
Metaphoric Analysis of Miriri's Ekegusii Pop Song *Ebunda*

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Abstract

The study undertakes a metaphoric analysis of the animal metaphors in Miriri's Ekegusii pop song "Ebunda" (a donkey) to reveal meaning. The meaning of the animal metaphors in the song might be elusive to the majority of the fans because metaphor is principally a matter of thought and action which is often situated in a specific context. The study employed the descriptive research design to describe the metaphors as used in the song. First, four coders (including the researchers) were employed to identify the metaphors in the song through the Metaphor Identification Procedure Vrije Universiteit. Secondly, the metaphors in the song were classified into animal metaphors based on the levels of the principle of Great Chain of Being metaphor (GCBM). The animal metaphors in "Ebunda" were then explained using the Conceptual Metaphor Theory. The study reveals that animals are stratified source domains used to effectively conceptualize human beings as highlighted in the song. In addition, the animal metaphors in "Ebunda" are used on a cognitive basis to reveal the perceptions Abagusii (the native speakers of Ekegusii) have about some animals in society. Metaphors are crucial ways of communication and are best explained using the Cognitive Linguistics paradigm.

Keywords

Ebunda, Animal metaphors, Cognitive Linguistics, Ekegusii pop Songs, Conceptual Mappings

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Introduction

The study employs the Cognitive Linguistics (CL) framework to analyze the animal metaphors in Miriri's Ekegusii pop song "Ebunda" (a donkey). Ungerer and Schmid note that CL is an approach to language that is based on our experience of the world and the way we perceive and conceptualize it (7). According to Fauconnier and Turner, CL is normally focused on meaning because it investigates how people comprehend the world by experiencing and associating with it (6). CL also provides that language is not the product of particular structures in the brain, but of the general cognitive systems that human beings use to conceptualize all aspects of reality (Ntabo 8). CL initially began in the late 1970s and early 1980s out of dissatisfaction with the formal approaches to language which were dominant at the time. Linguists like Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner developed a framework for explaining linguistic phenomena like analogy, metaphor, metonymy and counterfactual reasoning which are not effectively accounted for by the formal approaches to language. Metaphors are, thus, effectively accounted for within the framework of CL because they are considered to be vital linguistic tools that help to make sense of abstract notions through the concrete ones.

The term *metaphor*, which is the focus of this study, originates from two Latin roots which are: *meta* that means *over* and *pherein*" which implies to "carry beyond" (Glucksberg 3). A metaphor is, therefore, a tool which helps in understanding one thing in terms of another. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) posit that metaphor is normally employed to make sense of abstract notions through concrete ones. According to Kövecses (4), metaphors play a significant role in human thought, understanding and reasoning and beyond that, in the creation of human beings' social, cultural and psychological reality. In other words, metaphors are primarily conceptual, universal and conventionally part of the ordinary system of thought. Moreover, metaphor is not limited to poetic language alone (Croft and Cruse 13), but as pointed out by Lakoff and Johnson (2003), it is a matter of language and thought.

Kövecses posits that metaphor has become a valuable cognitive tool that people cannot do without (14). This implies that human being's conceptual system, in terms of

how a person thinks and acts is basically metaphoric in nature. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) also postulate that what human beings think, what they experience and do every day is very much a matter of metaphor. In addition, Deignan (2005) also observes that language is indeed hardly metaphor free. This study, therefore, seeks to analyze the animal metaphors in Miriri's *Ebunda* (a monkey) Ekegusii pop song to reveal the message of the composer.

The choice to analyze animal metaphors is motivated by Charles Darwin's research on evolution which provides that a human being is comparable with an animal because of the shared characteristics between animals and human beings (Bayne 13). For example, animals, like human beings have conceptual understanding as an adaptation strategy (Cheney and Seyfarth 17). According to Deignan (2005), the metaphors that conceptualize a human being as an animal are referred to as animal metaphors. Deignan further notes that animal metaphors are culturally motivated as they highlight the attitudes, norms and beliefs by a given community towards certain animal species and, therefore, may vary from culture to culture, in time and space. For example, the metaphors in Miriri's Ekegusii pop song "Ebunda" (a donkey) juxtapose a human being with animals which leads to the linguistic concept of Ekegusii animal metaphors in this study. This suggests that a human being can be understood based on the attributes of animals in Gusii (the region where Ekegusii is predominantly spoken). The present research, therefore, analyzes the Ekegusii animal metaphors in Miriri's "Ebunda" (a donkey) Ekegusii pop song to reveal the attitudes, norms and beliefs associated with certain animals in Gusii.

