

Animal Metaphors in Representation of Women in the Ovoko Dialect

Jacinta, Ukamaka Eze; Juliana Ginika Mamah ; Bestman Esegbuyiota Odeh ;
Akaeze Chioma Magadaline; Peter Ada Achadu

Department of Linguistics, Igbo and Other Nigerian Languages University of Nigeria Nsukka

Corresponding Author: **Peter Ada Achadu**

Abstract

Problem: Studies of animal metaphor abound in extant literature showing how animals are used in representing people in different linguistic communities. Unfortunately, this area of study has not gained popularity in the Igbo language. Therefore, this research work sets to investigate animal metaphors in representation of women in the Ovoko dialect – a variety of the Igbo language in Enugu State, Nigeria. The main objectives of this research work are to identify the domestic birds metaphorically used in representing women in the Ovoko dialect and examine their metaphoric meanings as used in the area under study. **Approach:** As two of the researchers are native speakers of the dialect under study, the data used for the study were sourced through introspection and unstructured interview (which was used to validate the data elicited). The study employs analogical mapping as the study's framework. **Findings:** The study reveals that there are three domestic birds that are used metaphorically to represent women in the Ovoko dialect. The domestic birds are chicken, duck and turkey. It is also discovered that the meanings attached to chicken when used metaphorically can be derogatory or extolling depending on how it is used and who uses it to represent who. Moreover, duck and turkey are generally derogatory in their use because it is only their ugly attributes that are used for mapping on women in the dialect being studied. **Conclusion:** Only objects of similar qualities are meant to be compared with each other. This study has actually demonstrated this feat through the application of analogical mapping as a theoretical base for the analysis of the animals used in the representation of women in the study area. However, animals used in this study are by no means the exhaustive lists, but has created a vacuum on how other animals could be employed in the community to achieve the same result. The study concludes that the theory of analogical mapping in the study of animal metaphor in representation of women in the Ovoko dialect successfully captures the illocutionary effect of such statements. It also argues that context of use of such animals determines the meaning intended for them in the statement. The researchers then recommend that more research works should be done in the Ovoko dialect on this area in order to document more of the animal metaphors and other metaphors as used in the dialect.

1. Introduction

Separating cognitive semantics from pragmatics is quiet a tedious undertaking in that cognitive semantics recorngnises meaning as not fixed, but a matter of construal and conventionalisation. Construal means way in which people perceive, comprehend and interpret the world around them or simply the way of using words. For a clearer understanding, an account in cognitive semantics called

the dynamic construal theory argues that words are without meaning by themselves. On that account, Croft and Cruse (2004) aver that in cognitive semantics, compositionality can only be intelligible if pragmatic elements like context and intention are taken into consideration. Cognitive semantics holds that language is part of a more general human cognitive ability, and can therefore only describe the world as people conceive of it. This is why simple things or processes are conceived differently by different linguistic communities.

Cognitive semantics looks into grammar's interaction with experiential factors and cognitive abilities. Mbah and Edoga (2012) note that as part of the field of cognitive linguistics, the cognitive semantics approach rejects the traditional separation of linguistics into phonology, morphology, syntax, pragmatics, etc. Instead, it divides semantics into meaning-construction and knowledge representation. This can mean that cognitive semantics studies much of the area that is traditionally meant for pragmatics as well as semantics. What differentiates the cognitive semantic approach from other semantic theories is that cognitive semantics rejects the assertion that reference to reality is a very important determination of meaning of linguistic expression. In line with this, it is concluded that the truth of an expression remains secondary in cognitive semantics, since truth concerns a relation between a cognitive structure and the world. Cognitive semantics is an approach to meaning that is based on our experience of world and the way we perceive and conceptualise it. Grady (2007) asserts that if cognitive linguistics is the study of ways in which features of language reflect other aspects of human cognition, metaphors provide one of the clearest illustrations of this relationship. Metaphor has been studied for many years in cognitive linguistics and cognitivists see it as an important source of meaning extension and also a central feature of human language.

