

Animal Metaphor in Gĩkũyũ

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Abstract

Animal metaphors are prevalent in many languages. Animals are closely related to the human beings and they provide a rich basis for the conceptualization of human beings and their activities. Using the cognitive linguistics approach, this paper analyses the Gĩkũyũ animal metaphors through the in-depth examination of the terms that refer to the domestic and wild animals namely Ng'ombe 'cow', Mbũri 'goat', Ngũrwe 'pig', Kamũngũrio 'squirrel'. The paper discusses how these animals are conceptualized in the Gĩkũyũ world view and the metaphoric mappings involved in the interpretation of the animals related metaphors. From the analysis of the data the following mappings emerged: Mappings from the source domain of animals to the target domains of human beings, concrete objects like mobile phones and abstract objects like wealth. The mappings are based on the appearance, behavior and characteristics of the animals. There is also semantic derogation where the negative behavior or characteristics of the animals are mapped to the characteristics or behavior of human beings.

Keywords: Animal metaphors, metaphoric mappings, cognitive linguistics, semantic derogation

INTRODUCTION

This section briefly looks at the traditional and cognitive linguistic approaches to metaphor.

The Concept of Metaphor

The Traditional Approach to Metaphor

The study of metaphor dates back to Ancient Greece. One of the ancient philosophers who studied metaphor is Aristotle (354-322 BC). Aristotle in his book poetics cited in Lanchun (2003: 5) defines metaphor as consisting in giving the thing a name that belongs to something else, the transference being either from genus to species or from species to genus or on grounds of analogy. The traditional approach holds the view that metaphor

happens at the world level and that it is a linguistic issue. When I.A Richards's book, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric's* was published in 1936, this view changed and metaphor came to be seen as a linguistic phenomenon and also a way of thinking. Richards sees metaphor as a juxtaposition of the two ideas whereby a new idea is created through this mutual interaction. According to Lakoff (1992:1), in the tradition view, metaphor can be defined as a poetic and novel expression in which a concept of a world is used beyond its lexical meaning to reveal the same concept

The Cognitive Linguistic Approach to Metaphor

According to Ungerer and Schmid (1996), cognitive linguistic is an approach to language that is based on our experience of world and the way we perceive and conceptualize it. Metaphor has been studied for many years in cognitive linguistics and cognitivists see it as a central feature of human language and also an important source of meaning extension.

Lakoff and Johnson (19980) view metaphor as a conceptual phenomenon which is associated with people's thinking and behavior. They also argue that metaphor is pervasive in everyday life not just in language but also in thought and action and our ordinary conceptual system in terms of which we think and act.

In cognitive linguistics, metaphor is regarded as an across domain mapping with two domains namely: the source and a target domain (Kovecses 2002:23). Mapping is the cognitive process that relates literal meaning to the extended meaning. According to Kovecses (2010:18-22) the common source domain that are used in mapping metaphorical concepts are:

- The human body
- Health and illness
- Animals
- Buildings and construction
- Machines and tools
- Games and sports
- Cooking and food
- Heat and cold
- Light and darkness
- Movement and direction

(Ibid 23-26), the common target domains are:

- Emotion
- Desire
- Morality
- Thought
- Society/ nation
- Politics
- Economy
- Human characteristics

- Communication
- Time
- Life and death
- Religion
- Events and actions

Animal Metaphor

Animal metaphors are ubiquitous in the languages of the world (Sabariah & Nurul, 2013). According to Rouhi and Mohand (2011), what counts as an animal metaphor is the use of an animal name as the source rather than the target. Animal metaphor can be thought of as a system of metaphoric mapping (Ervtis, 2012).

According to Wei (2010), these mappings can be divided into the appearance of the animals mapped onto the appearance of the human beings, the behavior of the animals mapped onto the behavior of human beings and the actions of animals mapped onto the actions of human beings.