The principle of Great Chain of Being Metaphor (GCBM) was effectively used in the present study to categorize the metaphors in Miriri's Ekegusii pop song "Ebunda" (a donkey) into the conceptual domain of *animal metaphors* to aid in their analysis. The GCBM is normally central in the analysis of metaphors. The main characteristic of the GCBM is that every existing thing in the universe has its place in a divinely planned hierarchy. The order is thought to be a vertical chain where different things occupy their corresponding places on the basis of their properties and behavior (Kövecses 14). The GCBM further provides that all things are classified in a hierarchical system where every item belongs to a given level of the chain. The upper most level is occupied by *God*, then *Cosmos / Universe, Society, Human beings, Animals, Plants, Complex Objects, Natural Physical Things* in that order (Kövecses 15). According to Krzeszowski (1997), each level is defined by certain qualities that can be metaphorically inherited by other levels in the chain. Lakoff and Turner (1989) also note that the GCBM is a useful tool which allows us to comprehend the general human behaviour based on well-understood non-human attributes.

The present study purposively selected Miriri's "Ebunda" (a donkey) Ekegusii pop song for analysis based on the song's richness in animal metaphors. Pop songs normally appeal to a mass audience. According to Scruton, composers of pop songs usually employ metaphors to express poetic ideas and subjective emotional states through their songs (14). Dibben and Windsor (2001) also argue that the metaphors in

pop songs should be objectively evaluated to reveal the message of the composers which may be elusive to the audience of the pop songs. Bikknel also notes that in-depth analysis of the metaphors in pop songs will aid in realizing the critical issues addressed by the composers of pop songs (21). Moreover, pop songs are not only mere tools of entertainment but also a manifestation of the norms, beliefs and attitudes of a given people in society (De Nora 8). Another motivation for the study of metaphors was due to Middleton's (2000) proposition that, although pop music is cherished by many people in the globe, studies on the pop genre are still at the infancy stage. In addition, Frith (9) associates the limited studies on pop songs to some critics who consider pop songs banal and their wordings, imagery and emotions feeble. The present study, therefore, analyzes the animal metaphors in Miriri's Ekegusii pop song "Ebunda" (a donkey) to help in interpreting them for the benefit of the mass audience of the song.

The Ekegusii pop song artists also exploit metaphors to present issues related to Abagusii (the native speakers of Ekegusii) through musical means. One such Ekegusii artist is Daniel Tariki popularly known as Miriri. His hilarious songs, especially "Ebunda" (a donkey), has gained acclaim among the revelers and in the Ekegusii FM stations because of the use of witticism and animal metaphors. The song "Ebunda" (a donkey), which was released in 2017, is basically presented as a lamentation concerning how Miriri is unnecessarily ridiculed by his competitors in the Ekegusii pop music industry. Miriri also employs the song "Ebunda" (a donkey) to inform his critics that he is a witty artist whose success in the Ekegusii pop music industry emanates from patience and dedication. Miriri's other songs include: *Jane*, *Miriri Chinkuma* (Miriri's Fame), *Goita Omwana* (Killing a Child), *Mpenzi Ann* (Ann my Lover) and Honourable Momanyi Okeri among others.

Ekegusii is a Bantu language spoken by the Abagusii in Kisii and Nyamira Counties (Aunga11). Ekegusii is classified as E42 by Guthrie (1971), who further categorizes it under zone E40 alongside most Kenyan and Ugandan languages. According to Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, the Kisii people (the assumed speakers of Ekegusii) are approximated at 1.8 million in 2019 (4). There are other related languages which are mainly spoken in Tanzania that include: Kuria, Ikizu, Ikoma and Ware (Nyakundi 7). Abagusii make up approximately 6% of the Kenyan population. Cammenga (2002) notes that there are two dialects in Ekegusii which are: the *Rogoro* (Northern dialect) and the *Maate* (Southern dialect). The *Rogoro* dialect is spoken in Kisii and Nyamira Counties while the *Maate* dialect is spoken in the southern parts of Kisii County (Obwoye 14). According to Cammenga, the *Rogoro* dialect is considered the standard variety because it is used in written works for example in grammar books to teach Ekegusii to primary school pupils in grade one to three and in the Ekegusii Bible(3). Nyakundi postulates that the *Rogoro* and the *Maate* dialects differ in the aspects of speech sound, vocabulary and sentence structure but the dialects have not presented any variations in meaning(9).

Theoretical Framework

The study employed the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) which was developed by Lakoff and Johnson in 1980. The CMT provides that metaphors are not primarily a characteristic of language but they belong to the realm of thinking. According to the CMT, there are two conceptual domains which are key to interpreting metaphorical expressions. The two conceptual domains are the source and the target domains. Knowles and Rosamund (2006) opine that the source domain (SD) is the conceptual domain from which the metaphor is drawn while the target domain (TD) is the conceptual domain to which the metaphor is applied. The CMT normally reveals the meaning of metaphorical expressions through the principle of conceptual mappings. The conceptual mappings are the systematic set of correspondences that exist between the constituent elements of the SD and the TD. The CMT maps the elements in the concrete SD onto the abstract TD to interpret metaphors. The CMT was, therefore, resourceful in understanding the animal metaphors in Miriri's Ekegusii pop song "Ebunda" (a donkey).