From the general point of view, metaphor can be seen as understanding one conceptual domain in terms of another conceptual domain whereas a conceptual domain, according to Kovecses (2002), is any coherent organisation of experience. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) see metaphor as a conceptual phenomenon which is associated with people's thinking processes and behavior. Put differently, the attitudes conveyed by means of metaphors originate in conventional views attached to the cultural values held by a community. Over the time, metaphors have been used as tools by human beings to communicate with one another more effectively and more accurately. In a lay man's understanding, metaphor is just a figure of speech in literary work which directly compares an entity to another and seems to be restricted to poetic language. However, metaphor exists in all our daily lives communications and interactions. Metaphor comes from the Greek word 'meta' meaning "over," and 'pherein' meaning "to carry." This refers to a linguistic process where aspects of one object are transferred or carried over to another object, so that the target object is spoken of as if it were the source object. Furthermore, metaphorical language allows people to comprehend one kind of entity in terms of another. Through the mapping of the source and target domains, the attributes of the source domain are transferred onto the target, thus allowing the target categories to be apprehended in novel and often revealing ways.

Basara and Opande (2017) are of the opinion that, may be as a result of the close relationship between people and animals since ancient times, one source domain that could provide rich metaphorical expressions is the animal kingdom. It is pertinent to note that, it is the comparison of animal to human being or giving animal attributes to human that counts as animal metaphor. Generally, humans are animals in that they share physical behaviour and neural machinery with primate species of mammal. Human beings have the cognitive ability to create and understand metaphors. In essence, they create animal metaphor in order to cognitively model and represent other creatures including other humans in their struggle for existence. Using animals as vehicles for describing undesirable habits and attributes of human beings is common in almost every culture; nonetheless, that does not mean that positive characters cannot be described using animal imagery. Rodriguez (2009) gave some conspicuous examples of animal terms loaded with favorable associations such as bull for a strong virile man; lion for a brave person and lynx for someone clever, among many others. The meaning attached to these animal

names reflects cultural views. Indeed, the ideas held by the members of a community towards particular animals possibly is responsible for endowing the animal name with either positive or negative implications. Meanwhile, the connotative meaning of an animal varies from one linguistic community to the other both in time and space.

Ovoko is a town in Igbo-Eze South Local Government area of Enugu State, Nigeria. In Ovoko linguistic community, metaphorical expressions that use animals' names to represent people are numerous. Animals like mammals, birds, reptiles and even insects are used to represent human beings in speech in the Ovoko dialect. However, following the trend of globalisation, the younger generation in Ovoko linguistic community tends to lose out in the acquisition of metaphoric language. As such, there is the need to document some of these metaphors as used in the dialect to sustain that aspect of the dialect. Therefore, this study will explore domestic birds used in representing women in the Ovoko dialect. There have been some recorded studies carried out on semantic studies as regards ecological relationships in the Ovoko dialect. But, although studies on animal metaphors in languages and cultures abound, to the best knowledge of the researchers, there is no known study on animal metaphors in the Ovoko dialect. It is this academic lacuna that this study intends to fill.

The objectives of this research work are to identify the domestic birds that are metaphorically used in representing women in the Ovoko dialect and examine their metaphoric meanings as used in the area under study. The analysis will base only on the use of names or features of domestic birds. Therefore, this study intends to answer these questions: what domestic birds are metaphorically used to represent women in the Ovoko dialect? What meanings can be derived by using such birds' names to represent women in the Ovoko dialect? This study will help the users of the dialect to be well informed about the meaning of some terms they use to represent people and the socio-psychological imports of such terms in the listener or the addressee. It can also serve as a research material for future researches in this field of study. The major challenge encountered by the researchers in the course of this study was travelling to the area of study to be put right any time they are met with issues concerning the data elicited, however, this challenge was surmounted as the researchers created a WhatsApp account where the respondents or say participants were included for easier interaction.

