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FROM THE EDITORS

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ARTICLES

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Conceptualising love in Amharic: Lexis, metaphors, and cultural contexts

Abstract

Based on three sets of linguistic data and grounded in cognitive ethnolinguistic methodology, this article analyses the Amharic concept of love at three levels of granularity. First, it examines the difference between the two verbal exponents of the concept *wäddädä* 'to love, like, want' and *afäqqärä* 'to love', along with the specifics of the noun *fəqər* 'love', as well as the multitude of other categories formed from the two main roots *fqr* and *wdd*. Second, it discusses the basic metaphors of love, with particular focus on those unique to Amharic (e.g. *fəqər lay mähon* lit. 'to be on love'*, yäanǧät fəqər* lit. 'the intestine love'). Third, the article explores the most important subcategories of Amharic love, such as romantic love, family love, self-love and love of homeland. Overall, the article offers an in-depth account of the structure of the concept and demonstrates a range of links with fundamental beliefs and practices functioning in Ethiopian culture, such as the notion of an interventionist God, the central role of family relations, the tabooisation of sex, and a uniquely conceptualized relationship with one's homeland. It also provides a strong argument for taking linguistic and cultural relativity into account in discussions of human experience and the conceptualization of love.

Keywords: concept of love, Amharic worldview, Amharic semantics, Ethiopian culture, ethnolinguistics

1. Introduction

Few notions have attracted the attention of scholars around the world as much as love. While most of the research in this area still treats it as a predominantly universal concept (Buss 1988; Bartels & Zeki 2000, 2004; Fisher et al. 2005; Shaver & Mikulincer 2006; Song et al. 2015), the past few decades have brought increased awareness of the key role that language and culture have on one's perception of love (Kövecses 1986, 1991; Wierzbicka 1986, 1992, 2019; Beall & Sternberg 1995; Goddard 1995; Swidler 2001; Lomas 2018). Nevertheless, it is rather safe to say that the quest to uncover the different ways in which love is conceptualized and verbalized across the world's languages is far from complete. The present study aims to contribute to this endeavour by providing a comprehensive account of the concept of love present in Amharic.

In many respects, the concept of love in Amharic presents a particularly interesting case. On the one hand, it is strongly influenced by Christian philosophy, which has had a key role in shaping the concepts of love found in most European languages (Underhill 2012; Wierzbicka 2019). This means its scope and structure resemble those found in languages such as English or Polish, encompassing a great multitude of different domains of experience and subcategories (Bierwiaczonek 2002; Brożyna-Reczko 2017; Wierzbicka 2019). On the other hand, however, the specificity of the Amharic language and its role in shaping the Ethiopian culture have allowed it to develop a rather unique concept of love based upon this universal Christian platform. This is reflected in the categories of Amharic, particularly in the two main verbal exponents of the concept, but also in a number of other words and phrases regarding love and the related emotions and attitudes. At a more fine-grained level, Ethiopia's cultural uniqueness has also meant that each of the subcategories of love in Amharic differs from their counterparts in other languages, both in content and prominence. Drawing on three sets of linguistic data, this study aims to examine the concept of love in Amharic at three different levels:

(1) Analyse the lexico-semantic field centred around the main roots connected with the concept of love, *fqr* and *wdd*;

(2) Examine the basic metaphors of love present in the Amharic lexicon and how they manifest in actual language use;

(3) Analyse the basic characteristics of the main subcategories (types) of love in Amharic.

Overall, the study aims to provide a multifaceted picture of the concept of love encapsulated in Amharic while also laying the groundwork for cross-linguistic

comparisons. Additionally, the study seeks to contribute to the broader ethnolinguistic effort to understand Amharic emotion concepts – a project that has been largely dormant since Mengistu Amberber's pioneering analysis (Mengistu 2001), but has recently been revived in a number of studies (Gashaw 2021; Menete and Guiying 2021; Yibekal 2024; Yibekal and Ado 2024; Kacprzak 2026).

2. Material and method

The study falls within the field of cognitive ethnolinguistics, which assumes that each language embodies a unique model of the world, providing speakers with a framework for organizing their experience of reality and communicating it to other members of their linguistic community (Bartmiński 2009; Underhill 2012; Głaz 2022). This model will hereafter be referred to as a *worldview*, understood after Bartmiński as a "language-entrenched interpretation of reality, which can be expressed in the form of judgements about the world, people, things, events" (Bartmiński 2009: 23). For a long time, worldview studies were mainly focused on the most petrified side of language – the language system. The last two decades, however, have seen an increased interest in corpus, text, and even survey data (Underhill 2012: 31-40; Bartmiński 2018: 10-11; Głaz 2022: 196-8). These complementary data sources account for the open and dynamic nature of lexical categories, which are often broad enough to encompass different perspectives, thereby bringing the analysis closer to the people who use them. Given its scope and complexity, including additional data seems particularly crucial in the context of the concept of love in Amharic. Equally importantly, it also allows one to better capture the intertwining of the Amharic language and the unique Ethiopian culture reflected in it. Therefore, the present study employs three different types of linguistic data:

- Lexicological data: Basic linguistic facts (lexicological definitions, main derivatives and phrases) concerning the lexical representations of the concept were derived from the contemporary dictionary of Amharic *Amarəñña mäzgäbä qalat* (2001, henceforth AMQ), as well as from the older, but not rarely more comprehensive dictionary *Addis yä'amarəñña mäzgäbä qalat* written by Desta Tekle Wolde (1970). In order to know the etymology of the chosen lexemes, two dictionaries of Ge'ez were used: Kidane Wold Kifle's *Mäṣhafä säwasəw wägəs wämäzgäbä qalat haddis* (1956), as well as Wolf Leslau's *Comparative Dictionary of Ge'ez* (1987). Finally, the lexicological data were supplemented by the idiom dictionary *Yäamarəñña fäliṭočč* (Amsalu & Daniachew 1983) and Thomas Leiper Kane's *Amharic-English Dictionary* (1990), which is particularly rich in phraseology.

- Corpus data: The main collocational patterns involving the lexical representations of the concept were derived from the Amharic Web Corpus (amWaC), which is a corpus based on texts collected from the Internet, and whose final size is almost 26 million words.
- Texts: The self-collected corpus included 652 excerpts from contemporary Amharic discourse on love and its single subcategories.[1] The written part of the corpus included text excerpts from mainstream online newspapers and news channels (such as *Addis Maleda*, *BBC Amharic*, *Ethiopian Reporter, Zehabesha*), blogs and religious websites (such as betefikir.blogspot.com, zenazeorthodoxtewahedo.blogspot.com, eskemeche.blogspot.com, and eotcmk.org), social media posts,[2] literature (Haddis 1968; Bealu 1975, 1983; Kebbede 1994; Mulatu 2000; Sebhat 2011; Mehret 2013; Henok 2014; Yismake 2021, 2023[3]), and song lyrics. In order to ensure a greater variation of the material, the corpus also included excerpts from spoken language, coming from videos (mostly from popular YouTube channels such as Seifu ON EBS, ebstv worldwide, and Tossa Tube) as well as Amharic films (*Fəqər täk*, *Läfäqär*, *Ṭafač*, *Wädağ*, *Yäfəqər ṭəgg*) available on YouTube.

With regard to the design of the study, the aim was to account for the factors shaping the structure of the concept of love in contemporary Amharic. The analysis begins with the main lexical categories related to love, revealing the basic categorization tools available to Amharic speakers within the relevant lexico-semantic field. The next section examines the main metaphors of love, which provide speakers with a key means of conceptualizing the intangible domain of human emotions, particularly love (Kövecses 1986, 1991, 2000; Underhill 2012: 65–108; Kacprzak 2022, 2025). The focus falls both on the most linguistically entrenched metaphoric patterns in Amharic and on their individual

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[1] With 200 excerpts coming from newspapers blogs and websites; 26 from social media posts; 206 from literature; 120 from song lyrics (76 zäfän 'secular song', 44 mäzmur 'religious hymn'); and 100 from films and videos (50 films, 50 videos).

[2] The social media excerpts were collected from two Facebook profiles connected with love: የእናት ፍቅር https://www.facebook.com/p/%E1%8B%A8%E1%8A%A5%E1%8A%93%E1%89%B5-%E1%8D%8D%E1%89%85%E1%88%AD-100079564146613/ and ሙሳጭ የፍቅር ጥቅሶች https://www.facebook.com/groups/524982825719193/, as well from individual posts found through keyword searches in the Google search engine.

[3] As seen in the above, the majority of the works included are written by contemporary writers in the last three decades. However, the inclusion of Haddis Alemayehu's and Bealu Girma's prose felt necessary due to the two writers' foundational importance for Amharic literature, and the fact that their books are still among the most commonly read in Ethiopia, thus having influence on the modern-day readers.

elaborations. The third and final part of the study turns to the subcategories of love – the level at which much of the cultural knowledge about love is stored and where its connections with the broader worldview become particularly visible (Bierwiaczonek 2002; Kacprzak 2022, 2025). This level also offers the clearest insight into Amharic discourse on love, much of which revolves around specific subcategories rather than the concept as a whole.

3. Love in the Amharic lexicon[4]

In Amharic, there are two main roots connected with love – *fqr* and *wdd* – both with a long history dating back to the Ge'ez language.[5] Based on these two roots, one can distinguish three main lexical representations of the concept of love: the noun *fəqər*, as well as the verbs *afäqqärä* and *wäddädä*. When it comes to the meaning and scope of these categories, the simplest case is the nominal representation of the concept, which, for the most part, resembles the English lexeme *love*, as seen in the definition provided by AMQ:

1. ከፍተኛ የሆነ የመውደድ ስሜት (ለምሳሌ የሃገር ፍቅር /የእናት ፍቅር/ መንፈሳዊ ፍቅር)። 2. በሁለት ተቃራኒ ጾታዎች መካከል ያለና በወሲብ ፍላጎት ላይ የተመሰረተ የመዋደድ፣ የመሳሰብ ስሜት። 3. ወዳጅ፣ ስምም። እገሌ ና እገሌ ፍቅር ናቸው። '1. a strong feeling of loving [*mäwdäd*] (e.g. love of homeland / motherly love / spiritual love) 2. a feeling of mutual loving [*mäwadäd*] and care based on sexual desire linking two people of opposite sex 3. beloved, name. X and Y are very friendly / all love', [lit. they are *fəqər*]'

When considering the first two senses in this definition, we see that the noun in question, just like its English equivalent, covers a wide range of relationships – from romantic love and motherly love to love of homeland and spiritual love. Regarding the structure of the definition itself, an interesting aspect is the decision to separate love between a man and a woman from other types of love, and to base this distinction on the aspect of sexual desire – an element that is not typically prominent in Amharic discourse and is considered somewhat taboo. This likely reflects the dictionary makers' attempt to give the definition a more scientific character, especially given that this distinction is absent in the older dictionary by Desta.[6] Another noteworthy aspect is that the first two senses are

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[4] A more in-depth analysis of love-related lexemes derived from the two roots can be found in Kacprzak (2026), a Polish-language article that also examines the broader lexico-semantic field and idiomatic expressions pertaining to love in Amharic.

[5] See Kidane (1956: 379, 631) and Leslau (1987: 164, 604).

[6] Whose definition is distinctly Christian (and, thus, likely more aligned with the Amharic worldview), treating all types of love under a single sense: ውድ፣ ሰላም፣ ስምም። (ተረት)፣

explained using verbs derived from the root *wdd* rather than *fqr*. This provides the first indication that the verb *wäddädä* functions as the more neutral of the two verbal exponents of the concept. The third point in the definition, in turn, covers three uses of the noun *fəqər*. The first two correspond to the metonymic extension 'beloved' and the personal name *Fəqər*, which may be used for both males and females. The example that follows them sheds light on a fairly common use of the noun referring to good character or attitude, often with collective subjects, as in *Yäpiyasa ləǧočč fəqər naččäw* lit. 'the children / people of Piasa are *fəqər*',[7] or *wäloyäwočč fəqər načäw* lit. 'the people of Wollo are *fəqər*',[8] which roughly translates to 'they are very friendly / all love'. In separate entries, both Desta and AMQ also record the phrase *yäne fəqər* 'my love', which is used to affectionately address a beloved person – typically in a romantic relationship, but not exclusively. Notably, however, metonymic extensions such as 'sex' or 'to make love', common in many European languages, are absent from both dictionaries.