Research Methodology

The study is anchored within the descriptive research design which, according to Anudo, is useful in describing the state of affairs as it exists at a particular point in time (16). The Ekegusii pop song "Ebunda" (a donkey) was purposively sampled for study because of its popularity in Ekegusii FM stations and richness in metaphors. Purposive sampling technique, according to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2007), allows the researcher to select desirable and reliable data for the study. The study employed the Metaphor Identification Procedure *Vrije Universiteit* (MIPVU) to select the metaphors from the selected Ekegusii pop song. Four coders (including the researchers) were employed to select the animal metaphor through the MIPVU. The four coders first considered words to be metaphorical based on contrast between the word's basic meaning in the dictionary and their contextual sense. The proposed metaphors were then subjected to an inter-rater reliability check to test whether they were indeed metaphors. The inter-rater reliability test is one of the provisions of the MIPVU which is employed to measure precise metaphors for study. Agreement by at least three coders was considered sufficient for a word to be marked as a metaphor related word as provided by the MIPVU. In the cases where the four coders were in disagreement concerning the identification of a metaphor, they discussed the meaning of the contentious lexical unit and only classified it as a metaphor after agreement as provided for by the MIPVU. The motivation for employing the MIPVU to identify the metaphors in Miriri's Ekegusii pop song "Ebunda" (a donkey) was due to the fact that the MIPVU normally provides analytical steps that can be used to measure precise metaphors. The identified metaphors were then classified into the conceptual domain of animal metaphors using the principle of Great Chain of Being metaphor (GCBM) and then subjected to the Conceptual Metaphor Theory for analysis.

Research Findings and Discussion

The study identified three animal metaphors which are displayed in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Animal Metaphors in Miriri’s Ekegusii pop song *Ebunda* (a donkey)

No	Ekegusii	Gloss
1	<i>Omonto n’ ebunda</i>	A human being is a donkey
2	<i>Omonto n’ egioto</i>	A human being is a frog
3	<i>Omonto n’ chinki</i>	A human being is houseflies

Source: Authors

The animal metaphors in Miriri’s Ekegusii pop song “Ebunda” (a donkey), as indicated in Table 1 above contrast a human being with an animal. This conceptualization is in line with Gathigia’s argument that it is common for human beings to be conceptualized through animal behaviors because animals are part of the world (10). Kövecses also points out that human beings often resort to animal metaphors (zoosemy) as a means of describing human attitudes, behavior, feelings and relationships (17). According to Deignan (2003), animal metaphors are both used on a cognitive basis and they reveal the perceptions by a given community towards some animals. For example, Miriri employs “ebunda” (a donkey) metaphor to describe a human being as shown in metaphor (1) below. Thus:

(1) *Omonto n’ ebunda* – ‘a human being is a donkey’.

In making reference to his critics, Miriri sings that *ebunda ekondama* (a donkey insults me) in his Ekegusii pop song “Ebunda” (a donkey). He alleges that instead of the donkey carrying its heavy yoke, it is busy negatively criticizing progressive people like Miriri in society. Miriri, therefore, labels his critics as *ebunda* (a donkey). A donkey, also referred to as the ass, is a domesticated member of the horse family. The scientific name for a donkey is *Equus africanus asinus*. Donkeys are considered as working animals because they are employed as draught or pack animals in many developing countries (FAO, 2011). FAO further notes that donkeys are often associated with impoverished households in many developing nations especially those that live below the subsistence levels. Donkeys are also involved in undertaking odd jobs like land tillage and offering human transport among others. In (1) above, *ebunda* (a donkey) is the source domain (SD) while *omonto* (a human being) is the corresponding target domain (TD) as per the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). Therefore, one of the corresponding conceptual mappings of the SD corresponding to the TD in this case is: the unpleasant human beings’ attitudes towards the roles of a donkey corresponding to the unpleasant behaviors of some human beings. This insinuates that Miriri is annoyed by his critics’ actions that are apparently malicious in pointing out baseless flaws in Miriri’s artistic work. Moreover, since donkeys are associated with impoverished households, Miriri suggests

that his critics lack progressive ideas for failing to objectively critique his work. The *egioto* (a frog) metaphor below is another illustration that metaphor is part and parcel of human language. Indeed, as noted by Deignan (2005), human language is hardly metaphor-free. This implies that metaphors are so pervasive in human language that sometimes we may be unaware of them. Thus:

(2) *Omonto n' egioto* – ‘a human being is a frog’.

