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Conceptualizing Farm Product Overmaturity in the Mfantse Dialect of Akan

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Abstract:

Within the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory by Lakoff, G. and Johnson, M., the present paper analyzes the expressions in the Mfantse dialect of Akan, which communicate the state of overmaturity in farm products, more precisely farm product + adjectives forms (e.g. kube werpee ‘coconut dry’). This study is a case study which uses a qualitative research approach. The analysis is based on data collected from six (6) farmers purposively sampled from Gomoa Asebu, Ajumako and Mfantse Nyankomase in the Central Region of Ghana. The data collection tool was a semi-structured interview. It is realized that among the Mfantse people, the presence of a given feature like dryness or overripe is conceptualized to communicate the overmaturity of farm products. The results of our discussion may add to further research into the factors that contribute to figurative expressions and coinage relating to crop farming vocabulary among the Mfantse people.

Keywords:

Metaphor, Conceptualization, Overmaturity, Mfantse

1. Introduction

Research has convincingly shown that, among the Ewes, Igbos and Mfantse (Akan) people, the field of crop farming is rich in expressions at various stages of crop growth from crop propagation through to farm product harvesting and preservation (e.g., [19,15,20]).

Expressions are chosen to communicate farm activities based on quite many factors, namely parts of the crop used for the activity, how the activity is carried out and the tool used for the activity in question. Thus, for example, in Akan, the term used to communicate the propagation of cassava by the use of cassava cutting, is hye (lit. insert). This term is used by considering the above-mentioned factors. The mentioned works worked on the crop farming terms from the lexicography and semantic field perspective.

The present study, focus on how the Mfantse people conceptualize the overmaturity of farm products from the conceptual metaphor perspective. More precisely, we seek to establish the various conceptualization of overmaturity, which is primarily dependent on the use of farm product + adjectival forms like (kube werpee lit. coconut thick and nkunuma weromee (lit. okra parched). We may as well establish the cognitive instrument (metaphors) on which these expressions are based. We believe that the results of our analysis may contribute to the understanding of how the Mfantse people conceptualize concepts in crop farming.

2. Theoretical Framework

Cognitive Linguistics approach analyses language in its relation to other cognitive domains and faculties such as bodily and mental experiences, image-schemas, perception, attention, memory, viewing frames, categorization, abstract thought, emotion, reasoning, inference just to mention a few [18,7]. This linguistic approach relates linguistic expressions to human cognitive experience.

According to the cognitivists, to explicate a given phenomenon in a given language well, we need to be interested in, as well as respect the perspective of speakers and more broadly the experiential reality [12,14].

[10] state that, language description is motivated by human conceptual knowledge and experience of the world. This, in turn, posit that linguistic forms or structures have basic meanings in a given language, but they may encode conceptualizations that go beyond simple reference and meaning among natives of the language in question. The paper attempts to test the constructs and assertions of the cognitive linguistic approach with the analyses of crop produce overmaturity terms.

In the words of [7]:

Cognitive semantics conceives and understand that knowledge of the world is best mediated through language. Cognitive linguists are of the view that natural language can be adequately explained in terms of its semantics and function rather than describing linguistic expressions in terms of the formal rule system that is completely independent of meaning.

The paper employs the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). It suggests that metaphor is not a matter of language but a matter of thought and abstract ideas. According to the theory, a metaphorical mind always seizes upon the world of spatial concrete, well known, physical categories and, use metaphor to ‘transfer’ the concepts onto less concrete and ever more abstract, less explain, hard to comprehend domains such as emotion, feelings, time, causality, event structure, just to mention a few. This paper attempts to test this claim with how the Mfantse people perceive and conceptualize the overmaturity of farm products.

According to [13], Metaphoric (and metonymic) mappings of concrete, well-explained categories, especially those stemming from spatial domains, onto abstract areas of experience such as emotion, causation just to mention a few is to a very large extent the grounding for abstract categories and abstract thought. The theory assumes that the human mind maps elements from concrete source domains onto the more abstract target domains of emotion, causality, event structure, and others. The concrete categories themselves are categorized based on pre-conceptual spatial configurations shared by most living beings.

