A Comparative Cognitive Study of Happiness and Sadness Metaphors in Fante and English

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Abstract

The advent of cognitive linguistics has resulted in a change in the way people previously perceived metaphor as purely a linguistic device. Metaphor is now studied as a cognitive instrument that shapes our language, thought and action (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kovecses, 2002). Native speakers of a language employ metaphors to express abstract concepts of emotions. This paper does a study of the happiness and sadness metaphors in English and Fante, a dialect of the Akan language spoken in Ghana. It is underpinned by Lakoff and Johnsons' (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory which is adopted as the framework for analysis. The study found that the two languages share some similarities with regard to the use of conceptual metaphors such as *happiness is a fluid in a container, happiness is being off the ground, sadness is a fluid in a container and sadness is an object*. The differences in the use of these conceptual metaphors are very minimal and can be ascribed to the different cultural practices that are prevalent in the two languages. The study recommends that teachers of language integrate metaphor awareness into their curriculum to help learners have a better understanding of metaphorical expressions to improve their communication skills. Additionally, there should be an expansion of studies on conceptual metaphors to cover more Ghanaian and African languages to enrich cognitive linguistic theory.

Keywords: *conceptual metaphor, happiness, sadness, Fante, English*

Introduction

Metaphor was traditionally considered a linguistic phenomenon that poets employed as a way of embellishing their works. However, since the advent of Cognitive Linguistics (CL), metaphor has lost its traditional orientation. Works by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and Kovecses (2002) have brought about a change in the way metaphors are conceived. It has been proven that metaphors go beyond the level of embellishing the language poets use but it is a matter of language, thought and action. To Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and Kovecses (2002), metaphor is a conceptual mapping of a source domain to a target domain, where elements of the source correspond to elements of the target domain. These cognitive correspondences enable us to think about the target domain in terms of the source domain (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Lakoff & Turner, 1989).

Many studies have focused on how humans conceptualise their systems. According to Kovecses (2005), metaphors tend to be universal and near-universal as generic-level and specific-level metaphors tend to be different cross-linguistically. For instance, *Happiness Is Up* is a generic–level metaphor and a specific-level version of the metaphor *Happiness Is Up* in English is *Happiness is Being Off the Ground*. *Happiness is Being Off the Ground* is a culturally significant concept that is unique to Japanese culture, and so the conceptual metaphor, "Anger is (in the) hara", is limited to Japanese. Kovecses (2003) conducted a comparative study of linguistic expressions of 'Time is money' in English and Hungarian. Taking into consideration his study of linguistic expressions of metaphor in the two languages, four parameters namely linguistic form, literal meaning, metaphorical meaning and conceptual metaphor were set out. Three patterns were identified but the most frequent pattern was the same in all parameters in the two languages. Berger and Flensburg (2009) looked into the emotion metaphors of *Sadness*, *Love* and

Anger. They drew their data from English expressions in psychology and their study had the aim of finding out the metaphorical models that underpin the discourse between experts and laypersons. Their findings revealed that the experts' data have different conceptual metaphors though both the experts and laypersons share a common conceptual metaphor of *Love, Anger* and *Sadness*.

Yu (1995) did a comparative analysis of linguistic metaphors for anger and happiness in English and Chinese. The findings indicate that the two languages have some commonalities in the metaphor, *Anger Is Heat*. On the contrary, while English uses fire and liquid metaphors, Chinese uses fire and gas to express the same metaphor. Both English and Chinese share the common metaphor of *Happiness is Up*, *Happiness is Light* and *Happiness is a Fluid in a Container*. Chinese, however, tends to use more body parts, especially internal organs, in conceptualizing anger and happiness than English does.

Liu and Zhao (2013) identify similarities and differences in the conceptualisation of happiness and sadness in Chinese and English, two languages that are unrelated. Whereas the two languages conceptualise happiness through the metaphor, *Happiness is Up*, they differ at the specific level. Whereas English has expressions for *Happiness is Being off the Ground*, Chinese does not have that because they consider the act of 'being off the ground' as socially inappropriate as their culture considers it as haughtiness and a lack of modesty.