The arguably most distinctive aspect of the Amharic concept of love, however, emerges when considering the verbal exponents of the concept, which AMQ defines as follows:

afäqqärä 1. ፍቅረኛ አደረገ። 2. ወደደ '1. make someone one's lover / beloved / boyfriend / girlfriend 2. love'
wäddädä 1. አፈቀረ፣ ፈቀደ 2. ፈለገ፣ ደስ አለው። (ችግራቸውን ሊያቃልላቸው ይወዳል።) '1. love, want / desire 2. want, like (He would like to lighten their problem / burden)'

Unfortunately, the definitions provided by AMQ do little to clarify the semantic difference between the two lexemes, as they largely define them in terms of one another.[9] Even so, several observations can already be made. Most notably, the definition of *afäqqärä* includes the term *fəqräññä* boyfriend / girlfriend, lover', suggesting that this verb is primarily associated with romantic love. This restriction does not apply to *wäddädä*, which also covers the broader meanings 'to want / desire (non-sexually)' and 'to like'. The differences between the two verbs become clearer in the corpus and textual data, where three major contrasts emerge. Firstly, as the dictionary definitions suggest, *afäqqärä* is prototypically associated with romantic love, whereas *wäddädä* applies to all types of love, though *afäqqärä*

ሆዳም፣ ሰው፣ ፍቅር፣ አያውቅም 'love / dearness, peace, harmony, saying: a glutton / greedy person does not know love' (Tekle Wold 1970: 412).
[7] https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100063500929910.
[8] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NSV4R0jFHFA&ab_channel=AlemBer%2CEthiopia.
[9] The same pertains to the definitions provided by Desta (1970: 418, 995-6).

can occasionally take other objects such as homeland or freedom. Secondly, the two verbs differ in intensity, with *afäqqärä* conveying a stronger emotion and commitment. In the context of romantic love, the two verbs may mark a natural development from the *wäddädä* stage to the *afäqqärä* stage, with *afäqrəšallähu* / *afäqrəhallähu* 'I love you' being the ultimate, deeply intimate declaration of love, which indicates that one wants to spend the rest of their life with their beloved. When used with non-romantic objects, *afäqqärä* may highlight the intensity of emotion or emphasize commitment normally expressed by *wäddädä*. Finally, the difference is reflected in frequency: in the amWaC corpus, *afäqqärä* occurs only 323 times, while *wäddädä* appears 10,156 times, indicating that *wäddädä* serves as the default verb in most contexts.

Apart from the main lexical representations of the concept, the existence of two roots connected with love, combined with the richness of Amharic morphology, offers extensive possibilities for creating derivatives that frame the concept from different angles. With verbal derivatives, adding appropriate prefixes or modifying the root regularly produces reciprocity (*täfäqaqqärä* 'to love each other, mostly in romantic love', *täwaddädä* 'to love each other (any relation), also to fit each other'), passivity (*täfäqqärä* 'be loved, mostly in romantic love', *täwäddädä* 'be loved, liked, popular, also to become more expensive'), and agency (*affäqqärä* 'to make someone be loved (romantic love)', *affäqaqqärä* 'to make two people (romantic love) love each other', *asfäqqärä* 'to make someone be loved, compel to love someone', *awaddädä* 'to make people love each other, also raise price, make elements fit', *aswäddädä* 'to make something to be loved, also make the price rise'). The range of possibilities is even greater with derived nouns and adjectives. Among nouns based on the root *wdd*, the most frequent are *wäddağ* 'friend, beloved'[10] and *wäddağənnät* 'friendship', which demonstrate the close ties between love and friendship. Other derivatives recorded in dictionaries – such as *mäwwädäğa* 'reason one is loved' or 'peaceful approach' and *awwädadäd* 'way of loving' – are less common in everyday use but nonetheless highlight the richness of the Amharic love lexicon.

The most commonly used adjective formed from the root *wdd*, in turn, is certainly *wäddad*, which serves as the base for a number of idioms denoting various attitudes such as *rasun* / *ras wäddad* 'egoistic, selfish', *säw wäddad* 'friendly', or *agär wäddad* 'patriotic'. This richness of the Amharic love-lexicon continues when one turns to the nouns and adjectives based on the root *fqr*, one of which – *fəqräññä* 'girlfriend / boyfriend, lover, the loved one' – was already mentioned in

[10] As in *yäkänfär wäddağ* 'beloved, lit. lip friend'.

the previous paragraph. Another important lexeme in this context is *afqari,* which may mean 'one who loves, loving', as in *säwən afqari* 'one who loves people' and *həzbun afqari* 'one who loves people / the people'. In today's Amharic, however, *afqari* is most often used in a much broader sense, as in *yäsport / yämuziqa afqari* 'sport / music fan', where it refers to someone passionate about a certain activity. Nevertheless, perhaps the most fascinating lexeme in the context of Ethiopian cultural uniqueness is *mästäfaqär* 'love philtre, love potion, charm believed to inspire love', which is recorded only in Kane's dictionary but remains widely present in today's Amharic Internet, where numerous texts and videos explain what it is and how it can be used. Most available content warns against using *mästäfaqär*, as it is perceived as unnatural and is believed to have serious consequences for both parties involved. This does not mean, however, that actively trying to inspire love is not encouraged within the Amharic world-view. This is reflected in the derived nouns *afaqari* (from *mafaqär*), *afäqaqari* (from *mafäqaqär*), and *awadağ* (from *mawadäd*), all of which mean 'a person or thing that causes people to love each other' and carry positive connotations. Finally, it is interesting to note that Kane's dictionary also lists several lexemes synonymous with the nominal representation of love, such as *wädäda* 'loving, liking', *fäqära* 'love, holding someone in affection', as well as *afqəro* and *afqərot*, which both originate from Ge'ez. Though the latter two terms no longer have much linguistic life on their own, they are preserved in idioms such as *afqəro nəway* 'love of money, cupidity', and *afqəro təmhərt* 'love of learning'.

4. Metaphors of love in Amharic

When it comes to the basic metaphoric properties of the Amharic concept of love, most of the patterns listed below should be familiar to the English-speaking audience of this article. To start with, the most fundamental metaphor of love in Amharic is undoubtedly the one that sees God as the ultimate source of love. Here, following the teachings of the Bible, God is perceived as love itself and the source from which all love comes. As for the ways in which this perfect and everlasting love of God is manifested in the human world, the above example demonstrates that it can be conceptualized as a container in which one lives (see the commonly used phrase *ṭəlq fəqər* 'deep love'). This can also pertain to other types of love, such as love of a neighbour and romantic love, and, as illustrated in the examples below, the metaphor can be elaborated in a number of ways:

1. *bäwəb yäfəqər aläm wəsṭ yalä hulättu lela fəṭur yallä aymäslaččäwəm näbbär ⁘* (Bealu 1975: 283)

'Being in the beautiful world of love, it seemed to them as if no one else existed apart from them'.

2. *andäññayen säməčče lämqrätəm hone wäyəm zälləyye lämäwṭat፡ ənem əndä əsʷa mäwässän alčalkum።* (Bealu 1983: 259)
'After first having drowned [in love], just like her, I could not decide whether to stay there or jump out'.

More often, however, love itself is conceptualized as residing within a container – specifically, the human body (*fəqər addäräbbät* 'love stayed / dwelled in him'), and, more precisely, the human heart (*fəqər bäləbbu* 'love in his heart', *käləbb mafqär* / *mäwdäd* 'love from the heart'). As for the nature of love within this framework, one can choose between a couple of main metaphors, all drawn from basic human experience. The first of them is the well-known love is a fluid in a container metaphor (Kövecses 2000: 26), represented in a number of conventionalized expressions, such as *bäfəqər yätämolla* 'filled with love', *fəqər mänäčča* 'love had its source, gushed out', *yäfəqər mənč* 'source of love', *fəqər täčč'ämmärä* 'love increased'. Naturally, the fluid-like quality of love can be elaborated on, as in the excerpt below from Eyob Mekonnen's song *täw yalšaññən*, where love is depicted as flowing freely through one's body, akin to water in a river:

3. *fəqər fərhat yälläw näṣṣa näw mängädu*
əndašaw yəfässal čan aydälläm gədu
(Ǝyob Mäkonnän, "Täw yaləšəññənn" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=urjkHoUKif-M&ab_channel=TeddyLyrics, [10 March 2025].
'Love does not know fear, its path is free,
It flows as it wants, it does not press, it does not force'.

The other key metaphor is the love is an object metaphor. Following the logic of this metaphor, love can possess all the fundamental properties of a physical object: it can have a certain size (*käff yalä* / *təlləq fəqər* 'great / big love'), be possessed (*fəqər alläw* 'he has love'), be sought and found (*fəqər fällägä* / *agäññä* 'he sought / found love'), and be given and received (*fəqər säṭṭä* / *täqäbbälä* 'he gave / received love'). Rather unsurprisingly, the feeling of love in Amharic can also be conceptualized in terms of fire (*bäfəqər täqaṭṭälä* 'he burned with love', *yäfəqər əsat* 'the fire of love', *yämmiyaqqaṭṭəl fəqər* 'burning love'), although this metaphor appears to be used primarily for one specific subcategory (romantic love), and within a specific discourse (songs and literature). What all these three metaphors (fluid, object, fire) have in common, however, is that they primarily represent love within the domain of feelings and emotions. When love is viewed as a mutual relationship, in turn, a different metaphor emerges – love is closeness.

Here, drawing from the fundamental human experience of physical closeness (see Kövecses 1986: 65-66), Amharic expresses love's growth as two people coming closer (*täqärarräbu* 'they got closer to each other', *qərb naччäw* 'they are close to each other'), while its decline is framed as increasing distance (*täraraqən* 'we got further away from each other'). When seen from a long-time perspective, a love relationship can also be seen as a journey, with the lovers being conceptualized as travellers walking together through life's ups and downs (*yäfəqər guzo* 'the journey of love'). Nevertheless, within the source-path-goal image schema (Lakoff 1987: 286), more common in Amharic discourse is the perception of love in terms of a path on which one walks (*yäfəqər mängäd mägwaz* 'to walk the path of love'), which is deeply connected to Christian ideology and the Christian attitude, which holds great significance in Ethiopia. Another common metaphor with strong Christian undertones portrays love as a ruler or conqueror (*fəqər säffänä* / *ašännäfä* 'love reigned / pervaded / won'), to whom one willingly submits and works for (*yäfəqər səra* 'the works of love'). In general, the collected material also includes many other major lexicalized metaphors known from other languages, including English (Kovecses 1986; Bierwiaczonek 2002; Tramutoli 2015; Kacprzak 2022), such as love is a nutrient (*fəqər ṭämmaw*/*rabbäw* 'he was thirsty/hungry for love'), love is an illness (*ṭena asaṭṭtoññall mäwdädəh* 'your love has made me lose my health', *bäfəqər täläkkäfä* 'he was contaminated by love'), and love is an animal (*bäfəqru kənf* 'on the wings of love', *fəqər yazäw* 'love grabbed him').[11] The one metaphor that stood out in terms of its lack of prominence in the collected material was the love is a plant metaphor, which tends to be fairly common across languages (Gathigia and Maitaria 2019; Shah et al. 2021; Kacprzak 2022, 2025), but appears only twice in the corpus of texts analysed for this study.

