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## METAPHORIC ANALYSIS OF MŪRĪMI WA KAHALF'S POP SONG: "ĨNO NĪ MOMO"

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### ABSTRACT

Gĩkũyũ vernacular singer, the late Sammy Mūrīmi Nderi, better known by his stage name Mūrīmi wa Kahalf, cut a niche for himself for his hilarious and metaphorical songs. In particular, the song: "Ĩno nĩ momo" has been a massive hit with revelers and deejays in Kenya since being released in 2012 thanks to its use of metaphors and witticism. Basically, the song is about a man who goes to the city and falls in love with a randy, huge woman "momo" and the challenges that come along with such a relationship. Using four annotators including the researcher, this paper set forth to identify the metaphors in the song through the Metaphor Identification Procedure Vrije Universiteit (MIPVU), an extended version of Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP). In addition, the study explains the meaning of the metaphors using the Cognitive Linguistics Framework. Content analysis which is within the qualitative research paradigm, also guided the analysis of the song. The study notes that the MIPVU is an effective method of identifying metaphors in songs. The study concludes that metaphor provides a tool for reasoning about one thing in terms of the other. Further, this research recommends that language researchers should employ the MIPVU in the analysis of songs since it does not rely on unilateral introspection in the identification of metaphors.

**Keywords:** *Mūrīmi Wa Kahalf, Metaphor, ĩno Nĩ Momo, Song, Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIPVU), Gĩkũyũ Vernacular Music, Metaphor in Oral Literature, Kenyan Popular Culture.*

### INTRODUCTION: THE NEXUS BETWEEN COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS AND METAPHOR

Cognitive linguistics (CL) is an interdisciplinary approach to the study of language, mind and socio-cultural experience (Evans, et al., 2007). The term *cognitive* refers to the crucial role of "intermediated informational structures" in our encounters with the world (Geeraerts and Cuyckens, 2007, p. 5)<sup>1</sup>. As a dynamic framework within theoretical and descriptive linguistics (Geeraerts, 2006), CL is one the most reliable areas

<sup>1</sup> Following Geeraerts and Cuyckens (2007a) and others, the term Cognitive Linguistics (CL) is employed here in order to be distinguished from the Chomskyan cognitive approach to language, which views language as an innate independent faculty. For details on the difference refer to (Geeraerts, 2006; Evans and Green, 2006; Ungerer and Schmid, 2006).

of research within the interdisciplinary project of cognitive science. In CL, metaphor is regarded as one of several kinds of *idealised cognitive model* (or ICM)<sup>2</sup>.

The history on metaphor studies spans many years (Wu, 2007)<sup>3</sup>. Classical theorists, for example, look at metaphor as a special use of language, a deviance from what is literal, usually in the pursuit of an aesthetic purpose (Ortony, 1993; Lakoff and Johnson, 1999). In the traditional approach to metaphor, metaphor is viewed as a pure “matter of language” and is believed to be “used chiefly for poetic or rhetorical emphasis” (Cameron and Low, 1999, p. 78). This is called the “logical positivist paradigm” as Cameron and Low (1999, p.78) describe it. Aristotle, for instance, regarded metaphors as the “transference of a name to something it does not belong to” (Harris and Taylor, 1989, p.20). On the other hand, the cognitive view of metaphor assumes that, apart from being an element of rhetoric, metaphor is also a mental process that tries to associate entities of the world with abstract things (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). From this study onwards, metaphor has been seen as “a matter of mind” (Cameron and Low, 1999, p.78). With this approach, metaphor is no longer seen as being the opposite of literal language use, but more as a mapping of mental concepts (Cameron and Low, 1999). Thus, cognitive linguists consider the creation of metaphors as one aspect of the more general human tendency to categorize experience, and suggest that the roots of the metaphors we use daily lie in our sensory experience, that is to say, in our relationship with the physical world. As Deignan (2005) comments, our “language is hardly metaphor-free” (p.18). Thus, metaphors are so pervasive that we may even be unaware of them. It is against this background that this paper analyses the animal, plant and vehicle metaphors used in Mũrĩmi wa Kahalf’s pop song: “Ĩno nĩ momo.”

## METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

This study adopted a qualitative research design. A qualitative research “say[s] how things are’ by informing the reader of phenomena as experienced by the study participants and interpreted by the researcher in a relevant context” (Creswell, 2007). The song “Ĩno nĩ momo” which is about a man who goes to the city and falls in love with a huge woman “momo” and the challenges that come along with such a relationship was purposively sampled for this study<sup>4</sup>. The song was purposively sampled because of its popularity with Kenyans and specifically revelers and deejays since being released in 2012. Second, the song was sampled because of its witticism and its use of metaphors. After the selection of the song, the song was translated and analyzed for metaphors. The song was transcribed and translated to English. The metaphors collected were subjected to inter-rater agreement reliability check in which four annotators including the researcher carried out the Metaphor Identification Procedure *Vrije Universiteit* (MIPVU). Each lexical unit was annotated as a metaphor-related word if its contextual meaning contrasted with its basic meaning (Goatly, 1997). When the four annotators disagreed with the identification of a metaphor, they discussed its meaning and categorized it once there was an agreement (Steen et al., 2010). Although

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<sup>2</sup> The Idealized Cognitive Models (ICMs) are the static or dynamic mental representations of typical situations in life and their typical elements (Guan, 2009, p.181). According to Lakoff (1987, pp. 271-292), ICMs are organized on the basis of five structuring principles into image-schema, propositional, metaphoric, metonymic, and symbolic ICMs. Further, Radden and Kovecses (1999) argue that an ICM concept is “meant to include not only people’s encyclopedic knowledge of a particular domain but also the cultural model they are part of” (p.20).

<sup>3</sup> The history of metaphorical studies in the West can be divided into three phases: first, the first phase, which lasted for more than 2000 years from Aristotle to Richards, is characterized by rhetorical approaches to metaphors; the second phase, which lasted from the 1930s to the 1970s, is characterized by semantic approaches to metaphors, including the application of logical, philosophical, and linguistic methods; and lastly, the third phase, which started in the 1970s, began to see the cognition-orientated cross-disciplinary studies of metaphors, approaching metaphors from the perspectives of cognitive psychology, cognitive linguistics, philosophy, pragmatics, semiotics, aesthetics, and phenomenology, et cetra (Dingfang, 2000, p.2).

<sup>4</sup> Nderi released his first song, “Irima rĩhandwo Mũĩ” in 2006. Some of his other songs are “Sofia”, “Nduta Roko” and “Kamunguna”.

there are other procedures employed by cognitive linguists<sup>5</sup>, this procedure was employed by this study to check on the inter-rater agreement<sup>6</sup>. Content analysis also guided the analysis of the song.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The paper employed the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (henceforth, CMT)<sup>7</sup>. The CMT was initially developed by Lakoff and Johnson in their seminal work *Metaphors We Live By* in 1980. Within the cognitive tradition, metaphor is understood as a device with the capacity to structure our conceptual system, providing, at the same time, a particular understanding of the world and a way to make sense of our experience. As Kövecses says that: “[metaphor] has become a valuable cognitive tool without which neither poets nor you and I as ordinary people could live without” (2002, p. xi). Thus, the conceptual domain from which we draw metaphorical expressions to understand another conceptual domain is called the source domain, while the conceptual domain that is understood in this way is the target domain (Kövecses, 2002). Using the mnemonics along the line of “TARGET DOMAIN IS SOURCE DOMAIN,” metaphors are mapped from concrete source domain to abstract target domain in the conceptual system<sup>8</sup>.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study found that zoosemy (animal metaphors), plantosemy (plant metaphors) and vehicle metaphors are used as source domains in the construction of metaphors related to women as discussed below:

**Table 4.1:** Animals, plants, vehicle metaphors in the song “ĩno nĩ momo” and their reliability measures

No	Metaphor	Gloss	Conceptual Metaphor	Reliability Measures				
				Coder 1	Coder 2	Coder 3	Coder 4	Total
1	Ngombo*	a slave	Animal	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	1.00
2	Ngoma *	A devil	Animal	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	1.00
3	Friesian	a type of a cow	Animal	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	1.00
4	Ngond’u	sheep	Animal	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	1.00
5	Mbarathi	a horse	Animal	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	1.00
6	Irimũ *	An ogre	Animal	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	1.00
7	Karagita	a tractor	Vehicle	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	1.00
8	Vitz	a small model of a car	Vehicle	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	1.00
9	Gari nene	a big car	Vehicle	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	1.00
10	Turera	a trailer	Vehicle	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	1.00
11	FH	a big truck	Vehicle	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	1.00
12	Momo	a large car	Vehicle	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	1.00
13	Mĩigua	Thorns	Vehicle	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	1.00
14	Mĩraa	Khat	Vehicle	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	1.00

KEY: \* These metaphors are not necessarily zoosemic. However, this paper is of the view that their usage in the song connotes animal-like behaviour. That is why, they have been categorised in the animal conceptual metaphor.

<sup>5</sup> Other procedures include: the Fleiss' kappa which measures the inter-annotator agreement (Artstein and Poesio, 2008) and Cochran's Q (Dunn, 1989) which looks at analyst bias and checks out whether one or more analysts are behaving significantly differently than the others.

<sup>6</sup> According to Cameron (2003), the inter-coder reliability rate should only be considered to be acceptable if it is 75% or more. This implies that three annotators out of four in the study had to come to a consensus for a lexical unit to be considered a metaphor. Since there were four annotators, each annotator had to allocate 25% or 0.25 points to every lexical unit that was metaphorically related for unanimity on metaphoricity to be achieved. If all the four agreed that a lexical unit is a lexical unit, then this was marked as unanimous since when you multiply 4 with 0.25 you will get 1.00 or 100% (Table 4.1).

<sup>7</sup> The Cognitive Metaphor Theory (CMT), the dominant paradigm in metaphor studies, was developed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). Other scholars (for example, Lakoff and Turner, 1989; Kövecses, 2002) have also contributed on the CMT.

<sup>8</sup> Traditionally, Richards (1936) describes a metaphor as consisting of the *tenor* (or subject to which attributes are ascribed), the *vehicle* (the subject from which the attributes are derived), the *tension* (the dissimilarities between the tenor and the vehicle) and the *ground* (the point of similarity between the tenor and the vehicle).

## THE WOMAN IS AN A ANIMAL<sup>9</sup>

Given that animals are part of the world, it is a common phenomenon that people are often described and conceptualized as animals. In fact, as Kövecses (2000) notes, people have often resorted to animal metaphors (zoosemy) as a way of explaining human behaviour, human feelings and even human relations<sup>10</sup>. Thus, animal metaphors not only have a cognitive basis, but are also culturally motivated, that is, they reflect the attitudes and beliefs held by a particular community towards certain animal species, and, therefore, may vary from culture to culture, in time and space (Deignan, 2003). The following animal metaphors are used in the depiction of the female persona in the song:

- (1). Ngombo - a slave
- (2). Ngoma - a devil
- (3). Friesian - a type of a cow
- (4). Ngond'u - Sheep
- (5). Mbarathi - a horse
- (6). Irimū - an ogre