Despite the varied studies of conceptual metaphors in different languages, there is a seeming unavailability of studies on conceptual metaphors in Fante, a dialect of Akan, a language spoken in Ghana in West Africa. The notable study of the concept in Akan is that undertaken by Ansah (2014, 2010) whose works focused on the metaphorical conceptualisation of fear in Akan and

that of anger and love. Ansah's (2014, 2010) works establish some commonalities and culture specific differences in the conceptualisation of these concepts in English and Akan. This study, therefore, seeks to fill the gap in the study of other emotions of conceptual metaphors in Fante that have not been looked at, hence the choice of subject. Additionally, studying these will also help in identifying the universalities as well as the differences that exist between and among different languages in terms of the use of the aforementioned emotion metaphors.

Conceptual Metaphor Theory

Since the introduction of their work, *Metaphor we Live By*, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) have brought about a change in the way metaphor is conceived. They describe it as a basic cognitive instrument that native speakers of a language use to express concepts in their daily lives either consciously or unconsciously. 'Metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature' (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980 p3). What this means is that metaphor does not only focus on the words but it looks at the conceptualisation and comprehension of one domain in terms of another. The Conceptual Metaphor Theory draws a distinction between linguistic metaphor and conceptual metaphor. Native speakers of a language make use of linguistic metaphor but conceptual metaphor looks at the mental representation of a concept in the minds of the native speakers. For example, time is conventionally spoken of with regard to space and motion. We can, therefore, have expressions such as *Time flies*, *We cannot go back to those days*, etc. The examples above give the indication that, in the conceptualisation of time, space and motion are used. The theory is based on the observation that much of what we say in our daily use of language is figurative and fairly systematic. To the proponents of the theory, emotions are conceptually structured. Kovecses (2000) says that:

> … Although a sharply delineated conceptual structure for space emerges from our perceptual motor functioning, no sharply defined conceptual structure for the emotions emerges from our emotional functioning alone ... Metaphors allow us to conceptualize our emotions in more sharply defined terms.

Worthy of note is the fact that the figurative expressions that instantiate conceptual metaphors may be conventional ways of using language by native speakers but they still are figurative. If one says, for instance, *I am in love*, it is a conventional way of expressing the feelings the person has but love is not a physical thing one can be in. Using such figurative expressions shows how emotional states are represented not only in English but across cultures. For example, in Fante, the expression *Maatɔ ɔdɔ mu (I have fallen into love)* reflects the conceptual metaphor *Love is a Container.*

Conceptual Metaphor Theory both supports and is substantiated by the empirical research. Kovecses (2000, 2002) looked at how abstract emotional states such as anger, fear, happiness and love are conceptualised metaphorically. In his works, he uses concrete domains such as heat, pressure, movement to establish that metaphor helps our understanding of emotions. Studies by Yu (1995) and Kövecses (2005) have also shown that linguistic realisations can vary due to socio-cultural factors though conceptual metaphors often have universal tendencies as a result of the bodily experiences that are shared between or among cultures. This is further supported by Liu and Zhao (2013) who identify similarities and differences in the conceptualisation of happiness and sadness in Chinese and English. To them, both languages have expressions for the

metaphor *Happiness is Up* but differ at specific levels of conceptualisation because, while Chinese does not have expressions for *Happiness is Being off the Ground,* English does. Similarly, it would be reasonable to expect both universality as well as variation with English in the conceptualisation of metaphors in Fante.

Methodology

This study employs a comparative descriptive qualitative design. This design is considered suitable since the study seeks to explore and describe how happiness and sadness are metaphorically conceptualised in English and Fante (a dialect of Akan spoken in Ghana). The comparative nature of the design helps in identifying the similarities and differences that exist among the metaphorical expressions in the two languages. The study is set in the interpretivist paradigm. It focuses on bringing to the fore the meanings that are attached to experiences and expressions by individuals and communities. This paradigm supports the focus of the current study which is to interpret metaphorical language as a reflection of shared cultural and cognitive structures.