All this demonstrates that the metaphoric system of Amharic love, at least at its core, is similar to those known from the European languages, including English. However, there are still significant unique aspects to the metaphoric conceptualizations of love in Amharic. A closer examination reveals three key areas of distinction. First, and most obviously, the system of the Amharic language offers a number of language-specific metaphors. One of the most notable examples is the basic orientational metaphor found in the fixed expression *fəqər lay mähon* lit. 'to be on love', which is used to denote a state which one in English would call being *in* love. This expression is part of a broader pattern in Amharic, where processes are often expressed with the preposition *lay* 'on' (e.g., *guzo lay*

[11] For some other common metaphors present in Amharic see Yibekal 2024.

'travelling', *fälläga lay* 'in search'; see Leslau 1995: 618). Other metaphors, in turn, refer to experiences specific to Ethiopian reality. With regard to the meaning of such metaphors, very often of crucial importance are their ties to the rest of the Amharic worldview, and the valuing it entails.

For example, to fully understand the meaning of the phrase *yäğəb fəqər* 'superficial love that lasts only when things go well', one must know that *ğəb* 'hyena' represents one of the most negative characters in the Amharic worldview, symbolizing traits like deceptiveness, cowardice, and a lack of morality (compare with Wołk-Sore 2009: 134-135). On the positive side, a similar connection is found in the phrase *yäanğät fəqər* lit. 'intestine love', which is inextricably tied to the role that stomach and intestines play within the Amharic language, serving as a very intimate sphere and the centre of one's true feelings. This also explains why *hode* 'my stomach' is one of the most affectionate terms one can use to call the beloved person in Amharic.[12] Second, unique metaphoric conceptualizations can arise within metaphoric paradigms that are otherwise common across languages, including English (Kövecses 2003). For instance, when it comes to the attraction accompanying the first stages of romantic love, noteworthy are the conceptualizations connected with heat and fire, such as *mäṭbäs* lit. 'to fry', which has become a common way of saying 'to hit on someone' among the urban youth. In the self-collected corpus of texts, there is also a particularly creative elaboration of the fire metaphor:

4. *ahunəm əkko yamral፡፡ qiṭe əskiqqaṭṭäl wäddädkut፡፡* (Yismake 2023: 128)
'I am still attracted to him. I loved him until my ass burned'.

Another interesting example of a unique metaphoric conceptualization present in an otherwise well-known domain is the phrase *kähulättu mäkakkäl näfas aygäbbam* 'wind does not enter between these two', referring to the closeness that characterizes people in love.[13] Third, not only the particular metaphoric conceptualizations can differ from those in other languages, but also their level

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[12] As regards the linguistic means of expressing affection in Amharic, two highly relevant analyses can be found in studies by Ewa Wołk-Sore (2008, 2009). In addition to identifying body parts that typically serve to convey positive emotions toward another person (2008: 89; 2009: 132-133), these studies also point to two other important phenomena, namely the use of the first-person pronoun (2008: 88-89; 2009: 130-131) and the shifting of grammatical gender to the feminine (2008: 89-90; 2009: 131-132).

[13] A number of other metaphors characteristic of Amharic and their creative elaborations can be found in Leslau 1990.

of prominence. When it comes to single metaphoric phrases, a clear example of this is the expression *fəqər yazäw* 'love seized him'. The conceptualization it entails should not sound foreign to the ear of any English speaker, whose language offers a very similar expression. Nevertheless, contrary to English and many other European languages (Brożyna-Reczko 2017: 4, Kacprzak 2022: 263), *fəqər yazäw* is the default way of expressing the state of 'falling and being in love'.[14] More broadly, also entire metaphoric paradigms can differ between languages in terms of prominence (Kövecses 2003: 319). In Amharic, this is most visible with regard to the metaphor presenting God as the source and giver of love, which remains one of the most foundational metaphors underpinning the entire notion of love (compare with Kacprzak 2022: 281), reflecting the religious nature of Ethiopian society and the central role that the idea of an interventional God plays in the Amharic worldview (Kacprzak 2024a: 266). By contrast, as already noted, the love is a plant metaphor appears less frequently in the collected material, whether from the AmWac corpus or the self-collected corpus.

5. The subcategories of Amharic love

As already observed, just like in other languages where the concept of love has been influenced by Christian philosophy (Underhill 2012; Wierzbicka 2019), love in Amharic is a broad concept encompassing a number of subcategories. Each of these subcategories is built around a distinct scenario and highlights different aspects of the concept as a whole (Kövecses 1986; Bierwiaczonek 2002; Kacprzak 2022, 2025). The discussion of the subcategories of love in Amharic below is divided into four sections, which subsequently address romantic love, subcategories related to the family domain, religiously oriented subcategories, and non-prototypical subcategories.

5.1. Romantic love

The prototypical status of romantic love in Amharic is evidenced by the fact that it functions as the default reference of a number of common idiomatic expressions involving the noun *fəqər,* such as the already mentioned *fəqər yazäw* 'love seized him' and *bäfəqər wäddäqä* 'he fell in love', which normally do not refer to any other subcategory. Furthermore, romantic love also appears most frequently in

[14] Note that Amharic also has the widely used phrase *bäfəqər wäddäqä*, which, at least formally, corresponds directly to the English *fall in love*. Nevertheless, in the light of the corpus and text data, this phrase is used less often than *fəqər yazäw*.

the collected material, especially in excerpts representing newspaper discourse and popular culture. Equally importantly, it is based on a distinct, linguistically and culturally shaped prototypical scenario. One of the most characteristic traits of this scenario is the existence of the already mentioned two verbal exponents of the concept, which allow one to conventionally categorize or grade their emotional experience into *wäddädä* and *afäqqärä*, with the latter being used in the most intimate situations to emphasize the intensity of one's feelings and to express a deep commitment to the other person. However, there are also several other linguistic categories around which the script of romantic love develops. An interesting example is the variety of expressions related to the stage following falling in love. In terms of frequency of use, the most common word for two people in a romantic relationship before marriage is the already mentioned *fəqräññä* 'boyfriend / girlfriend, beloved', which is built on the root *fqr* and inherently carries the element of love in its base (*fəqər* + *äññä* lit. 'someone who loves'). From a morphological perspective, another noteworthy, though slightly outdated, term is *yäkänfär wädağ*, which also means 'boyfriend / girlfriend', but profiles[15] the relation differently, referring to a 'friend whom one kisses' (lit. 'lip friend'). In many cases, however, especially in the early stages of a romantic relationship, people refer to the person they are dating as *gʷadäññä* 'friend', which serves to downplay the seriousness of the relationship. Finally, one of the excerpts from the literature corpus reflects the growing popularity of the loanwords *boyfriend* and *girlfriend* among young Amharic speakers in the urban areas, highlighting the influence of English and the global English-driven culture on the language:

5. *Solome yäMälaku gärläfrend nat bəlo bähassabu dämdəmʷal.* (Mehret 2013: 16)
'In his mind, he concluded that Selome was Melaku's girlfriend'.

Interestingly, even the question posed to a beloved person in the hope of initiating a romantic relationship has been firmly conventionalized in Amharic in the form of the phrase *yäfəqər ṭəyaqe* lit. 'the question of love':

6. Seifu (host): *man näw mäğämmäriya wädä fəqər gudday nägärun yäwässädäw?*
Guest: *əwnätun bənnawära əne näñ yäfəqər ṭəyaqe yäṭäyyäqʷat።*
Seifu: *ayyähat፣ käzziya bähʷala yätədar aggare bətəhoñi alk?*
(Seifu on EBS, 20 March 23, "በቀን የምተኛው 2 ሰአት ቢሆን ነው": 23:41-24:24, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rWTidOEFVG8, [10 February 2025])

[15] The term *profiling* is used here in the sense proposed by Langacker (1987, 2013), as opposed to its use in the Ethnolinguistic School of Lublin where it denotes a process applied to already existing lexemes (Niebrzegowska-Bartmińska 2020: 215).

'Seifu: Who was the first one to take the matters on to the love level?
Guest: To tell the truth, it was me who asked the question of love.
Seifu: You saw her, and then you said would you like to be my spouse?'

As seen in the above, in Ethiopia, the expectation is that falling in love must lead to *gabəčča* 'marriage' and *tədar* 'wedded living, matrimonial life', which represent the next key stage and ultimate goal of the script of romantic love. Over time, the love between two people matures from the joyful emotion associated with the early stages of a romantic relationship into what is perceived as the true foundation of long-term love – *mäkkäbabär* 'to respect one another' and *mättäsasäb* 'to remember one another, be considerate about one another, to have consideration for one another':

7. *əyyätäwawwäqu əyyätälämammädu əyyätäwaddädu yämättäsasäb masäriyačča̱w əyyäṭäbbäqä hedə።*] (Alemayehu 1968: 20)
'Getting to know each other better, getting used to each other, getting along with each other (alternatively, loving each other more and more), their bond of being considerate about one another [*mättäsasäb*] grew stronger and stronger'.
8. Journalist: *mən aynät baläbet nača̱w? läbetača̱w?*
Interviewee (older woman from rural area): *ṭ̣aru säw näw። täsasbän mənnadär näw። ləǧoča̱ča̱nən bämättäsasäb bämättädadär asaddägän፣ yaw mäča̱w qänu biyagäddača̱wəm täsasbän ənnətädaddärallän።* (Tossa Tube, "በደግነታቸው፣ ከአሜሪካ የመጣውን ያገር ልጅ ያስደነቁት አርሶ አደር ሰርፕራይዝ ተደረጉ", 14:42-14:58, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G7AWbFtRRLE&t=1143s&ab_channel=Tossatube [8 December 2024].
'Journalist: What kind of a husband is he? For his home?
Interviewee: He is a good person. We live with consideration for each other [*täsasbän*]. We have been raising our kids with care / consideration [*mättäsasäb*]. Even when hardships arise (if we cannot fulfil all their needs), we raise them being considerate about each other [*täsasbän*]'.

At the same time, however, based on the collected material, there is no doubt that the first stage of romantic love – the state of being in love – dominates contemporary mainstream discourse, particularly in popular music. Notably, in two of the excerpts from the collected corpus, love is described as causing one to lose their *yəluñta* lit. 'they tell me + nominal suffix', which is considered to be a cultural value characteristic of Ethiopia (Hassen 2016), and defined as a 'sensitivity to the opinions of others, regard for other's feelings, concern for public opinion, sense of the proprieties' (Kane 1990: 1690). This highlights the nature of the love most frequently emphasized – a joyful feeling that overwhelms one's body and mind, leading to a certain detachment from normal, rational functioning (for comparison, see Kövecses 1986; Bierwiaczonek 2002;

Kacprzak 2022). The aspect that stands out most for its relative lack of prominence in Amharic discourse, by contrast, is sexual desire and sex. This is particularly evident in popular music, where none of the lyrics in the self-collected corpus make direct references to sex, and the rare indirect references are highly implicit and delicate. References to sex appear slightly more frequently in Amharic literature, but their prominence remains relatively low, and the language used in such cases is highly metaphoric (e.g. *wäddädat* lit. 'he loved her', *gäläbbäṭat* / *gäläbbäṭäčč*äw lit. 'he turned her upside down / she turned him upside down', *yäčagula bet fəqər* lit. 'nuptial bower love', etc.).