This study adopts a qualitative research design in order to describe and interpret animal metaphor in representing women in the Ovoko dialect. The study broadly hinges on semantics as an area of study in linguistics, but its major focus is on cognitive semantics. The geographical area of the study is the Ovoko dialect. Considering the volume of this work, only the domestic birds used in representing women in the dialect will be analysed. The data used for this study were got through introspection and unstructured interview. The data elicited were subjected to analysis using analogical mapping.

2. Literature review

In this section, related research works carried out on this topic will be reviewed.

Fontecha and Catalan (2002) do a contrastive-cognitive analysis of semantic derogation in animal metaphor using two male/female examples in English and Spanish. The objectives of their study are to find out whether these examples of animal metaphor are equally conceptualised in English and Spanish. Again, to know whether the two paired examples within each language are used in semantic derogation and interpreted specifically with respect to the two sexes. More so, to ascertain whether, if there is indeed semantic derogation, it applies equally to male and female terms. Finally, to ascertain if the same degree and kind of semantic derogation is observed in the two languages, on the bases of the examples analysed. Findings show that in spite of the differences observed between the two languages, the words in these particular animal pairs are indeed metaphorically applied to persons in both English and Spanish. It is also revealed that some kind of semantic derogation appears in both languages. The research finds out that the main metaphorical meanings of the female terms connote worse qualities than those connoted by the metaphors of the male terms. Finally, it shows that there are differences in the degree and kind of semantic derogation found in the two languages. The two research works are

related as they study animal metaphor, but are different because while Fontecha and Catalan (2002) set their studies in English and Spanish, this current one is set in the Ovoko dialect of Igbo the Language.

Barasa and Opande (2017) carry out a research on the use of animal metaphors in the representation of women in Bukusu and Gusii proverbs in Kenya. The objectives of their study are to examine how people make use of animal metaphors in the construction of women and men and to explore the use of animal metaphors in Bukusu and Gusii proverbs that sought to ascertain whether the common proposition proposed by Lakoff and Turner is applicable to the data of the study. The study's goal is also to examine the similarities and differences in the meanings and representations associated with the animal metaphors in both Bukusu and Gusii proverbs. Data used for the study is composed of forty-eight Bukusu and Gusii proverbs related to animals. The analysis shows that in the two communities, women are perceived as inferior and subordinated to men. It also shows that women are portrayed as objects which are to be used for beauty and can be used and thrown away. This implies that girls and women serve to fulfil the role of sexual objects. Again, the proverbs refer to women as domestic workers, wives and caregivers. They use of conceptual metaphor theory as their analytical framework which is the same with this present research. However, while their research was carried out on Bukusu and Gusii proverbs, this present study examines animal metaphors in representing women in the Ovoko dialect.

Gachugi, Sikuku and Kiliku (2018) analyse the Gikũyũ 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 thrust of the paper is to discuss how these animals are conceptualised in the Gikũyũ world view and the metaphoric mappings involved in the interpretation of the animals related metaphors. From the analysis, the following mappings are discovered emerge: 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. The study also observes semantic derogation where the negative behavior or characteristics of the animals are mapped to that of human beings. Although the two studies are related in terms of studying animal metaphor, their objectives are different.

Bashorun, Odeh and Mamah (2021) study the metaphorical meaning of dog in the Yoruba language. The objectives of their study are to examine the way animal metaphor is used in the Yoruba language which focuses on dog and to explore the metaphoric meanings of dog in the Yoruba language. The data used in the study were got through introspection and were confirmed by two native speakers of the Yoruba language. Employing the conceptual metaphor theory which is one of the cognitive semantics theories as the study's theoretical framework, the study finds out that in the Yoruba language, dog as a domestic animal can have more than one meaning when it is used metaphorically and the study also finds out that the metaphorical meaning of a dog can be hunting, promiscuousness, security and lunatic depending on the meaning a Yoruba language speaker has in mind. The study then recommends that more research works on animal metaphor in the Yoruba language should be done. Although this previous work is related to this present study as they are anchored on animal metaphor, they differ. Bashorun, Odeh and Mamah (2021) focus on the use of dog as a metaphor in Yoruba while this current research work is focused on animal metaphors in representing women in the Ovoko dialect.