Kovesces (2002) asserts that substantial part of human behavior seems to be metaphorically understood in terms of animal behavior which leads to the conceptualization of PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS metaphors. In these metaphors there is meaning transfer from the source domain of animals to the target domain of human beings. This transfer involves the transfer of attributes and actions associated with an animal to human being. The transfer may be negative or positive Maita (2003) argues that this kind of transfer relies on five parameters namely; habitat, size, appearance, behavior and relation between the animals and human beings.

Animal Metaphors in Gĩkũyũ

Although there many studies on Animal metaphors in other languages and cultures, studies on Gukuyu animal metaphors are hardly found in the literature. This study focuses on the use of domestic and wild animals metaphors in Gĩkũyũ. The animal terms that are examined are Ng'ombe 'cow', mburi 'goat', Ngurwe 'pig' and kamũngũrio , squirre'l. In the Gĩkũyũ culture, animals are closely related to human beings who come into contact with animals in their day-to-day activities. Animals also assume an anthropomorphic nature especially in oral narratives where they are portrayed as doers of human actions through their behavior and they also take on human traits such as language.

DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION

The data analysis will proceed according to the following steps:

First illustrations with the given noun terms will be constructed, then from these illustrations, the different meanings will be identified and categorized into the literal and extended meanings.

After that the cognitive process of metaphor will be used to show how the extended meanings are related to the literal meanings.

Literal and Metaphoric Meanings

The Literal and Metaphoric Meanings of Kamũngũrio 'Squirrel'

These meanings are illustrated in the sentence below:

1. a. Kamũngũrio nĩ karĩa mbembe
The squirrel has eaten maize
- b. Nĩaragũrire Kamũngũrio
He/she bought mobile phone
- c. Mũndũ ũcio nĩ Kamũngũrio
Person that is squirrel
That person is a squirrel

In sentence 1a, 'Kamũngũrio' is used to exemplify the animal sense which is the literal meaning of the term. These other meanings in b and c are derived from the animal sense by metaphoric extensions. In sentence 1 b, the mapping is based on appearance and behavioral characteristics of the animal which are mapped onto the target domain of mobile phones.

When the mobile phone was introduced, it was a new object among the Agĩkũyũ people and they did not have a name for it, and it was still being referred to as thimu, a word which is borrowed from Kiswahili 'simu' which is used to refer to the landline telephones. There was need, therefore to give it a name which would differentiate it from other phones. To do so, the people appealed to their encyclopedic world knowledge to get an object that had some similar characteristics with the mobile phone. The squirrel which is a small animal qualified for this. In appearance the mobile phone is small just like a squirrel. The squirrel also is a very destructive animal which move very fast eating seeds which farmers have planted. These characteristics were also found in the mobile phone which can be used to spread very destructive information all over the world very fast. Due to these similarities in appearance and characteristics, the mobile phone was give the name Kamũngũrio just like the squirrel. In sentence 1 c , the mapping is based on appearance whereby the appearance of Kamungurio is mapped onto the target domain of human beings to refer to a small person.

The Literal and Metaphoric Meanings of Ngurwe 'Pig'

To illustrate these meanings, consider the following sentences

2. a. Ngũrwe yakwa ĩna twana ikũmi
pig mine has piglets ten
my pig has ten piglets
- b. Maina ni Ngũrwe
Maina is pig
Maina is a pig

c. Nĩarehererio Ngũrwe mucĩ

He/She was removed pig home

A pig was removed from his/her home

In sentence 2 a, the literal meaning of the term Ngũrwe is exemplified by the animal sense. The meanings in 2b and 2c are derived from the animal sense by metaphoric extension. In these two sentences there is mapping from the source domain of animals to the target domain of human beings based on appearance and behavioral characteristics of the animal which are transferred to the human beings. The pig is fat so the people being referred to are also fat. There is also semantic derogation whereby negative attributes of a pig like being gluttonous and dirty are transferred to human beings. Sentence 2c, assumes a gender perspective where women are referred to as pigs in a derogatory manner. Women are believed to eat too much, so when a woman gets married, it is common to hear people say that a pig was removed. This means that there is one less mouth to feed and the woman can go and over eat at her husband's place.