Finally, another important characteristic of the Amharic language in regard to romantic love is the sociolinguistic variation it embraces. In a diverse society like Ethiopia, these differences naturally arise from the gap between the traditional *gäṭär* and the modern cities, not least Addis Ababa, as well as the different generational gaps. This is evident in several excerpts from the self-collected corpus, including the one below, in which a young journalist explains the difference in attitudes toward love between today's youth and the older inhabitants of rural areas in the Wollo zone:

9. *bəzu gize fəqrən bäqalat mašmonmon yämmičəlut wäṭṭatočč načč*äw꞉ *[…] gäṭär səthedu dägmo, yägäṭär säwwočč yätägbar ənği yäqal säw aydällum*꞉ (Tossa Tube, "ወሎዬዎቹ ባላገሮች በቴሌቪዥን ቀረቡ ! በልጃቸው አንደበት ተሞገሱ", 28:55-29:14, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o4-kpM3wHvg&list=LL&index=12&t=553s&ab_channel=Tossatube [26 February 2025].
'A lot of times, it is the youth that can wrap love into words. […] When you go to the rural area, in turn, rural people are the people of action, not words'.

As shown, the expression of affection and the tendency to use "love words" can vary significantly depending on these two factors.[16] Interestingly, one of the literary excerpts in the corpus also reflects a belief – or stereotype – that differences in romantic relationships between men and women may also exist among major ethnolinguistic groups in Ethiopia:

10. *kämähal agär yämäṭṭut wändočč ləkk ənda ṭalyan načč*äw꞉ *setočč*ən *makbäranna mänkäbakkäb yəwäddalu*꞉ *yal*^{w}*ačč*äwn *yadärgalu*꞉ *gurra allačč*äw꞉ *yätəgray wänd*

[16] In general, public expressions of romantic love, such as holding hands, hugging, and kissing, are rather uncommon in Ethiopia. For example, a husband and wife (or a boyfriend and girlfriend) are unlikely to engage in affectionate physical contact while meeting with family or friends, and the same applies to public spaces. However, this cultural norm may be gradually changing under global influences, particularly among young people in major cities, including Addis Ababa.

rägṭo näw setoččən yämmigäzzaw꞉꞉ läset dänta yälläwm፣ kəbər aysäṭəm꞉꞉ (Bealu 1983: 356)
'Men from the central regions are just like Italians. They like to respect and treat women well. They hold their word. Brag / swagger. A Tigre man keeps his woman under his heel. He does not care about her, does not respect her'.

However, to fully capture the sociolinguistic differences and the stereotypes functioning in Amharic, a study based on a different methodology would be necessary.

5.2. Subcategories of love related to the family domain

When it comes to love within the family, the first observation is that it is usually only the less emotion-laden verb *wäddädä* that is used in this context, as *afäqqärä* would generally create an awkward impression when referring to any of its types.[17] This, however, does not mean that family love (*yäbetäsäb fəqər*) is perceived as less important within the Amharic worldview. Among all family relationships, particularly prominent in the context of love is the linguistically entrenched category *yäannat fəqər* 'motherly love'. Although it is considered one of the most universal forms of love – so much so that some anthropologists claim it to be the source of all other forms (see Shaver & Mikulincer 2006; Clark & Monin 2006) – it is also shaped by cultural norms and beliefs (Johnston and Swanson 2003: 21; Mary et al. 2024), which is well visible in the collected material. Here, still dominating is the ideal of an ever-sacrificing and devoted mother for whom motherhood is the ultimate fulfilment of her life's purpose. Central to this image are the categories of *mäswa'ətännät* 'sacrifice' and *ənkəbkabe* 'care'. The other set of aspects commonly associated with motherly love involves affection and tenderness, not rarely combined with concern. Fatherly love, on the other hand, has traditionally been understood through the lens of the father as a strong leader and provider for the family, with affection and tenderness playing a less prominent role than in motherly love.[18] However, in contemporary Amharic literature and film – which, as previously observed, tends to break with some of the traditional gender stereotypes – a more affectionate and expressive father figure appears to be gaining prominence. This is exemplified in the following excerpt

[17] On rare occasions, the word *afäqqärä* may be used in this context, for instance, to emphasize an extreme love and dedication to one's child. However, it does not have an established role in the typical or ideal scenario of parental love.
[18] This is well reflected in Amharic proverbs, which, by default, convey traditional beliefs, e.g. *abbatu silaṭäw ənnatu səttaqəfäw* 'the father shaves, the mother hugs'.

from Mehret Gebretsadik's book *Yätäqolläfäbbätt qulf*, where a father tenderly covers his sleeping daughter with a blanket:[19]

11. *abbatʷa näbbäru lelit sinnässu kurmət bəla aytäwat yaläbbäsʷatənna astäkäkläw yastäññat፡፡ zarem läərsačč̆äw ṭinno miṭiṭi nat፡፡* (Mehret 2013:87)
'It was her father who covered her with a blanket and laid her down, after he woke up at night and saw her huddled up [on the couch]. For him, she is still his little daughter'.

What remains unchanged, in turn, is the expectation that a child expresses love for their parents by demonstrating ultimate gratitude and respect and later repaying this debt by taking care of them in old age. Interestingly, Amharic even has a semi-established phrase, *yäənnat wəläta* 'the motherly debt / favour', which is rooted in the moral accounting metaphor, as reflected in the song *Ǝnnat* by Fikreaddis Neqatibeb:

12. biyalfəm gize biyalfəm
zämän biyalf amätat
yäəmmayen wəläta
yäəmmayen yäəmmayen
alräsam alräsam
ədme zäläaläm
(Fikreadis Neqatebeb, "Ǝnnat", https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_bGgQ_booM0&ab_channel=Kegnit [10 March 2025]
'Although time passes, although the years pass, I will never forget my mother's favour. Forever'.

Despite the above example, however, family love is generally less prominent in Amharic music than romantic love – or, for the sake of argument, the next category to be analysed: love of God.

5.3. Religious subcategories of love

When it comes to the subcategories related to God and religion, one cannot begin anywhere other than the deeply rooted belief that God is the original and ultimate source of all love manifested in human relationships (*yäfəqər mənč̣* 'the source of love', *əgziabəher fəqər näw* 'God is love'). This idea remains fundamental to the Amharic worldview (see previous section). In Ethiopian society, shaped by

[19] Also worth mentioning in this context are the Google search results for the phrase *yäləjj fəqər* 'love of a child', which include a significant number of short social media videos depicting fathers kissing, hugging, and joyfully playing with their young children [5 December 2024].

the belief in an interventionist God (Kacprzak 2024a: 266), equally significant is the metaphor that presents God as one who actively bestows love upon people. This is reflected both in the Amharic language system – such as in the conventional blessing *yäsäw fəqər yəsṭəh* 'may he give you people's love' – and in everyday discourse, particularly in discussions of romantic love.

Regarding the nature of the relationship between God and humans, two well-established metaphors dominate: "God is a good father" and "God is a good Lord" (Gomola 2010; Modise & Wood 2016; Hesse 2023). In the context of the uniqueness of the Amharic worldview particularly noteworthy is the latter of the two metaphors, not only because of its continued prominence in contemporary language (especially through the lexeme *geta* 'Lord', used for both God the Father and Jesus) but also because, within this framework, humans are seen not only as servants of their Lord but also as His slaves (*bariyawočč*), which undoubtedly stretches the distance existing between the two parties. Interestingly, however, in several instances from the self-collected corpus, the Lord metaphor blends seamlessly with metaphors that imply a much closer, more intimate connection – including those that depict God as a relative or even a friend:

13. *käənnatem käabbatem yəläq yämmiṭṭäggagañ zämädе*
iyyäsus näw mäkäta läne afqari yäläbb wädağe
wədd näw läne getaye ənqunna wärqən yasnəqal
(Daniel Amdemikael, "Yäläbb wädağe", https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f2wdgcuXWtI&ab_channel=DanielAmdemichael [10 March 2025]
'A relative closer than my mother and my father
Jesus is my shield, my beloved friend of the heart.
My Lord is dear to me, he makes me despise pearls and gold'.

Furthermore, amidst this deeply Christian-rooted religious worldview, an intriguing figure emerges: *yäfəqər amlak* 'the god of love'. If one considers only the data from the AmWac corpus, the phrase, indeed, refers mostly to the Christian God, or Christ. But the issue becomes much more intricate as one delves into the other sets of linguistic data. In the following excerpt from the film *Yäfəqər säw*, a wife thanks 'the god of love' for bringing her husband back home after he strayed into an affair with a much younger woman:

14. *yäne geta⁝ ənkwʷan wädä betəh mäṭṭahläñ⁝ ṣäloten yäsämma əssu yäfəqər amlak yəmmäsgän⁝* (Salkan Tube "Yäfəqər säw", 1:46:07 – 1:46:16 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v2xHkYnM58M&ab_channel=SalkanTube [10 March 2025]
'My lord (to husband), welcome home! Praise be to the god of love, who has answered my prayers'.

Perhaps, one could still interpret this as a reference to the Christian God as an interventionist deity who grants love to those who seek it. However, this interpretation does not hold in the following excerpt from Bealu Girma's "Oromay", where *yäfəqər amlak* aligns more closely with the ancient Greek god Eros (Zeitlin 1999), demanding worship through physical intimacy – even in the context of extramarital relations:

15. *əndägäna aqäfkʷat፡፡ yäfəqər amlak əndägäna lämämmäläk fälləgo näbbär፡፡* (Bealu 1983: 206)
'I embraced [in practice: 'made love to'] her again. The god of love wanted to be worshipped again'.

Finally, the third of the religious subcategories of love – love of neighbour – stands out both in terms of its lexical means of expression and the specifics of its use. The most immediate nominal representation of this category is the old Geʿez compound *fəqrä biṣ*, which remains widely used, particularly in religious contexts. Nevertheless, it is fairly safe to say that this subcategory is primarily shaped and represented by the verb *täwaddädä* 'love each other'.[20] Upon closer analysis of the contexts in which this verb occurs, another unique trait of this subcategory is revealed: in modern Amharic discourse, it is often used in reference to the ethnic groups living in Ethiopia. On the one hand, this reflects the effort to cultivate tolerance within the country's ethnically and religiously diverse society; on the other hand, it is a clear result of the many tensions Ethiopia has witnessed, particularly in the last decade. On a more individual level, the simple phrases *säw mäwdäd* 'to love other people' and *säw wäddad* 'loving other people, friendly' are used in order to highlight one's kindness and benevolence towards others. Naturally, this type of love is also perceived as a manifestation of God's infinite love and as the key to fulfilling his calling.

5.4. Less-prototypical subcategories of love

Finally, we arrive at what one might call the less prototypical subcategories of love: self-love, love of homeland, and friendship. Regarding the first of these three, it is a legitimate question whether such a concept even exists in Amharic. In Ethiopian culture – deeply religious and community-oriented (Abbink 2011: 256; Østebo 2023; Yisma et al. 2023; Getahun 2024) – self-love is most often

[20] Interestingly, also the verb *täfäqaqqäre* 'to love each other', derived from the root *fqr*, can also be used in the context of loving one's neighbour with little to no change in meaning.

equated with egoism. This is best reflected in two common Amharic expressions based on the root *wdd* and the pronoun *ras* 'self', such as *ras wäddad* 'egoistic, egocentric, lit. 'self-loving'[21] and *rasən mäwdäd* 'to be egoistic, narcissistic, lit. to love oneself', both of which carry (nearly) exclusively negative connotations. On the other hand, the degree of love for the homeland present in the Amharic language and discourse is very high. From a lexical perspective, this is reflected not only in the most immediate categories, such as *agär wäddad* 'patriot, lit. country-loving', *yagär fəqər* 'patriotism, lit. love of country', but also *ityoṗṗəya* 'Ethiopia', *ityoṗṗəyawinnät* 'ethiopianness', and *habäša* 'habesha', which accumulate all the unique cultural and social traits for which Ethiopians love their country (Kacprzak, in press).