In the song “Ebunda” (a donkey), Miriri laments that *egioto gekondama* (a frog insults me). Miriri is apparently abhorred by the people whom he also loathes so much for undermining his capacity in the Ekegusii music industry. A frog is a member of the amphibian group which has a short body without a tail. It is a carnivorous animal. It can dwell in either water or on land. An analogy of a frog that is killed in gradually heated water is recorded in history. It is alleged that a frog put in tepid water whose temperature is increased gradually will not sense the danger and it may be cooked to death. The analogy is often equated with human beings who are either unable or unwilling to realize sinister threats which occur gradually. In metaphor (2) above, *omonto* (a human being) is the TD while *egioto* (a frog) is the corresponding SD. Thus, the conceptual correspondence between the concrete SD corresponding to the abstract TD in this case is: the human weakness of being obsessed with trivialities is juxtaposed with malicious people’s blurred vision. This insinuates that Miriri considers his critics envious and jealous of his prowess in the Ekegusii pop music industry. Miriri also suggests that those who loathe him are so blinded with their negative criticism to a point of not being able to realize the amount of time and energy they spend in trivialities. This conceptualization is comparable with the proverbial frog which loses its life for lacking the ability to sense the gradual increase of the water temperature.

Miriri also uses *chinki* (houseflies) metaphor to describe his critics. Barreiro, Albano and Teixeira (2013) posit that houseflies greatly amplify the risk of human exposure to food borne pathogens. Miriri, therefore, employs metaphor (3) below in a derogative manner. Thus:

(3) *Omonto n' chinki* – ‘a human being is houseflies’.

Miriri compares the people whom he regards as malicious for failing to appreciate his music with *chinki* (houseflies). This comparison is given as a form of a reprimand because, according to Barreiro, Albano and Teixeira (2013), houseflies are considered a nuisance by human beings and animals because they are the main food borne pathogens. Houseflies are normally attracted to decaying organic materials and places where food is prepared and stored. In metaphor (3) above, *omonto* (a human being) is the TD while *chinki* (houseflies) is the corresponding SD. The corresponding conceptual mapping of the SD corresponding to the TD in this situation is the unpleasant behavior of being a nuisance corresponding to a person’s distasteful attitude. This suggests that Miriri considers his critics as a nuisance for unnecessarily poking holes into

his, otherwise, cherished Ekegusii pop songs. The conceptualization for (3) above validates the provision by Cognitive Linguistics that the creation of metaphors is one aspect of the more general human tendency to categorize experience. The metaphors we use in our daily life, as suggested in the conceptualization for (3) above, is in our sensory experience which is a manifestation of our relationship with the physical world.

Discussion of Findings

Firstly, the study reveals that the MIPVU is a reliable framework of identifying metaphors for study. This finding authenticates Gathigia's assertion that the MIPVU provides not only explicit and analytical steps for researchers to follow when identifying metaphor, but also a consistent criterion of identification which coders employ in reliability checking exercises (21). This helps in reducing the bias or inconsistencies that may be produced by having a single researcher doing the analysis.

Secondly, this study also reveals that metaphor is a central cognitive tool of conceptualizing people through pop songs. This finding is corroborated by previous studies which have found that metaphor is a basic and indispensable linguistic feature of human understanding (Cienki 2005; Gathigia 22). The metaphors identified in Miriri's Ekegusii pop song "Ebunda" (a donkey) are also appropriately explained using the CMT as propounded by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). The presence of the various metaphors in the song that instantiate human beings confirms Cienki's (2005) argument that metaphor provides "a tool for reasoning about one thing in terms of the other" (1). Finally, the principle of GCBM is appropriately employed to classify the metaphors in Miriri's song "Ebunda" (a donkey) as animal metaphors. The primary objective of the GCBM is to assign a place for everything in the universe in a strict hierarchical system (López 2009). Moreover, the study notes that a human being who is at a higher level is explained using animals which occupy a lower level than human beings in the GCBM. This reveals that entities in upper levels can be conceptualized based on the entities in the lower levels in GCBM. Such a conceptualization, however, draws a negative metaphor axiology as revealed in this study.

Conclusion

Based on the findings and discussion above, this study concludes that the three animal metaphors identified in this study aptly conceptualize a human being in the Ekegusii pop song "Ebunda" (a donkey) by Miriri. The animal metaphors are also effectively accounted for by mapping them into different kinds of conceptual mappings as provided by the CMT to reveal meaning. Moreover, the study concludes that the MIPVU is a reliable method of identifying the metaphors in the Ekegusii pop song "Ebunda". This is because the MIPVU provides for the inter-rater reliability test which is helpful in establishing precise metaphors for study.

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