The study adopts the Conceptual Metaphor Theory as the framework of analysing metaphor. It aims at making inferences from linguistic expressions that embody conceptual representation of metaphorical meaning. The data is selected from English and Fante with that of the former being secondary, that is, they were selected from conceptual metaphors that have already been analysed. Approximately, twenty-five Fante metaphorical expressions were purposively selected from oral narratives, funerals, songs, informal conversations and the radio. The Fante data could be described as primary since the researcher is a native speaker of the language so some of the data were from his own experiential knowledge of the language. This insider status enhanced the accuracy of the identification of metaphor and contextual interpretation. Additionally, being an

insider helped in gaining easy access to participants and authentic linguistic data. Some data were also gathered from a few native speakers of the language and this was done to crosscheck what was gathered with that of the researcher to authenticate the appropriateness of the data. The data was analysed qualitatively. The metaphorical expression in Fante was first given and it was followed by its literal meanings. An analysis of it was then done in order to infer conceptual metaphors from the expressions. Ethically, the researcher sought the permission and approval of those whom data were sourced from to get their consent and they were also informed of the purpose of the research before data were gathered.

Data Analysis and Discussion

The Emotion Concept of Happiness

Happiness is one of the different forms of emotions that are universally experienced. Psychology defines happiness as pleasure and comfort that one experiences when the person receives some good news or when some set objectives have been achieved. It can further be described as a state one finds themselves in when there is no stress and desired levels have been reached. This section takes a look at whether the two languages share the happiness and sadness metaphors.

The data analysed reveals that the two languages share the conceptual metaphor of *Happiness is a Fluid in a Container*. Kővecses (1986) is of the view that the human body is conceived as a container and the emotions are the fluids that are in this bounded container. When the emotions grow and get beyond the limits that the container can take, they ‘overflow’ and spurt out. The following examples reflect the conceptual metaphor *Happiness Is a Fluid in a Container*:

English

a. I was overwhelmed with joy.

b. My heart is full of joy.

c. Happiness welled up in me.

Fante

a. Enyigye ahyɛ me ma. (Happiness or joy has filled me. / I am filled with happiness.)

b. Enyigye ahyɛ m'akoma mu ma. (Happiness has filled my heart fully.) My heart is full of happiness)

c. Ne se atɔ ngo mu. (His /her teeth have fallen in oil.) He/she is very happy or excited.

The examples above in both languages express the fact that the emotion of happiness is conceptualised and expressed in a container. In the first Fante example, the body is seen as the container that harbours happiness and happiness is deemed to have filled it fully. In the second example, the heart which is a part of the body is said to be the container. Here too, the container, *heart*, is described as being full of the happiness emotion. When compared with the expressions in English, it is evident that, in both languages, the container that is considered to be able to carry the emotion concept could be either the entire body or a certain part of the body. In *My heart is filled with joy*, it is a specific part of the body, in this case the heart, that the emotion is found in. On the contrary, in *Happiness welled up in me*, it is the whole body that the emotion is found in. This falls in line with the view shared by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) that, if people are containers, the different parts of the body are containers as well.

Happiness can also be conceptualised and expressed as being off the ground. In this situation, the one who is experiencing the emotion of happiness feels light and is seen to move up since there isn't much weight that can prevent the person from jumping. In Akan, it sometimes happens that,

when one is excited or experiences happiness, the person jumps up and down. The verb *huruw* in Fante means *jump* in English. One could be seen jumping up and down on hearing any good or pleasant news. In Akan, the expression, *Oridzi ehuruwsi* literally translated as *He or she is eating jumping up and down* but appropriately represented as *He/she is jumping up and down* (since it is not possible, naturally, for someone to eat jumping) is metaphorically used to express the emotion concept of happiness. English has expressions such as the following:

a. He is six feet off the ground.

b. She is in the clouds.

Being six feet off the ground is an indication that the individual has moved from the surface of the earth and is probably hanging in space and *being in the clouds* is evidently clear that the person has left the surface of the earth literally. All these are indications of someone being up and eventually off the ground.

It needs to be noted, however, that there is a very important difference between English and Fante in the expression of happiness as being off the ground. This is because there is no one-to-one relation between English and Fante as a result of cultural differences. In English, the metaphor, *Happiness is off the ground/up* is a conceptual metaphor which denotes an upward orientation such that being happy is being off the ground. This is seen in expressions such as the following

a. She was on cloud nine.

b. We were in the clouds.

c. They were floating.