Even more telling is the fact that love of Ethiopia is perhaps the only subcategory, apart from romantic love, in which the verb *afäqqärä* is regularly used, highlighting one's emotional engagement and readiness to sacrifice for the country. On a discursive level, the prominence of love for Ethiopia in popular music is particularly notable, with "Ethiopia is the mother of all Ethiopians" (*ənnat agär* lit. 'mother land', *yähullačč ənnəmm ənnat* 'the mother of us all') being by far the most basic and common metaphor. Beyond language, this special love is also evident in the way Ethiopians incorporate their flag into their clothing, their pride in Ethiopia's cultural heritage, and their inability to part with their traditional food, even when abroad (Kacprzak, in press). Finally, the concept of friendship in Amharic differs from that in other Christian-rooted languages, European languages in particular. Is friendship love? In Amharic, this question makes little sense. One cannot *mafqär* a friend – this would immediately shift the relationship into the sphere of romantic love. However, it is entirely normal to *mäwdäd* one's friends – one's *wädaǧočč* 'friends',[22] a noun derived from the verb *wäddädä*. Likewise, referring to friendship in terms of the *fəqər* of friends is natural, as seen in a literary excerpt from the self-collected corpus, where the metaphoric phrase *yäwändəmmamačč fəqər* 'love of brothers' is used to describe two close friends. The ways of expressing friendship also differ. Grammatically, it is common to use feminine forms when addressing male friends, a practice intended to convey closeness and affection (Wołk-Sore 2008: 89-90, 2009: 131-132). On a supralinguistic level, the physical closeness between male friends

[21] This expression also has an equivalent formed with the root *fqr*: *mäfqäre rə'əs* 'egoist, selfish person'. This form, however, is less frequent in contemporary Amharic.
[22] Another popular term for 'friend' in Amharic is *gʷadäññä*. More recently, among young speakers, *ǧäläs* – a loanword from the English *jealous* – has also gained popularity.

might seem unusual to those from cultures that promote greater interpersonal distance. In Ethiopia, it is entirely normal for male friends to embrace or even walk hand in hand – something that could be perceived as awkward by those unfamiliar with this cultural norm.

6. Conclusions

Drawing on three sets of linguistic data, the above study examined the concept of love in Amharic at three different levels. First, it localized the lexical representations of the concept, including the two verbs *wäddädä* and *afäqqärä*, the noun *fəqər*, and the many other categories derived from the two main roots *fqr* and *wdd*. Second, it identified the linguistically entrenched metaphors of love. While the vast majority of these metaphors are known from analyses of love metaphors in other languages, the data also included several expressions that appear to be more unique to Amharic, e.g. *fəqər lay mähon* 'to be in love, lit. to be on love'*, yäanǧät fəqər* 'true love, lit. the intestine love'*,* and *mäṭbäs* 'to hit on someone, lit. to fry'. The third part of the study analysed the various subcategories encompassed by the concept, highlighting their linguistic and cultural specificity, and their ties with the rest of the Amharic worldview. Overall, love in Amharic emerges as a particularly broad concept profiled by a variety of different lexemes, understood via numerous metaphoric patterns, and encompassing a wide array of subcategories and related concepts.

The results of the above study do not necessarily compel one to automatically abandon the notion that, at the most basic level, love is something shared by all humans. In a slightly narrower context, despite highlighting a number of significant differences, the analysis has also demonstrated that the Amharic concept of love offers a large number of basic similarities with the corresponding concepts known from other languages of Christian heritage (Wierzbicka 2019; Kacprzak 2022). Nevertheless, the study clearly shows that the language- and culture-relative aspects of love should be taken as seriously as the universal ones (Kövecses 1991; Wierzbicka 1992; Kacprzak 2022). This pertains not only to the most immediate lexical representations of the concept. Throughout the analysis, we have seen that the concept of love in Amharic cannot be separated from other parts of the language and the worldview embedded within it – the basic metaphysical assumptions (such as the interventional God as the uncontested centre of the world), social values (including religiousness, gender roles, and the tabooisation of desire and sex), other lexical categories (such as those denoting emotional attitudes), and even the specifics of the morphological system (the prefixation and reduplication system, basic prepositions). This is what language and lexicon

are – an ecosystem interconnected on many levels, tied to the culture in which they have developed – a truth that must be remembered when analysing linguistic concepts and comparing them across the world's languages (Underhill 2012; Kacprzak 2024b: 117). Additionally, significant differences may not only manifest in lexical facts but also in the prominence of certain phenomena, from single aspects and metaphoric patterns to entire subcategories. There is probably no better example of this than the religious subcategories and religiously-tinged metaphors of love in Amharic (not least the "God is love" metaphor), which, naturally, resemble those found in other Christian-rooted languages. However, their status is much more prominent in Amharic than, for instance, in Danish, which represents a strongly secular Western culture (Kacprzak 2022). On the contrary, the aspects of desire and sex, highly prominent in Western cultures (Underhill 2012: 96-106), are much less visible within the Amharic discourse on romantic love.

In conclusion, the present study should be considered as another step towards understanding the concept of love present in Amharic, providing an in-depth account of the main factors that contribute to its specificity. However, the quest to uncover the uniqueness of the Amharic concept of love is far from over. To fully understand its specificity, this study should be followed by more detailed and fine-grained analyses of the subcategories of love in Amharic, and the discourses shaped around them, as well as the related concepts denoting emotions and emotional attitudes. Additionally, it is important to note that this study approached the Amharic concept of love primarily from the perspective of a common lexical platform through which Amharic speakers can categorise and communicate their experiences related to love. However, given Amharic's status as both a lingua franca and an ethnic language, coupled with the diversity within Ethiopia (especially the gap between large cities and the countryside), it is spoken by a particularly diverse group of speakers. Therefore, incorporating additional data, such as questionnaires, to uncover the sociolinguistic differences in how Amharic speakers conceptualise love should be considered the next logical step following this study. Finally, to better highlight the specificity of the concept of love in Amharic and to ground the study more firmly in the African context, comparative studies involving other Ethiopian and African languages would be necessary.

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Signalling contexts through metaphors in the advertisements of herbal aphrodisiacs in Southern Nigeria

Abstract

Herbal aphrodisiacs, promoted as energisers for sexual intercourse, have seen increased usage in Nigeria, yet existing studies on aphrodisiacs advertising often overlook the role of context in shaping audience engagement. Using Conceptual Metaphor Theory of Lakoff and Johnson, the authors explore how advertisers construct contexts in herbal aphrodisiac advertisements in Nigeria's Niger Delta. The authors argue that advertisers consciously construct metaphors that draw from diverse social and cultural experiences to create relatable frameworks for consumers to comprehend herbal aphrodisiac messages. Contextual evaluation of herbal aphrodisiac advertisements offers insights into the construction of gender roles in Nigeria's sexual discourse.

Keywords: advertisements, aphrodisiacs, herbal medicines, contexts, conceptual metaphors

1. Introduction

Sexual dysfunction is considered a cultural issue, particularly in Nigeria, where cultural norms and beliefs often restrict conversations about sexuality. Many

Nigerians view sex as a strictly private affair that should only be discussed in the context of marriage. This cultural belief often makes it difficult to discuss issues related to sexual dysfunction. Furthermore, cultural beliefs and practices in Nigeria often dictate the sexual roles and behaviours of men and women. For instance, men are expected to be sexually active and dominant. Therefore, it becomes pertinent for men to seek medical remedies to alleviate issues related to sexual dysfunctions, and hence, there is a growing number of advertisements for herbal aphrodisiacs in the Niger Delta area.

Aphrodisiacs are therapeutic cures that work as energisers for sexual craving and execution in both men and women. They also control the degree of sex hormones and neurotransmitters in the body framework (Olorunsogo 2023). Issues like erectile dysfunctions, weak erection, poor libido, quick ejaculation and low sperm counts are addressed using aphrodisiacs. In Asia and Africa, the consumption rate of herbal medicines, compared to synthetic medicines, is high (World Health Organisation 2010).

Herbs are very popular in Nigeria and their overall consumption and marketing communication have amplified throughout the country (Odiboh et al. 2017). Good promotional strategies not only function as the soul of a company, but they also heighten the image of a company (Sunday 2022). Beyond the style and discourse strategies deployed in the advertisements of sex-enhancement drugs, this study argues that context plays a huge role in effectively conveying the messages of the advertisements. Scholars have investigated the strategies and linguistic techniques used by advertisers of herbal medicines (Adegoju 2008; Ayimey, Awunyo-Vitor & Gadawusu 2013; Mavunga 2013; Dickson 2015; Yakub, Nyakoe & Okal 2017; Mutunda 2018). The attitudes of people to advertisements and the implications of consumption of herbal drugs have also been considered (Abodunrin, Omojasola & Rojugbokan 2011; Allen, Ogochukwu & Ojinime 2019). However, how the advertisers of herbal medicines deploy social and cultural values to construct mental models for consumers has not been given adequate attention. Therefore, this study investigated how metaphors are mapped and framed within identifiable social contexts in the advertisement of herbal aphrodisiacs, to determine how these models help in the understanding of advertisements' messages.

2. Literature review

Existing scholarship has critically examined the persuasive, linguistic, and cultural dimensions of herbal medicine advertising in Nigeria. Ajayi (2023) explores how metaphorical names and visuals in alcoholic herbal sex drinks construct

masculinities in southwestern Nigeria, while Onipede (2023) highlights the strategic use of euphemistic language and imagery to navigate cultural sensitivities around male potency. Using a rhetorical framework, Adegoju (2008) identifies persuasive and propagandist techniques that position herbal remedies as culturally grounded alternatives to Western medicine. Similarly, Oji and Olorunsogo (2025) demonstrate how oral rhetoric and culture-specific messaging in sound-based advertisements shape attitudes toward masculinity and traditional medicine. Focusing on consumer perception, Allen, Ogochukwu, and Ojinime (2019) find that herbal medicine advertisements significantly influence purchasing decisions in southeastern Nigeria, largely driven by cultural norms and societal expectations. Collectively, these studies underscore the complex interplay of language, culture, persuasion, and consumer behaviour in Nigerian herbal medicine advertising.

Other studies conducted in Ghana (Ayimey, Awunyo-Vitor, and Gadawusu 2013; Dickson 2015), Zambia (Mutunda 2018), South Africa (Mavunga 2013), and Kenya (Yakub, Nyakoe and Okal 2017) demonstrate that advertising techniques using fear, humour, exaggerated claims and emotional appeals are commonly used in herbal product advertisements across different countries. Producers tend to use indigenous languages and use the techniques of juxtaposition, hyperbole and rhetorical questions to manipulate target customers and create a perceived power imbalance. A dominant strategy is the use of "absolute certainty", and the techniques included exaggerated competence, misinformation, claims of the source of herbs, false testimonials and false guarantees. While the specific content and strategies may vary, the underlying principles of persuasion and manipulation in advertising seem to be universal.

3. Theoretical framework

Conceptual metaphors, deeply rooted in cognitive linguistics and popularised by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in their seminal work *Metaphors We Live By* (Lakoff & Johnson 1980a), offer profound insights into the interconnectedness of human cognition and language. This theoretical framework posits that our comprehension of complex or abstract concepts often relies on more concrete, embodied experiences. A fundamental tenet of this theory is that abstract ideas are frequently grounded in sensory and bodily experiences.

Metaphors are deployed as conceptual tools for creating reality through related domains of experiences. These related domains are referred to as the source domain and the target domain. The conceptualisation of the target domain is usually interpreted through features of the source domain.

Metaphors capture thought and action and are reflected through language (Kövecses 2002; Sunday & Ogunsola 2016). They are structures through which humans perceive information, process it and act on it. These structures are entrenched and reproduced in everyday language through various expressions. In other words, comprehension of information, such as the messages of advertisements, would be possible through conceptual metaphors.

Furthermore, it is essential to emphasise that conceptual metaphors are neither arbitrary nor isolated linguistic constructs. They are pervasive in both language and thought, supported by substantial empirical evidence that demonstrates their cross-cultural applicability (Lakoff 1987). This universality of metaphors exerts a profound influence on various aspects of human cognitive processes, including thought patterns, perception, reasoning, and communication (Lakoff & Johnson 1980a; Lakoff 1987). These insights become particularly crucial in the realm of advertising, where metaphors are wielded as powerful tools for communication (Lakoff & Johnson 1980b).