This study notes that the choice of the animal metaphors above for the female persona in the song are not arbitrary, but, on the contrary, may shed some light onto the expectations and beliefs the society holds about males and females. In order to understand the metaphors better, it is important to take into account the folk conception of the generic GREAT CHAIN OF BEING metaphor (Kövecses, 2002) whose main aim is to assign a place for everything in the universe in a strict hierarchical system, which is pictured as a chain vertically extended (López, 2009). In the GREAT CHAIN OF BEING metaphor, from the bottom to the top, the levels stand as follows: *inanimate members* (for example, stones, metals); *vegetative members* (for example, flowers and plants); *animals*; *humans*; *celestial creatures*; and *God*. Within each level, there are sub-levels defined by different degrees of complexity and power in relation to each other (for example, within the animal realm the *lion* is above the *rabbit*, which, in turn, is above the *worm*) (López, 2009). In other words, the GREAT CHAIN OF BEING metaphor presupposes that the natural order of the cosmos is that “higher forms of existence dominate lower forms of existence” (López, 2009, p.81), and therefore, as a result, when people are compared to animals as in the metaphors above, they are often devalued. For example, the metaphor “ngond'u” (sheep) is used to talk about a person with low intellectual or rational capacity. According to López (2009), “ngond'u” (sheep) is used as a term of opprobrium for a woman, implying docility and lack of intellectual capacity. The metaphor also yields the factors of servitude and edibility, which are central to the metaphoric identifications of women with animals. However, the case of “ngond'u” (sheep) differs from the other metaphors in the sense that sheep are of a small size. On the converse, “ngoma” (a devil) may be said to refer to someone exhibiting insensitivity, savagery or cruelty. On the other hand, the use of the above metaphors (3-5) to depict women is in consonance with López's (2009) assertion that women are predominantly seen as domestic animals. Thus, women are depicted as creatures that perform the strictly animal functions of producing and rearing offspring (Shanklin, 1985). The metaphor of cow, for example, according to López (2009), is one of the most representative terms of livestock animals in the figurative categorization of women, and it clearly encodes the idea of a *big fat woman* or a *fat cow*. Similarly, the metaphor of a horse is also employed to depict the female persona in the song. As noted by Krzeszowski (1997), the term EQUIDAE, the Latin name for a horse, is a common word used in the HUMAN BEING IS AN ANIMAL metaphor. Interestingly, the horse metaphor has a negative connotation towards women. As Chamizo and Sánchez (2000) argue, since the horse can be ridden by people, it might evoke the image of mounting or getting upon a coital partner, therefore, hinting at the metaphor SEX IS RIDING, which portrays the man in the role of the *rider* that *mounts*, *rides* or *straddles* the woman. As far as the metaphor of “irimū” (an ogre) is concerned, size is crucial in crediting the woman

<sup>9</sup> According to the GREAT CHAIN OF BEING, humans stand above animals, so whenever that people are compared to animals they are degraded and devalued (Talebinejad and Dastjerdi, 2005).

<sup>10</sup> Zoosemy is understood as one of the mechanisms of semantic change whereby animal names are employed to designate human characteristics (Kleparski, 2008).

with negative connotations. Seen in this light, the female persona in the song is, therefore, presented as a creature that is dangerous and menacing since she can take the reins as far as a relationship is concerned.

### **A WOMAN IS A VEHICLE**

The use of vehicle as the source domain for a woman is employed in the song “Īno nī momo”. These vehicle metaphors used in the song are based on size and strength. The vehicle metaphors below are metaphorically used as terms of opprobrium for women in the song:

- (7). Karagita - a tractor
- (8). ti Vitz - a small model of a car
- (9). Gari nene - a big car
- (10). Turera - a trailer
- (11). FH - a big truck
- (12). Momo - a large car