On the contrary, the metaphorical concept *Being happy is being off the ground* is not applicable always in Fante. Lifting oneself off the ground does not always represent happiness in Fante. Expressions such as *Ahomado wɔ no do/ ɔma no ho do dodow* (*He lifts himself up*) rather shows that one is full of himself or one is self-conceited. It is an indication that someone is off the ground by not being humble or not showing humility.

There are instances where happiness is expressed as a bodily experience. In this situation, the emotion concept is found on a certain part of the human body such as the eyes and the face. For example, shinning eyes are a natural and universal reaction to the emotion of happiness. There is the tendency for one to have the eyes sparkling when good news come their way. Additionally, the facial expression one wears could also be an indication of the happiness the person feels.

English

a. Her eyes were sparkling like diamonds.

b. Amusement gleamed in her eyes.

Fante

a. N'enyim ayɛ serew serew. *(His/her face has become laughter laughter.)* His/her face is full of laughter.

b. Menyiwa agye dodow. *(My eyes have collected too much.)* I am excited/happy.

In the first two examples in English, the emotion of happiness is expressed in the eyes of the person. In the last two examples in Fante, the emotion is expressed in the face of the individual and also in the eyes. In example *a* under Fante, the expression *N'enyim* ayɛ *serew serew* means the face of the person is full of happiness or it is covered in happiness. When someone laughs or

smiles, it is usually evident on the mouth before it spreads to the entire face of the individual. In this expression, the person is full of smiles but that fullness is not seen only on the mouth but the entire facial expression brings out that happiness which the person is experiencing. In the second example that follows, happiness is expressed by the individual not only in the eyes though that is what is said to embody the happiness. It means that good news has been received and the sparkling nature of the person's eyes is an indication of it.

The emotion concept of happiness can also be construed and expressed as a physical entity. It can be seen as an object that one can possess, give, bring or lose, or look for. The following examples indicate some expressions that reflect such:

English

a. I have found happiness.

b. He is searching for lost happiness.

Fante

a. Ma m'enyiwa ngye. (*Let my eyes collect. /Give my eyes happiness, Let me be happy*).

   Let me be happy. /Give me happiness.

b. Dzi dɜw (*Eat happiness*) Be happy.

In the first two examples in English, happiness is expressed as an object that one can find in one context and also lose in another and which can be looked for. In the first Fante example, happiness is construed as an object that can be given for someone to receive. The expression is a request that happiness should be given and received. In the second example, happiness is seen as

something that one can eat. *Dzi* means eat and dɛw means happiness. It can, therefore, be said that, in Akan, happiness is construed as food that one can eat.

The Emotion Concept of Sadness

Sadness is defined in Psychology as an emotional state of unhappiness, ranging in intensity from mild to extreme and usually aroused by the loss of something that is highly valued. It is one of the basic human emotions that are considered universal. It is seen as a normal response one gives to situations that may be upsetting, painful or disappointing. Sadness generates, usually, a quiet mood resembling sorrow and grief as a result of one accepting the fact that some form of loss has occurred or there is some level of satisfaction that is elusive. The feeling of sadness could be intense or fairly mild. The expression of sadness can pertain to the metaphorical expression such as *Sadness Is Down, Sadness Is an Object,* and *Sadness Is a Fluid in a Container*.

The metaphor *Sadness Is Down* is linked to one's physical experience when the emotion is felt. Lakoff and Johnson state that a "drooping posture typically goes along with sadness" (1980). The body posture tends to be oriented downwards when one experiences sadness. The following expressions represent some of the conceptual metaphors of sadness:

English

a. I am feeling down.
b. His behaviour gets me down.

Fante

c. Asem no ahyɛ me do. *(The issue has overpowered/overridden me.)* I am subdued by the news
d. Maabotow. *(I have coiled).* I am down.