In advertising, conceptual metaphors prove to be invaluable, allowing marketers to tap into existing mental constructs. As Lakoff and Johnson's research reveals, metaphors are deeply ingrained in human cognition and extend beyond linguistic expressions. They have a direct impact on consumer perceptions and decision-making processes. For instance, metaphorical framing can significantly shape how consumers perceive products or services (Fausey & Matlock 2011). It has been strategically employed in branding to create associations and emotional connections with consumers, making products or services more relatable and appealing.

Conceptual metaphors play a pivotal role in evoking emotions in advertising, allowing advertisers to establish deep emotional connections with consumers (McQuarrie & Mick 1999). This emotional resonance is a potent tool for influencing purchasing decisions. The universality of certain conceptual metaphors also proves to be an asset in cross-cultural advertising research. This universality enables the creation of messages that resonate with diverse audiences, transcending language and cultural barriers.

Another significant advantage of using metaphors in advertising is their ability to enhance memory retention and recall. Metaphors engage the imagination and create vivid mental images, making the content more memorable. This is particularly evident in the advertising field, where metaphors are strategically employed to make products or services stand out in consumers' minds, ensuring they are not easily forgotten.

4. Methodology

We adopted a qualitative research approach and randomly selected three major cities (each from a state in the region): Ughelli, Port Harcourt and Benin. The advertisements for herbal sex-enhancement products exhibited consistent patterns within this region, making them suitable for our research. The collection of data started in 2019 but was paused because of the COVID-19 lockdown; collection resumed and ended in 2022. To collect data, we audio-recorded a total of 40 advertisements in local markets and motor parks (based on the availability of public advertisements of herbal aphrodisiacs), from which we purposively (based on clarity of audio and removal of duplicated adverts) selected 10 for analysis. We selected approximately three relevant advertisements from each city due to the high repetition and redundancy among many adverts, despite different product names. Benin was allocated four advertisements because it had a greater diversity of unique and clear adverts, providing richer data. Ughelli and Port Harcourt each contributed three advertisements to maintain balance while minimising redundancy.

Securing consent from the advertisers proved to be a significant challenge, as some were confrontational and suspicious of our recordings due to concerns of piracy. This was reasonable, as the duplicity of advertisements across the Niger Delta region was a result of piracy issues. Thus, while some advertisers verbally agreed to our recordings, many refused, and this led to the restricted size of data. The locations of collected data and product information were as follows: Benin (*Agbara Wonderful Herbal Root Powder*, Bobizua Motor Park; *Prolife Man Power and Sperm Booster,* Bobizua Motor Park; *See Kind Best Herbal Formula,* Bobizua Motor Park; and *Energy Three Thousand,* Oba Market); Port Harcourt (*Danko Natural Solution,* Choba Junction; unnamed Product, Rumuokoro Roundabout; and *Danko Natural Solution,* Choba Junction); and Ughelli (*Goodwill Herbal Mixture,* Ughelli Main Market; *Tataway Men Formula,* Ughelli Main Market; and *Jaleen,* Saniko Market).

These advertisements were broadcast to the public largely in Pidgin English through public address systems, which we recorded and transcribed. We also provided English translations in the analysis to facilitate a conventional understanding of the dataset. Subsequently, we conducted critical discourse analysis on the data, identifying and analysing the contextual aspects invoked using the Conceptual Metaphors approach.

5. Analysis

As a result of a relatively unified geographical mapping, the advertisements are related and similar in nature. The analysis is segmented into three categories based on the identifiable contexts that manifest in the data. There are three contexts constructed in the advertisements, namely sexual, medical and marriage contexts.

5.1 Sexual context

The advertisements ride on the portrayal of sexual activity to project the advertisers' messages to the public. The person who would understand the message in the advertisements would have in his/her mental model what sexual intercourse is. Within this context, the target customer is expected to be able to interpret any indirect representation that is given by the advertiser and draw inferences from the lexical choices made.

Excerpt 1: Advertisement of Agbara Wonderful Herbal Root Powder

You go start moto for night, moto no go fit enter. You go start again, you no go gree move. Your wife go dey say honey, honey, honey, you man go dey say honey, honey, honey. Before you know wetin dey happen, 4 O clock don nack, una no go do anything.

Translation

'You will start the engine at night, the engine will not respond. You will try to start it again; it will fail to start. Your wife will be moaning honey, honey, honey, and you will be responding the same way, but before you know what happens, the time would be 4 o'clock and you will not do anything'.

Excerpt 1 is structured by the conceptual metaphor SEXUAL INTERCOURSE IS A JOURNEY, in which the advertiser draws on the source domain of transportation and travel to organise the target domain of sexual performance. The key lexical trigger is "*start moto*", where *moto* evokes a vehicle in the journey frame. In the target domain, this vehicle maps onto the penis as the instrument through which the sexual act is expected to proceed. The phrase "*moto no go fit enter*" extends this mapping: in the source domain, a vehicle that cannot enter a route cannot begin a journey; in the target domain, this corresponds to the penis' inability to penetrate during intercourse. Thus, the discourse does not describe erectile dysfunction directly in biomedical terms but conceptualises it through the more familiar experiential logic of a failed journey.

The mapping develops further through the expressions "*you go start again*" and "*you no go gree move*". In the source domain, starting a vehicle corresponds to ignition, the process that makes travel possible. In the target domain, this maps onto the initiation of erection or arousal. Repeated attempts to "start" the vehicle, therefore, correspond to repeated attempts at achieving erection. Likewise, MOVEMENT in the journey domain maps onto PENETRATION/SEXUAL PROGRESSION in the sexual domain. A journey requires forward motion toward a destination, just as sexual intercourse conventionally requires penetration and sustained performance toward climax. When the advertiser says "*you no go gree move*", the expression evokes a stalled vehicle, and this maps onto a stalled sexual act in which intercourse cannot advance beyond attempted initiation.

Another important part of the metaphorical structure is the mapping of DESTINATION onto SEXUAL CLIMAX OR COMPLETION. Within the journey frame, travel is purposeful because it aims at arrival; in the sexual frame, the encounter is equally goal-directed because it is expected to culminate in successful intercourse and satisfaction. The temporal expression "*4 O clock don nack*" introduces the correspondence TIME ELAPSED IS A MEASURE OF FAILED PROGRESS. In the source domain, time is often used to measure whether a journey is advancing or delayed. Here, the passing of hours without arrival maps onto prolonged but unsuccessful sexual effort. The repeated exchange "honey, honey, honey" between husband and wife suggests mutual participation in the encounter, but it also heightens the irony of failed movement: both participants are present, yet the journey cannot proceed.

The final clause, "*una no go do anything*", completes the metaphor by signalling total journey failure. In source-domain terms, if a vehicle cannot start, move, or arrive, the trip is aborted. In target-domain terms, this corresponds to the inability to complete sexual intercourse. The conceptual mappings may therefore be summarised as follows: VEHICLE = PENIS; IGNITION/STARTING = AROUSAL OR ERECTION INITIATION; MOVEMENT = PENETRATION/SEXUAL PROGRESSION; DESTINATION = CLIMAX OR SUCCESSFUL INTERCOURSE; DELAY/TIME ELAPSE = PROLONGED FAILED PERFORMANCE; ABORTED JOURNEY = SEXUAL FAILURE. Through this systematic mapping, the advertisement frames erectile dysfunction not simply as bodily weakness but as a stalled and unsuccessful journey, making the condition vivid, culturally accessible, and rhetorically persuasive.

Excerpt 2: Advertisement of Tataway Men formula, Ughelli

Even if woman naked for your front, you no go fit react. You no be man enough again o, come, we get special medicine, hin name na Tataway Men Formula, Tataway Men Formula for men. Man wey dey get low libido, poor erection, power failure, break and fail, rise and fall, oh, my brother no fail o, COME, come take this thing, special herbal medicine, Tataway Men formula for men, Tataway Men formula, e go do welcome back for that your manhood wey no dey stand again, when we do your manhood welcome back.

Translation

'If you cannot have sexual arousal when a woman is naked before you, you are unable to have sex, then you have ceased to be a man anymore. Come, we have a special medicine; its name is Tataway Men formula for men. A man that has poor libido, poor erection, rise and fall, breaking and failing, please my brother, do not fail. Come and take this drug; a special medicine that is called Tataway Men formula. The drug will restore your manhood to its original and normal state'.

In Excerpt 2, the sexual context is structured primarily through the conceptual metaphor SEXUAL POTENCY IS POWER/ENERGY. This metaphor is activated by lexical items such as "power failure", "break and fail", and "rise and fall", all of which come from the source domain of electricity, force, and mechanical functioning. Within this source domain, a stable power supply is mapped onto libido and erectile strength, while power outage or system breakdown is mapped onto sexual dysfunction. The target domain is male sexual performance, especially the ability to achieve and sustain erection. The mapping can be stated clearly as follows: POWER SUPPLY = LIBIDO, POWER FAILURE = ERECTILE DYSFUNCTION, MECHANICAL STABILITY = SUSTAINED ERECTION, and BREAKDOWN/COLLAPSE = IMPOTENCE. Through this cross-domain projection, sexual performance is conceptualised as the possession and maintenance of usable power.

The advertiser develops this metaphor by presenting the male body, and particularly the penis, as a mechanism whose value lies in its ability to function properly. Expressions such as "poor erection", "break and fail", and "rise and fall" do not merely describe a biomedical condition; they invite listeners to understand impotence through the familiar experiential logic of machines and energy systems that fail under pressure. In this framework, the penis is implicitly treated as a device that should stand, hold, and perform, while impotence is constructed as the equivalent of a faulty system. The metaphor thus involves two related mappings: THE PENIS IS A MACHINE and SEXUAL FUNCTION IS ENERGY SUPPLY. These mappings make the condition vivid because the

audience can easily relate sexual inability to everyday experiences of weak current, unstable machinery, or interrupted electricity.

The clause "*E go do welcome back for that your manhood wey no dey stand again*" extends the same conceptual structure by positioning the advertised herbal medicine as an agent of restoration. Here, the medicine functions metaphorically as a repairer or recharger that returns lost power to the damaged system. The expression "*welcome back*" suggests the recovery of prior functional capacity, so that restored erection is understood as restored energy, not simply restored health in a general sense. The mapping is, therefore, completed by adding HERBAL MEDICINE = RESTORING FORCE, RECOVERED ERECTION = RESTORED POWER, and RENEWED PERFORMANCE = REACTIVATED MASCULINITY. In this way, the text does not just diagnose a sexual problem; it narrates a movement from power loss to power recovery, with the product serving as the medium of that transition.

This metaphorical construction also carries a strong cultural and ideological implication. The statement "*You no be man enough again o*" shows that the loss of sexual power is not framed as a neutral bodily condition, but as a threat to masculine identity itself. Because power in the source domain maps onto virility in the target domain, sexual dysfunction becomes symbolic emasculation. The metaphor SEXUAL POTENCY IS POWER/ENERGY, therefore, does more than provide a linguistic frame for discussing impotence; it encodes a broader cultural logic in which masculinity is equated with strength, functional stability, and sexual capability. The herbal product is consequently advertised not merely as a treatment for erectile difficulty, but as a means of restoring lost masculine legitimacy.

Excerpt 3: Advertisement of Prolife Man Power and Sperm Booster

We also get Prolife Manpower and Sperm Booster, Prolife man power and sperm booster. This one na special for man, man wey dey get poor libido, rise and fall, break and wait, wey go see food wey e go chop, e no go react. Even if woman naked for your presence, e no go react as a man, no, you no dey again. Come, my broda, make you no think. All you need na Prolife man power and sperm booster, e go sanitise your system, sanitise every weak arteries, you go be man again to do your work. E go build your sperm, e go dey kakaraka.