The empirical study reviewed scholarly works that are related to the topic under study. The common feature among all the empirical works reviewed here is that they are all anchored on the use of metaphors to convey implied meanings. The studies are carried out in different cultural cum linguistic contexts with different objectives. Having gone through the related research works done in this study area, it is found that no study on animal metaphor, to the best knowledge of the researchers, has been carried out in the Ovoko dialect. On this fact based the justification of the study.

3. Theoretical framework

Analogical mapping

Analogy is one of the most challenging aspects of linguistic creativity for a conceptual representation. It stretches the boundaries of domain description and dynamically establishes new ways of determining inter-domain similarity. According to Obitube (2017), the proponent of the theory of analogical mapping is not ascertained, but the account given by several authors point to Kikuya Ichikawa as the brain behind the theory in 1963. The theory presents a model for solving creative problems by assuming that different schemes or structures may share certain aspects in common (Obitube, 2017).

Fauconnier (1997) in Aboh, Awolor and Ezema (2019) identifies three types of mapping thus: projection mapping which projects structure from one domain onto another; pragmatic function mapping which is established between two entities by virtue of a shared frame of experience; and schema mapping which is based on bodily movements or experiences.

According to Aboh, Awolor and Ezema (2019), conceptual mapping can occur at three different levels. These are attribute, relational and system mapping. In his explanation, attribute mapping creates a connection between two entities based on semantic similarity. Relational mapping maps an entity onto another based on its shared symptoms. System mapping is based on one-to-one mapping and structural consistency such that each element in the source maps is consistently and uniquely related to an element in the target.

Following the fact that analogical mapping helps in understanding a domain through another domain, this research work adopts it as its theoretical framework in order to explain the connotations of domestic birds as used in representation of women in the Ovoko dialect.

Cognitive semantics bases its theoretical construct mostly on analogical mapping or image schema. This is in line with Clauser and Croft's (1999) view that the meaning of a linguistic expression is equated with the concept it expresses and that a concept cannot be understood independent of domain in which it is embedded (Obitube, 2017). Analogical mapping enhances the comprehension of a particular domain through another domain. As a result, this research work will adopt the theory in its analysis of data to be able to make clear the exact meaning the speaker or the writer want to communicate to the audience through the metaphor used. The aspect of the theory that will be used in this study is the attribute mapping as that will bring out the attributes of those domestic birds that are highlighted in the characteristics or features of the women being discussed.

4. Data analysis

The main purpose of language is to be used to communicate by man. There are certain things, conditions, features or situations that cannot be given a perfect description using a normal grammar. In order to find a perfect way of describing such, man resorts to the use of metaphor. In the Ovoko dialect, we have a lot of such metaphors that any time they are used, any speaker of the dialect that does not suffer pragmatic language impairment will understand what they imply. Here, we are going to identify and analyse domestic birds as used to represent women in the Ovoko dialect.

4.1 Identification of domestic Birds in representation of Women in the Ovoko dialect

Domestic birds that are usually used by the users of the Ovoko dialect to represent women include: chicken, duck and turkey. Consider the following sentences:

1. Ọgọchukwuvurukpaakeọkọkọ.
Ọgọchukwu hatch (past) spread like chicken
Ọgọchukwu hatched a lot like chicken.
2. IheEkenelutarubọkọkọ Igbo.
Thing Ekenemarry (past) be (pres.) chicken Igbo.
What Ekene married is a native chicken.
2. Ne nna Ada buokukọkọkọchi.