[17] states that,

Cognitive metaphor theorists emphasize that target domains typically correspond to areas of experience that are relatively abstract, complex, unfamiliar, subjective or poorly delineated, such as time, emotion, life or death, reincarnation, resurrection, ghosts. In contrast, source domains typically correspond to concrete, simple, familiar, physical, and well-delineated experiences such as motion, bodily phenomena, and physical objects and so on.

The farm product overmature expressions that have state notions are dependent on the conceptual thought patterns or pre-conceptual spatial configurations of the Mfantse speakers. A salient feature of the farm products in question communicates the state of overmaturity. In the paper, we focus on metaphor as very productive conceptual instruments for conceptualizing overmaturity with many expressions.

3. The Mfantse Dialect of Akan

According to [6], the Akan language is spoken in the southern part of Ghana. It is spoken as a native language (L1-first language) in six of the ten regions in Ghana namely, Ashanti, Eastern, Western, Central, and Brong Ahafo Regions. They are sandwiched by the Ewes in the Volta Region of Ghana. Its dialects include Agona, Akuapem, Akwamu, Akyem, Asante, Assin, Bono, Buem, Denkyira, Fante, Kwahu, Twifo, and Wasa.

The subject matter of this study is the Fante dialect. According to [2] label, Fante has been in use ever since life began in Ghana, for the reason that non-Fante Akans and non-Akans alike call it Fante. But, the speakers of the dialect call the dialect Mfantse and refer to themselves as Mfantsefo. We, therefore, refer to the dialect as Mfantse in this paper.

According to [5]:

Mfantsefo or the Mfantse people occupy the southern part of Ghana, bounded on the south by the Gulf of Guinea, on the east by Ga, on the west by the Ahanta, and on the north by the Wasa, Denkyira, Assin and Akyem. ... the Mfantse linguistic community includes Oguaa, Nkusukum, Abora, Ekumfi, Enyan, Gomua, Asebu, Kwamankese, Komenda, Edina, Abrem, Sekondi-Takoradi metropolis, and their satellite towns and villages.

The Mfantse speakers are mostly found at the coastal belt of Ghana while the Twi speakers are mostly in the hinterlands of Ghana.

4. Methodology

This study has a qualitative research approach. The analysis is based on data collected from six (6) farmers purposively sampled from Gomoa Asebu, Ajumako and Mfantse Nyankomase in the Central Region of Ghana. The semi-structured interview is the main tool that was used to collect data. The farmers were asked questions based on the terms they use to communicate the overmature state of a given farm product. This helped to elicit terms that describe the state of farm products. The interview was done in three weeks. This method saved time. The interviews were audio-recorded. Constructs of the conceptual metaphor theory were applied to data collected.

4.1. Conceptualizing Farm Product Overmaturity

Farm product maturity is in three-phase, overmature, maturity, and overmaturity. The three states mentioned are determinants of whether or not the farm products are ready for consumption and other needed purposes. We concentrate on the expressions that communicate the overmaturity of farm products. They are found in Table 1.

Table 1. Farm product overmaturity terms.

Terms	Crops
<i>guan</i> (lit. be dry)	All crops
<i>werpee</i> (lit. be thick)	Coconut
<i>werom</i> (lit. be parched)	Okra
<i>kyen</i> (lit. to last)	Pepper

In Table 1 are salient traits exhibited by various farm products that are in their overmature state. Based on the experiential realities concerning various farm products, the Mfantse people conceptualize the overmaturity of farm products based on the vision and ontological features of the products in question.

When crop products mature for a long period, they overmature. Some crop products are left to overmature for various purposes. One of the major reasons for allowing some crop products to overmature is the possibility of re-propagation. When farm products overmature they are easy to be propagated.