Translation

'We also have Prolife Manpower and Sperm Booster. This is special for a man that has poor libido, rise and fall, break and wait. When it sees the food that you are supposed to eat, it won't react. Even if a woman is naked in your presence, it won't react as it should in a man. No, you are not existing anymore. Come, my

brother. Don't be dejected. All you need is Prolife Man Power and Sperm Booster. It will sanitise your system and every weak artery, and you will be a man again to perform your responsibilities. It will build your sperm, and it will be strong'.

The metaphorical structuring of this excerpt is evoked through the conceptual metaphor SEXUAL DESIRE IS FOOD CONSUMPTION. This metaphor is activated most clearly in the expression *"wey go see food wey e go chop, e no go react"* ('when it sees the food that it is supposed to eat, it will not react'). Within the discourse context, *food* does not retain its literal meaning but is projected onto the sexual domain, where it stands for the female body. In the same way that food is an object of hunger and consumption, the woman's body is constructed as the object of male sexual desire. The metaphor, therefore, draws from the source domain of food consumption to structure the target domain of sexual desire.

The mapping can be specified as follows: food maps onto the female body; appetite maps onto libido; eating maps onto sexual intercourse; and loss of appetite maps onto reduced libido. These correspondences organise the meaning of the excerpt. The phrase *poor libido* is conceptually understood through the logic of diminished appetite, while the inability to "react" on seeing "food" metaphorically represents a man's inability to become sexually aroused in the presence of a woman. Likewise, the idea of "eating" is not literal consumption here, but a metaphorical representation of sexual intercourse. The discourse thus frames male sexuality through a bodily, everyday experience that is familiar to the audience.

This mapping is persuasive because it normalises sexual desire as something as basic and expected as hunger. By implication, a man who does not respond sexually to the "food" before him is represented as abnormal, deficient, or lacking in a natural masculine capacity. The utterance *"Even if woman naked for your presence, e no go react as a man"* strengthens this metaphorical logic by presenting the naked female body as the visible "food" that should ordinarily trigger "appetite", that is, libido. The failure to respond is, therefore, constructed not simply as a medical issue but as a breakdown in expected masculine desire.

The latter claims that the product will "sanitise your system", "sanitise every weak arteries", and "build your sperm" shift the discourse into a medical frame, but they also support the earlier food metaphor by presenting the medicine as a corrective intervention for the loss of sexual appetite. In other words, just as one may seek treatment or nourishment to restore a weakened appetite, the advertised product is positioned as a means of restoring libido and sexual function. Through this metaphorical structure, the text presents sexual desire

as a natural appetite, the female body as its object, and reduced libido as a troubling loss that the product promises to cure.

5.2 Medical context

A medical context is constructed by the advertiser to give the listeners the sense that the drug producers have the knowledge of medicine and understand how the human anatomy operates. The relationship between the participants (the advertiser and the target audience) is projected and re-moulded as a doctor-patient interaction and relationship. Instances of this are noted in Excerpts 4 to 7.

Excerpt 4: Advertisement of Danko Natural Solution

Man wey dey get low sperm count, <you no go fit pregnant woman at all at all>, because e get quantity of sperm wey dey come from man, go inside the woman belle and form pikin. If e no reach five million, e no go work o. Those small small boils like pimples wey you dey see for your private part, you no know wetin e be, na symptoms of staph.

Translation

'A man that has low sperm count can never impregnate a woman, because there is a required quantity of sperm that a man must deposit inside the woman before a child can be formed. If the sperm cells do not reach five million, a child can never be produced. Don't you know that the small acne-like boils growing on your private part, are symptoms of staphylococcus?'

The excerpt is best understood through the conceptual metaphor SEXUAL REPRODUCTION IS PRODUCTIVE PERFORMANCE. Here, the target domain is male sexual and reproductive capacity, while the source domain is productive labour or functional output. This mapping is activated by expressions such as "*you no go fit pregnant woman at all at all*", "quantity of sperm", and especially "*If e no reach five million, e no go work o*". In this metaphorical structure, sperm maps onto productive substance or output, impregnation maps onto successful performance, and low sperm count maps onto insufficiency or failure of output. The clause "*e no go work*" is especially revealing because it frames male reproductive ability not simply as a biological condition but as a performance that must yield results. Fertility is thus conceptualised in terms of effectiveness, productivity, and successful completion, while infertility is constructed as failed performance within a sexual act that is implicitly expected to lead to conception.

A second related conceptual metaphor in the same sexual frame is SEMINAL DEPOSITION IS DELIVERY/TRANSFER. In this case, the source domain is the movement of a substance from one place to another, while the target domain is

ejaculation and insemination. This is seen in "*sperm wey dey come from man, go inside the woman belle and form pikin*". The mappings are clear: the man maps onto the source point, the woman's womb maps onto the destination or receiving container, sperm maps onto the transferred substance, and child formation maps onto the successful result of transfer. This metaphor allows the advertiser to portray sexual intercourse as a directional act whose value lies in successful delivery and outcome. The focus is, therefore, not on intimacy or mutual pleasure, but on the man's ability to transfer sufficient reproductive material into the woman's body. Within this logic, the mention of "five million" reinforces the idea that what matters is not merely transfer, but transfer in adequate quantity.

The advertiser extends this sexual frame through the genital abnormality as a visible warning sign. Here, the source domain is a visible indication or surface evidence, while the target domain is sexual illness affecting the reproductive organs. The "*small small boils like pimples*" function as observable markers that point to deeper sexual disorder, namely "symptoms of staph". The mapping is that surface marks map onto warning signs, while underlying infection maps onto hidden sexual dysfunction. This metaphor strengthens the sexual context by tying bodily appearance directly to sexual capacity and reproductive risk. The advertiser, therefore, constructs male sexuality as something that can be evaluated through visible signs, measurable output, and successful reproductive transfer, all of which reinforce a discourse in which masculine sexual worth is judged by functional fertility.

Excerpt 5: Advertisement of Jaleen

Your manhood no dey function again as e suppose as man, to stand kakaraka and do hin work. You no say to penetrate, e need strong erection, but when your manhood don shrink, you go dey look your manhood, till e no go get power at all at all. Something don comot your body o, come, get better medicine wey go do that your manhood welcome back.

Translation

'Your genitalia do not function anymore the way they are meant to function; they are not standing erect and hard to carry out their functions. You should be aware that for the male genitalia to have penetration during sexual encounters, they should be erect and strong, but when the genitals have shrunk, you will keep looking at it till it loses all their power. Something has left your body, come and get better medicine to welcome back'.

The advertiser, in this excerpt, constructs erectile dysfunction not simply as a sexual difficulty but as a form of bodily malfunction requiring diagnosis and treatment. The advertiser speaks in a voice that resembles that of a clinician

explaining symptoms to a patient: "*Your manhood no dey function again as e suppose*". This expression activates the broader conceptual metaphor THE BODY IS A MACHINE, in which body parts are understood in terms of mechanical components that are expected to function properly. Under this metaphor, the penis is conceptualised as a functional unit within the body, and erectile dysfunction is framed as mechanical failure. The lexical items "function", "stand", "shrink", and "power" are not random descriptors; they are metaphorical cues that transfer meaning from the source domain of machinery and bodily systems to the target domain of male sexual performance.

More specifically, one major mapping in the excerpt is THE PENIS IS A WORKER / FUNCTIONAL INSTRUMENT. In this mapping, the source domain is WORK or FUNCTIONAL LABOUR, while the target domain is SEXUAL PERFORMANCE. Thus, the worker maps onto the penis, work performance maps onto sexual intercourse, and failure to perform work maps onto erectile dysfunction. This is evident in the phrase "*do hin work*", which presents the penis as an agent with a duty to carry out. Within this structure, successful erection is interpreted as successful work output, while impotence becomes underperformance or inability to fulfil the assigned function. By framing the penis as something that must "work", the discourse medicalises erectile capacity as a measurable bodily responsibility rather than a private or emotional issue. The implication is that when the organ fails in its "task", the body has deviated from its proper healthy state.

The line "*Something don comot your body*" introduces another important mapping: HEALTH IS POSSESSION OF A VITAL SUBSTANCE. In this case, the source domain is CONTAINMENT or LOSS OF ESSENTIAL CONTENT, while the target domain is MALE SEXUAL HEALTH. The body is conceptualised as a *container*, and potency is treated as a valuable substance that can leave it. Once something has "come out" of the body, health is imagined as diminished, incomplete, or unstable. This metaphor is significant within the medical frame because it resembles traditional and popular understandings of illness as loss – loss of blood, strength, heat, force, or inner balance. The proposed medicine is then positioned as the restorative intervention that can reverse this loss. The final phrase, "*do that your manhood welcome back*", extends this restoration logic by suggesting a return to normal bodily state, thereby activating a further metaphor: RECOVERY IS RETURN. In this mapping, the lost state of potency is imagined as something that can be brought back into the body through treatment.

The excerpt is structured by interconnected conceptual metaphors that make the advertisement persuasive within a medical context: THE BODY IS A MACHINE, THE PENIS IS A WORKER, SEXUAL POTENCY IS POWER, and HEALTH IS

POSSESSION OF A VITAL SUBSTANCE. These metaphors work together to transform erectile dysfunction into a recognisable medical problem characterised by malfunction, weakness, and loss. At the same time, they legitimise the advertiser's authority by making him sound like someone who understands how the body operates and how its failures can be corrected. The result is that the product is not marketed merely as a sexual enhancer but as a therapeutic solution capable of restoring bodily function, energy, and masculine wholeness.

Excerpt 6: Advertisement of Goodwill Herbal Mixture

Any man wey get diabetes, him manhood no go stand kakaraka to do hin work o. E dey weak the man organ. That is why you need the medicine. Goodwill Herbal Mixture, Goodwill Herbal Mixture to clear all those wicked bacteria comot from your body system, you need Goodwill Herbal Mixture, Goodwill Herbal Mixture. Any woman wey dey get vagina discharge needs Goodwill Herbal Mixture.

Translation

'Any man who is diabetic will have weak erection and his penis will not be able to function well; it weakens that man's organs. This is why you need Goodwill Herbal Mixture to treat all the wicked bacteria in your body system. You need Goodwill Herbal Mixture. Any woman that experiences vagina discharge needs Goodwill Herbal Mixture'.

The advertiser presents the medicine through two interrelated conceptual metaphors: SEXUAL POTENCY IS HEALTH and DISEASE IS WAR/INVASION. The first metaphor draws from the source domain of bodily strength and functional wellness to conceptualise erection as an index of general health. Thus, the expression *"him manhood no go stand kakaraka to do hin work"* does not merely describe sexual weakness; it frames erectile performance as a medical sign of bodily impairment. In this mapping, the source domain is health/physical functioning, while the target domain is sexual performance. The correspondences are clear: bodily strength maps onto erectile strength, bodily weakness maps onto impotence, and proper organ function maps onto successful sexual performance. By presenting the penis as an organ that should "do hin work", the advertiser medicalises sexuality and constructs impotence not as a private inconvenience but as a symptom of compromised health.

A second and more explicit metaphor is DISEASE IS WAR/INVASION, which is activated in the line "*to clear all those wicked bacteria comot from your body system*". Here, illness is conceptualised through the source domain of war or territorial invasion, while the target domain is disease inside the body. In this mapping, invading enemies correspond to bacteria, territory under attack

corresponds to the body, and removing invaders corresponds to medical treatment. The adjective "*wicked*" intensifies this mapping by attributing agency and hostility to bacteria, making them appear like malicious attackers rather than microscopic organisms. Through this metaphor, the body becomes a threatened space that must be defended, and treatment becomes a forceful act of expulsion. This is significant because it gives the medicine a heroic curative role: Goodwill Herbal Mixture is not just a product but a weapon deployed against hostile invaders.