Mother father Adabe (pres.) chicken dry season

Ada's grandmother is a dry season chicken.

4. Nwaonyenyenuhwabụ he agrikte.

Child woman that be (pres.) just agric only.

That girl is just a broiler.

5. Nne m ga-abụmanụọkụkọudummunyi.

Mother me be (pres.) now chicken season rainy

My mother is now a rainy season chicken.

6. {na-aryianenwunyenwagubụọkụkọ, kēnke m bụidamgbo.

You be (pres.) complain that wifechild you be (pres.) chicken, even belong me is duck.

You complain that your daughter-in-law is chicken, my own is even duck.

7. Ọbunneidamgbonuhwabẹunuchorụimeogga?

It be (pres.) mother duck that that you want to make provost?

Is it that duck that you want to make provost?

8. Ọbụ be m bẹ I dulejetorotoronuhwaikurunwaanyi?

It be (pres.) home me that you bring home turkey that you call (past) woman?

Is it in my home that you are bringing that turkey that you called woman?

4.2 The metaphorical meanings of Birds used in representation of Women in the Ovoko dialect

The analysis will be done following the basic tenets of the theory of analogical mapping where some characteristics or features of a source domain are mapped on the target domain.

Example 1. Ọgọchukwuvurukpaakeọkụkọ.

Ọgọchukwu hatch (past) spread like chicken

Ọgọchukwu hatched a lot like chicken.

Chicken	→	woman
Source domain		Target domain

In this example, an attribute of a chicken is mapped on a woman which is hatching in quantity. Chicken (hen) is known in this linguistic community for its reproductive tendency and dependency on the owner for living. This statement connotes the image of giving birth to so many children by a woman without enough resources to feed or train them. There is a derogatory tone in this statement in the sense that the woman referred to here is being described as highly active sexually and also as a liability to the husband.

Example 2. Ihe Ekenelutarubụọkụkọ Igbo.

Thing Ekenemarry (past) is chicken Igbo.

What Ekene married is a native chicken.

Native chicken	→	village woman
Source domain		Target domain

The term *ọkụkọ Igbo* in the Ovoko dialect metaphorically portrays a woman being knowledgeable in the cultural conduct of a woman and also being industrious. It is these attributes that are mapped on a woman when used the term. In the linguistic community under study, a woman is praised for her ability to trade well. Being that the community lacks land mass, they make their living mostly through trading which is a neutral business for both male and female. So any woman described as *ọkụkọ Igbo* is being praised for being knowledgeable in the things of culture as pertaining a woman's conduct and also being industrious. The term can also be derogatory when it is used to show that the woman is too sensible to be cheated. The meaning whether derogatory or not, depends on what the speaker wants to communicate at a particular point in time. So, it is the context of use that determines the meaning as used.

Example 3. Ne nna Ada buokukokochi.

Mother father Adabe (pres.) chicken dry season

Ada's grandmother is a dry season chicken.

Dry season chicken  Healthy old woman
Source domain Target domain

Metaphorically, *okukokochi* connotes sharpness of the body and good health in the dialect. This term is usually used to describe an old woman who despite her age is still strong and healthy. During dry season, chickens are always very active due to the hot weather. These attribute are mapped on any old woman who is still very active to explain the state of her health.

Example 4. Nwaonyenyenuhwabu he agrikte.

Child woman that be (pres.) just agric only.

That girl is just a broiler.

Broiler  a senseless girl
Source domain target domain

'Agrik' in the dialect is referred to as a specie of foreign chicken known as broiler. The attributes of broiler that are taken into consideration in bringing its metaphorical meaning in the dialect are its beautiful body built, overconfidence and senselessness. These attributes are mapped on a woman to show that she is physically attractive, but lacks manners. Put differently, she is highly uncultured despite her beauty. So, this is a derogatory remark on a woman.

Example 5. Nne m ga-abumanuokukodummuni.

Mother me be (pres.) now chicken season rainy

My mother is now a rainy season chicken.