4.1.1. Overmaturity is a Change of State

Mentally, farm products are perceived as objects that have dried up and objects that have thick texture to conceptualize their overmaturity. Conceptualizing farm products in this way is experientially triggered by the physical interaction between our bodies and other entities in the world. Where we can feel and see the state-changing cycle from wetness to dryness and tenderness to thickness respectively. Therefore, metaphors like eburow guanee (lit. corn dry), nkunuma weromee (lit. Okra parch) and kube werpee (lit. coconut thick) are realized. The term *guan* (lit. dry) ‘overmaturity’ collocate all farm products, *werom* (lit. dry) ‘overmaturity’ collocate Okra only while *werpee* (lit. thick) collocate coconut. The dryness and thickness that is perceived to communicate overmaturity in the mentioned metaphors are triggered by the known perception that anything dry and thick has been wet and tender before. In other sense, the said farm products have graduated from the state of wetness and tenderness (overmaturity) to the state of dryness and thickness (overmaturity) respectively.

The transformation from wetness to dryness and tenderness to thickness serves as the source domain onto which the target domains of growth from overmaturity to overmaturity of the said farm products are mapped. Farm products in this state have gone through the stages of growth, have changed in state, and benefit their consumers/users. The dryness trait on which the overmaturity of farm products are anchored can be extended to explicate the overmaturity of dynamic entities as well.

4.1.2 Overmaturity is Longevity

Mentally, farm products are perceived as objects that have journeyed through life for long or have been in existence for a long period to conceptualize their overmaturity. This conceptualization is triggered by experiencing or witnessing something exist for a period. Here, the journey a farm product takes from overmaturity through to overmaturity is mapped onto the journey from the beginning to the end in life. Thus, an overmature pepper is identified by the metaphor, *muoko nkyenyenee* (lit. Pepper last long).

The crop overmature term *kyen* has various meanings. These known meanings bear heavily on tone. Numerous literature on the various dialects of Akan points to the fact that tone plays a major role in the meaning of linguistics forms in Akan (see [4,8]). The term in question will communicate different ideas depending on the tone marked. Let have a look at the words in Table 2;

Table 2. The tonal Pattern of kyen.

Word	Meaning
a. <i>kyè̀n</i>	'to fast'
b. <i>kyé́n</i>	'to last'

Tone plays a pivotal role in the meaning of the linguistic forms in (a–b). The linguistic forms communicate different ideas; (a) means 'to fast' and (b) means 'to last' respectively. We see that the form *kyen* may have three different meanings depending on the tone marked. The term that is used in this context is *kyé́n* meaning 'to last'.

Pepper is one of the numerous perishable vegetables. Normally, to preserve it, it is dried for various purposes. Longevity guarantees difficulties in the period. We need to understand the process so that we will be able to understand the metaphorical mapping between the concept of longevity and overmaturity. Here, the concept of existing for a long time serves as the source domain the Mfantse people use to explicate the target domain of farm products overmaturity.

5. Findings

Metaphor is used as an instrument to communicate farm product overmaturity. Concrete and well-experienced concepts like a change of state and longevity are employed to communicate farm produce overmaturity in farm products. The mapping between overmaturity and the mentioned concepts is grounded on salient features exhibited by farm products in their overmature state. The features include dryness, thickness, and longevity. Most overmaturity crop produce is kept for propagation in the future. Some crop products are perishable, other ones are not. Sometimes the perishable ones go through some processes to get to the overmature state. These processes are for preservation purposes. Some of the processes are drying, boiling just to mention a few.

6. Conclusion

The paper aimed to examine how the Mfantse people conceptualize the overmaturity of farm products from the conceptual metaphor perspective. More precisely, we seek to establish the various conceptualization of overmaturity, which is primarily dependent on the use of farm product + adjectival forms. Judging from analysis, we have uncovered that many conceptual tools are used in conceptualizing overmaturity as presented. We are certain that the results we obtained from our analysis of the data expressing farm produce overmaturity may add to the continuous research into the register of various indigenous occupations. It may further contribute to the understanding of expressions used in crop farming coinages among the Mfantse people.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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