The Literal and Metaphoric Meanings of Ng'ombe 'Cow'

To illustrate the various meanings of Ng'ombe 'cow' consider the following sentences:

3. a. Ng'ombe ĩrĩa nĩ noru

cow that is fat

That cow is fat

b. Mũndũ ũria e Ng'ombe nyingĩ

Person that has cows many

That person has many cows

c. Aracirie Ng'ombe igana

He gave/paid bride wealth cows hundred

He gave/paid one hundred cows as bride wealth

d. Wi Ng'ombe we.

You cow you.

You are a cow.

In sentence 3a, the literal meaning of the term cow is exemplified by the animal sense whereas the meanings in 3b-d are derived from the animal sense by metaphoric extension. In b and c, Ng'ombe refers to wealth. This is because from the traditional Gĩkũyũ perspective wealth is measured in terms of animals that one has and bride wealth is paid in form of cows. In these two cases, there is mapping from the source domain of animals to the target domain of wealth. In 3d, the mapping is based on behavior, where the behavioral characteristics of the cow are transferred to the human beings. These characteristics are that cows are foolish, they cannot make decisions on their own and they depend on their owners for everything. These characteristics are all negative so

when they are transferred to human beings, we can say that there is semantic derogation in this mapping.

The Literal and Metaphoric Meanings of Mbūri 'Goat'

In order to illustrate the various meaning of this term, consider the following sentences:

4. a. Endia mbūri ithano
 He/she sold goats five
 He/she has sold five goats
- b. Wīna mbūri ngwenderie mūgūnda ūyū?
 Do you have goats I sell you land this
 Do you have goats so that I sell you this land?
 Do you have money so that I sell you this land?
- c. Ndūngīhikania ūtarutīte mburi
 You cannot get married without giving goats
 You cannot get married without paying bride wealth
- d. Ndīramwīta tūrīe mbūri
 I am calling you so that we eat goat
 I am calling you so that we eat goat meat
- e. Nīaraunire mbūri yakwa kūgūrū
 He broke goat mine leg
 He broke my goat's leg
 He impregnated my daughter
- f. Ni wakwa wa mbūri
 She is mine of goats
 She is my of goats
- g. Mwangi nī mbūri
 Mwangi is goat
 Mwangi is a goat

In sentence 4a, the literal meaning of the term goat is exemplified by the animal sense whereas the meanings in 4b-g are derived from the animal sense by metaphoric extension. In sentence 4b-c, the mapping is from the source domain of animals to the target domain of wealth. This mapping is based on the traditional Gīkūyū perspective where animals are regarded as wealth since they are used as mediums of exchange in purchase of land, payment of bride wealth and fines. In 4d, the term goat is used to refer to a party where people eat goat meat but nowadays it has been generalized to mean any event where people raise funds. Here there is mapping from the source domain of animals

to the target domain of parties or events. In 4e-g, the mapping is from the source domain of animals to the target domain of human beings.

Among the Agīkūyū it is a taboo to talk of pregnancy directly so in 4e, a woman who gets pregnant out of wedlock is likened to a goat whose legs have been broken. This is because she is a disgrace to her parents as she will not bring any bride wealth to them in form of goats.

In 4f, “mine of goats’ refers to a married woman whose husband has paid a lot of goats as bride wealth to them to her parents. Due to this, he has complete ownership over her. In 4g, the mapping is based on behavioral characteristics, where characteristics of the goat are mapped onto the human beings. Among the Agīkūyū, goats are regarded to be foolish animals since they depend on their owners for everything and they also follow each other blindly. These characteristics are negative and when transferred to human beings, we can also say that there is semantic derogation.

CONCLUSION

From the analysis of the data, it can be concluded that animal metaphors exist in Gīkūyū and that the most frequently mentioned animals occur more in metaphor. People also observe the appearance, behavior and characteristics of the animal and transfer them to human beings and concrete objects like mobile phones. Also there is mapping from the source domain of animals to the target domain of abstract objects like wealth. The data also demonstrates that animals are used in a derogatory sense where their negative behavior or characteristics are mapped onto human characteristics.

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