Rainy season chicken  an unhealthy old woman
Source domain target domain

Okukodummuni is mapped on an old woman to show the state of her health. During rainy season, chickens tend to be dull and most especially sick as a result of cold that accompanies the season. Therefore, a woman described in this way suffers persistent ill health.

Example 6 {na-aryianwunyenwagubukukok, kenke m buidamgbo

You be (pres.) complain that wife child you be (pres.) chicken, even belong me is duck.

You complain that your daughter-in-law is chicken, my own is even duck.

Chicken and duck  careless daughters-in-law
Source domain target domain

In this statement, two animal names play out - *okukokandidamgbo*. These terms as used in this context are derogatory in that the aspects of these animals that are highlighted here is that of untidiness and dirtiness. These metaphorical expressions are mostly used by mothers-in-law to describe their daughters-in-law whom they feel lack sense of ethics and aesthetics. *Okukok* litters around without tidying up while *idamgbo* messes up the environment with its faeces and still claims to be neat by bathing in every water around. These attributes of chicken and duck are used to map on wives who do not see it as a point of duty to tidy up the house where they live and those who feel that they can mess up the house anyhow they like as far as there are helpers in the house to clean up their mess respectively.

Example 7. Obunneidamgbonuhwabunuchorumeoga?

It be (pres.) mother duck that that you want to make provost?

Is it that duck that you want to make provost?

Duck  timid and reserved woman
Source domain Target domain

In the dialect under study, the term *idamgbo* generally connotes timidity and reserved nature. These attributes are mapped on women to describe her as a person that lacks courage, confidence or self-assurance and therefore finds it difficult to face the crowd or public. Such person dodges confrontation with other people and therefore is said to lack important leadership qualities. The statement above is derogatory because it shows incompetence on the part of the subject of discussion. Furthermore, *idamgbo* does not connote any positive metaphorical meaning in the dialect. Meanwhile, the term cannot be used to qualify a man rather it is feminine in nature as used in the dialect.

Example 8. Ọbụ be m beidulejetorotoronuhwa I kurunwaanyi?

It be (pres.) home me that you bring home turkey that you call (past) woman?

Is it in my home that you are bringing that turkey you called woman?

Turkey  an arrogant lady
Source domain Target domain

Torotoro is also a feminine term in the dialect under study because it can only be used for feminine genders. *Torotoro* is a bird known in the linguistic community for its pride and arrogance following the way it displays its rectrices. It is these qualities of turkey that is mapped on a woman to show how arrogant the woman is. So, with that statement above, a mother-in-law to be has already informed her son that she will not accept the arrogant fiancée of his in her house. Just like *idamgbo*, *torotoro* is always used in a derogatory manner, in the dialect, to explain bad attitude to life in general by women who exhibit such character.

5. Summary of the findings

This study attempted an analysis of animal metaphors in the representation of women in the Ovoko dialect by employing the tenets of analogical mapping. From the first objective, the study discovers three domestic birds that are used metaphorically to represent a woman in the Ovoko dialect. These domestic birds are chicken, duck and turkey. From the second objective, it is discovered that the meanings attached to chicken when used metaphorically can be derogatory or extolling depending on how it is used and who uses it to explain who. Moreover, duck and turkey are generally derogatory in their use because it is only their ugly attributes that are used for mapping on women in the dialect we are studying.

6. Conclusion

For a feature of an animal to be mapped on a human being means that there is an area of resemblance between the two different domains. This study has successfully used the theory of analogical mapping to account for the use of animals in the representation of women in the Ovoko dialect. Although the animals used metaphorically are not exhaustive (only domestic birds) in this piece of work, it has laid a foundation on how animals can be used to explain attributes of some individuals in the linguistic community being studied.

Therefore, the researcher recommends that more research works should be done in the Ovoko dialect on this area in order to document more of the animal metaphors and other metaphors as used in the dialect.

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