The expressions above suggest that, when one experiences sadness, the person seems to physically get closer or nearer to the ground. Going nearer or closer to the ground is an indication that one's physical position is low and no longer upright as a normal human being is expected to assume. The first two examples in English suggest the level of closeness one gets to the ground when sadness is felt. In the third example which is in Fante, one tends to be down when they are overwhelmed by sadness. Losing a loved one or receiving any bad news generally brings sadness and there is even the possibility of the receiver throwing themselves to the ground on receiving such news. In the fourth example, an individual loses their normal body posture of being upright and rather coils when news that is unpleasant is heard. It is impossible for an individual to coil without first being on the ground so, for a person to coil, they must first fall to the ground; falling leads to sadness. Being depressed means being pressed down to the ground, which implies the possibility of being in any lower position.

Sadness can also be construed and expressed as being in a container. The body is the container that the emotion of sadness fills. In this situation, it does not necessarily need to be full and even cause an overflow of it out of the container. In some instances, it could be a body part that is considered as the container that receives and keeps the emotion of sadness. The following examples depict expressions of sadness as a fluid in a container.

English

a. I am filled with sadness.

b. My heart is filled with sadness.

Fante

c. Awerɛhow ahyɛ me ma. (*Sadness has filled me fully.*) I am filled with sadness.

d. Awerɛhow ahyɛ m'akoma mu ma. (*Sadness has filled my heart fully*.) My heart is filled with sadness.

The first two examples in English depict the entire body as the container that harbours the emotion of sadness. These two expressions do not indicate the level or magnitude of sadness that the individual feels but the fact that sadness is or has come into the container. On the contrary, in the examples in Fante, the heart which is a part of the body is where the emotion concept of sadness has entered and occupies and not the entire body. Significantly, there is an indication of the level that sadness has reached in the container. Sadness is described as full in the container in the two expressions.

On the contrary, it is also realised that sadness can be conceptualised as associated with a part of the body but not necessarily embedded in a container in the body. In the following expressions which can be described as euphemisms that denote sadness, it is a part of the body that denotes the presence of sadness. Expressions such as *Me se afem* and *Me se bɔfo etu* all denote how sad an individual is. *Se* in Akan means teeth in English. Sometimes, when one tastes something that might not be pleasant, the person gets a kind of sensation in the teeth. It is assumed that a person who receives or experiences any form of grief feels it in the teeth. *Me se bɔfo etu* as an expression is usually used when a person experiences the loss of a loved one who is considered a pillar in the life of the one who utters such an expression.

In Akan, sadness is also construed as an object. It could be where the object hits the individual and destabilises them.

a. Awerɛhow aka me. (*Sadness has touched me. /I have been touched by sadness.)* I am sad.
b. Dɛm *awerɛhow* sɛm yi fi hen na abɛka me ndɛ yi? (*Where is this sadness that has hit me coming from?*) Where is this sadness emanating/coming from?

Awerɛhow is sadness in Fante. The expression of sadness in the first sentence depicts it as an object that has come to hit the individual. Once it hits the person, the emotional state changes to that of grief or despondency. In the second example, a question is asked as to where the object, sadness, came from to hit the individual. It can be added that, when sadness is construed as an object, it is sometimes also conceptualised as an object that has the ability to move from one location to another but it may be difficult to actually tell where it emanates from.

Conclusion

The focus of this paper was to look at how emotion metaphors of happiness and sadness are construed and expressed in English and in Akan, specifically Fante which is a dialect of Akan. There was a comparison of the metaphors identified with those used in English since the latter serves as the basis upon which all studies in conceptual metaphor are carried out. The study was underpinned by the Conceptual Metaphor Theory by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and Kovecses (2002). The findings reveal that Fante makes use of metaphors when conceptualising happiness and sadness. Speakers of the language conceptualise happiness as a fluid in a container, happiness is an object. It can thus be said that Fante and English have similarities in the conceptualisation of happiness since these are also found in English. With regard to sadness, Fante has expressions that conceptualise it as an object and also as a fluid in a container. In all, the study has shown that there is universality in the expression of metaphor but cultural and societal dynamics can bring about differences in the expression of some metaphors. The study recommends that teachers of language integrate metaphor awareness into their curriculum to help learners have a better understanding of metaphorical expressions to improve their communication skills. Additionally, there should be an expansion of studies on conceptual metaphors to cover more Ghanaian and African languages to enrich cognitive linguistic theory.

Finally, translators and interpreters should employ conceptual metaphors in their presentations and render them appropriately to ensure more accurate and culturally grounded translations.

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