From the point of view of appearance of the metaphors above, all these vehicle metaphors stand out for their big size, which makes them appropriate source domains for becoming derogatory terms for the female persona in the song. The implications of these metaphors may transcend the solely physical and hint at stereotypical views of women. Normally, the names of big vehicles may be said to imply fatness and ugliness. However, just like it has been argued in the previous section, it is important to take into account the generic GREAT CHAIN OF BEING metaphor (Kövecses, 2002) to understand the above metaphors. In the GREAT CHAIN OF BEING metaphor, the above metaphors (7-12) fall under the level of inanimate members. This is the lowest level in the GREAT CHAIN OF BEING metaphor. The comparison between people and vehicle metaphors above will transmit negative connotations. In metaphor (10) above, for example, a trailer is used to refer to a woman. A trailer is generally a large transport vehicle designed to be hauled by a truck or tractor. Thus, figuratively, a trailer is a person or thing that trails. Metaphor (7), on the other hand, refers to a woman as a tractor. A tractor is essentially a large vehicle that is used especially for pulling farm implements or machinery and has a powerful gasoline or diesel motor and large, heavily treaded rear tires. The metaphor of FH (Forward control High entry), a type of a truck lorry, is also used to conceptualize the female persona in the song. The metaphor helps in intensifying the physical structure of the woman in the song. Similarly, the metaphor of Vitz is also used to depict the woman in the song. A Vitz is a car with a 1000 cc engine and whose popularity can be attributed to its versatile hatchback design, dependability and exceptional fuel economy. The singer says that the female persona in the song is not a Vitz (ti Vitz). Thus, the woman in the song is the complete antithesis of a Vitz; she is not dependable and she consumes a lot. Further, metaphor (12) is a Gīkūyū word that has come to mean a “fat person” and has become popular in everyday parlance. The metaphor as used in the song is presented as a pejorative for women. The metaphor has been a cause of derision to women which might explain the negative import attached to the name. Phonetic considerations might be said to play a major role in the choice of the name “momo” to refer to a woman. The word “momo” is ideophonic in nature and it has its origin in a type of vehicle that had gained currency with transporters for its ability to carry a lot of materials. The word has the connotation of a huge and overbearing woman. In the song, the male persona decries his emasculation and even calls upon his mother to pray for him in order to overcome his troubles of living with his huge spouse. The singer says of “momo,” “ūngīmīkia cabi nonginya ĩkunde magana” (if you insert a key, it must drink in hundreds). This evokes the CONTAINER SCHEMA which negatively depicts the female persona in the song<sup>11</sup>.

### **THE WOMAN IS A PLANT**

Plants are sometimes used to conceptualize phenomena (Kleparski, 2008). According to Kleparski (2008), the process of transference of plant names to refer to various qualities of human beings and / or with

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<sup>11</sup> For a good understanding of the CONTAINER schema, refer to Peña (1997) and Clausner and Croft (1999).

reference to humans is known as a plantosemy. In this study, cases of plantosemy are discussed to conceptualise women. Thus, the female persona in the song is:

(13). Mīigua - Thorns

(14). Mīraa - Khat

As noted earlier, with regard to the GREAT CHAIN OF BEING metaphor, the natural order of the cosmos is that “higher forms of existence dominate lower forms of existence” (López, 2009, p.81). Therefore, when people are compared to plants as in the metaphors above, they are often devalued. Metaphor (11), for example, not only has a cognitive basis, but is also culturally motivated, that is, it reflects the attitudes and beliefs held by a particular community and, therefore, may vary from culture to culture, in time and space (Deignan, 2003; MacArthur 2005).

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings and discussion above, this study concludes the following: first, nearly all the animal, vehicle and plant metaphors employed in the song convey negative evaluations of the female persona in the song; Second, the MIPVU is an effective framework of identifying metaphors in Gīkūyū; third, since metaphors are always related to our world view and its interpretation, the study of the underlying assumptions that motivate the mapping of common animal, vehicle and plant metaphors used in the conceptualization of women provide a good insight into the role attributed to females by society; and lastly, the generic GREAT CHAIN OF BEING metaphor helps us understand the animal, vehicle and plant metaphors.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

This study recommends that language researchers should employ the MIPVU in the analysis of songs since it does not rely on unilateral introspection in the identification of metaphors. Second, the study recommends that more studies on metaphors in songs be undertaken so that animal, vehicle and plant metaphors used may offer a window on the construction of social identities as well as pave the way for a gendered discourse. This may help us understand whether such metaphors are responsible for endowing the women with either positive or negative implications, although those associations may vary from one culture to another.

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