These metaphors work together to strengthen the advertiser's medical authority. By linking diabetes to erectile weakness, the speaker adopts the discourse of diagnosis, explanation, and prescription. The claim "*E dey weak the man organ*" simplifies biomedical reasoning into accessible everyday language, but it still preserves the asymmetry of doctor-patient interaction: the advertiser is positioned as the one who knows the cause of the problem, while the listener is positioned as the sufferer in need of expert guidance. Within the metaphor SEXUAL POTENCY IS HEALTH, erectile failure becomes evidence of internal disorder. Within DISEASE IS WAR/INVASION, the advertiser's remedy becomes the means through which health, strength, and bodily order can be restored. The medical context is, therefore, not incidental; it is central to how the product is made believable.

The excerpt further extends this medical framing by broadening the product's relevance beyond men to women: *"Any woman wey dey get vagina discharge needs Goodwill Herbal Mixture".* This move expands the scope of the medicine from a treatment for male sexual weakness to a general therapeutic solution for reproductive and bodily disorders. Conceptually, this reinforces the metaphor THE BODY IS A SYSTEM, where different symptoms in male and female bodies are treated as disruptions within a single medicalised organism. The phrase "*body system*" is especially important because it invokes a biomedical model of the body as an organised internal mechanism that can be infected, weakened, and repaired. In this sense, the herbal mixture is discursively positioned as a universal restorative agent capable of cleansing the system and re-establishing proper function.

The advertiser constructs a persuasive medical context by combining culturally familiar expressions with systematic conceptual metaphors. The mapping of disease onto invasion and sexual performance onto bodily health allows the advertiser to recast everyday anxieties about impotence and discharge as urgent medical conditions requiring intervention. At the same time, the repeated naming of Goodwill Herbal Mixture functions like a prescription, reinforcing the impression that the speaker is not merely advertising but clinically recommending

treatment. Through these metaphorical structures, the product is legitimised as a medically necessary remedy, while the advertiser is elevated into the role of a knowledgeable healer whose authority rests on the ability to diagnose weakness, identify hostile causes, and offer restoration.

Excerpt 7: Advertisement of an unnamed Product

(inaudible) for enlarging of man organ, e go increase your sexual performance, e go help your manhood stand kakaraka, e go last for as long as you want. (inaudible) because the blood wey dey supply to the man organ na hin dey give strong erection. If you no get strong erection, you no go fit penetrate (inaudible) e no go fit enter. Another thing be say some people, because of power failure, if you climb woman for two minutes, you go dey think say ah this man go fall now, e go fall now, e go fall now, and once the thing enter your heart, your manhood go just fall like when NEPA take light, fiam! E don reach ground.

Translation

'It is for the enlargement of the male organ. It will increase your sexual performance and make your penis stronger. It will last for as long as you want. The blood supply to the penis is responsible for strong erection. If you do not have a strong erection, you will not be able to penetrate; your penis won't enter. Another thing is that some people, because of weak erection, when they try having sex, they would start worrying about the strength of the penis. Once that worry is given a chance, your manhood will fall like when NEPA interrupts power supply'.

The advertiser, in excerpt 7, constructs erectile function as a physiological process that can be clinically explained, diagnosed, and treated. The discourse first activates the source domain of medicine/biological functioning and maps it onto the target domain of male sexual performance through lexical items such as "blood", "strong erection", "penetrate", and "sexual performance". This yields the conceptual metaphor SEXUAL PERFORMANCE IS PHYSIOLOGICAL HEALTH. Under this mapping, adequate blood supply corresponds to bodily efficiency, strong erection corresponds to healthy function, and an inability to penetrate corresponds to dysfunction. The advertiser's explanation that "*the blood wey dey supply to the man organ na hin dey give strong erection*" imitates biomedical cause-and-effect reasoning, thereby positioning the speaker as medically knowledgeable and the listener as a patient in need of expert guidance.

A second metaphor that structures the excerpt is THE PENIS IS A MACHINE. This is evident in expressions such as "stand kakaraka", "fall", and the broader framing of the organ as something whose performance can be strengthened, enlarged, or made to last. Here, the source domain is mechanical operation, while the target domain is penile function. The mappings are clear: mechanical

strength maps onto erectile firmness, durability maps onto sexual stamina, malfunction maps onto erectile weakness, and collapse maps onto loss of erection. Through this mapping, the penis is not represented as a passive body part but as an instrument that must operate efficiently in order to achieve penetration. This mechanical framing strengthens the medicalized tone of the advertisement because it makes sexual difficulty appear as a technical problem requiring intervention.

The excerpt also draws heavily on the source domain of electricity/power supply, producing the conceptual metaphor ERECTION IS ELECTRIC POWER. Expressions such as "power failure" and "*fall like when NEPA take light*" establish a mapping in which stable electricity corresponds to sustained erection, power outage corresponds to erectile collapse, and restored current would imply renewed potency. The comparison to NEPA is culturally salient because it translates a private bodily experience into a familiar public experience of interrupted electricity supply. The source domain of erratic electrical current provides the inferential structure for understanding unpredictable erection: just as electricity can suddenly go off, erection can suddenly fail. This mapping not only simplifies the medical explanation for listeners but also dramatizes erectile dysfunction as sudden, humiliating, and disruptive.

The advertiser extends beyond physiology into the psychological dimension of dysfunction by showing how fear and anticipation can trigger bodily failure. The clause "*once the thing enter your heart, your manhood go just fall*" suggests an interaction between cognition and bodily response, but this psychological process is still understood through the electricity metaphor. Anxiety becomes the trigger for "power failure," thereby linking mental state to physical collapse. Overall, the medical context is sustained by three interconnected conceptual metaphors: SEXUAL PERFORMANCE IS PHYSIOLOGICAL HEALTH, THE PENIS IS A MACHINE, and ERECTION IS ELECTRIC POWER. Together, these mappings allow the advertiser to speak in the register of diagnosis and treatment while making male sexual dysfunction intelligible through familiar bodily, mechanical, and electrical domains.

5.3 Marriage context

The advertisers of the drugs construct sex within the marriage system, that is, between a man and his wife. Within the Nigerian context, sex outside marriage is generally regarded as immoral. The evocation of the marriage context suggests that the advertisers are aligning with the moral positions.

Excerpt 8: Advertisement of Danko Natural Solution

When man deposit something, e go stay and born pikin. Staph don cos plenty problems for husband and wife. Husband and wife go marry for six years, eight years, nine years, ten year, no pikin. They no go dey happy, the urge for love no dey again, e go kill the sexual feeling, e go die patapata.

Translation

'Whenever a man deposits something, it is being deposited to survive and lead to childbirth. Staphylococcus has caused a lot of problems for married couples. A couple will be together for six to ten years and they will not be able to have a child. They will be unhappy and the motivation for love decreases; this can even lead to loss of interest or total death of sexual desire'.

In excerpt 8, the advertiser constructs marital sexuality through the conceptual metaphors SEX IS INVESTMENT and MARRIAGE IS BUSINESS. These metaphors are activated by the lexical choice *deposit*, which draws from the source domain of economics and maps onto the target domain of marriage and reproduction. Within this mapping, financial deposit corresponds to ejaculation, return on investment corresponds to childbirth, and investment environment corresponds to marriage. The clause "*When man deposit something, e go stay and born pikin*" frames semen not simply as a biological substance, but as a valuable investment expected to yield profit in the form of children. In this way, procreation is conceptualised as the expected return on a husband's sexual and reproductive contribution within marriage.

The discourse extends this mapping by presenting the duration of marriage as a waiting period for investment maturity. Expressions such as "*six years, eight years, nine years, ten year, no pikin*" suggest that the marital union is evaluated in terms of whether it produces returns within a socially expected timeframe. In the source domain of business, a failed or delayed return signals loss, stagnation, or unproductive investment; in the target domain of marriage, childlessness is framed as evidence that the reproductive investment has not matured successfully. Thus, the metaphorical structure projects marriage as a productive enterprise in which sexual relations are meaningful largely because they are expected to result in childbirth.

A further entailment of this mapping is that emotional and sexual fulfilment in marriage becomes dependent on reproductive success. The expressions "*They no go dey happy*," "*the urge for love no dey again*," and "*e go kill the sexual feeling*" show how the failure of the expected return generates emotional decline within the marital relationship. Here, the source domain of business loss maps

onto the target domain of marital dissatisfaction: failed returns correspond to childlessness, economic frustration corresponds to emotional unhappiness, and business collapse corresponds to the death of sexual intimacy. The metaphor, therefore, does more than describe infertility; it frames childlessness as a threat to the viability of marriage itself.

The marriage context is reinforced by the kinship terms "husband", "wife", and "marry", which anchor the metaphor in a culturally recognisable model of legitimate sexuality. Through this framework, the advertisement reflects and reproduces a sociocultural ideology in which marriage is validated by its reproductive outcome. The conceptual metaphors SEX IS INVESTMENT and MARRIAGE IS BUSINESS, therefore, allow the advertiser to present fertility not only as a biological matter but also as a social obligation, where the success of marriage is measured by its ability to generate children as returns on reproductive investment.

Excerpt 9: Advertisement of Energy Three Thousand

If it happens that you climb a woman, you come down. You climb a woman, you come down. What makes you a man does not stand chim again, come you have a problem. Does it happen that in the night when your wife touches you, you will tell her to level you that you are doing night vigil, come you have a problem. Come and take Energy Three Thousand, so that when you touch a woman, she will know that a hand has touched her. Energy Three Thousand una well done!

Within the marriage context, Excerpt 9 is structured by the conceptual metaphor MARITAL SEX IS PHYSICAL PERFORMANCE/ACTION, with elements of MASCULINITY IS ERECTILE CAPACITY. The source domain is that of physical action, strength, and successful execution of a task, while the target domain is marital sexual intercourse. Thus, the expression "*you climb a woman, you come down*" draws on the source domain of climbing or undertaking a demanding physical activity and maps it onto the husband's sexual engagement with his wife. In this mapping, climbing corresponds to initiating sexual intercourse, remaining up corresponds to sustaining erection and sexual performance, and coming down corresponds to premature loss of erection or inability to continue. The clause "*what makes you a man does not stand chim again*" further activates the mapping STANDING UPRIGHT = MASCULINE/SEXUAL ADEQUACY, while FAILURE TO STAND = SEXUAL INADEQUACY and THREATENED MANHOOD. Through this metaphorical structure, the husband's sexual function is not treated as a private biological event alone, but as an index of masculine worth within marriage.

The marital frame becomes more explicit in "*when your wife touches you*" which narrows the target domain from general sexuality to conjugal intimacy and

marital obligation. Here, the metaphorical logic extends beyond performance to the relational consequences of failure. The excuse "*you are doing night vigil*" implies sexual avoidance, and within the discourse, this avoidance is construed as a breakdown of expected marital reciprocity. The source domain of task failure is, therefore, mapped onto the target domain of marriage: the husband is expected to respond when called upon by the wife, just as one is expected to rise to a duty when required. When the advertiser says the medicine will make it possible that "when you touch a woman, she will know that a hand has touched her", the discourse introduces another mapping in which touch as forceful impact corresponds to sexually satisfying contact in marriage. The source domain is tactile force or visible effect; the target domain is successful sexual fulfilment. In this way, the product is framed as restoring not only erection but also the husband's capacity to enact culturally valued masculine presence within the home.

Excerpt 9 is more coherently explained through the conceptual metaphor MARRIAGE IS EMPLOYMENT and, more specifically, SEXUAL PERFORMANCE IN MARRIAGE IS JOB PERFORMANCE. In this framework, the source domain is employment, with its roles, duties, evaluation, and sanctions, while the target domain is the husband's sexual role in marriage. The mappings are clear: EMPLOYEE = HUSBAND, JOB = MARITAL SEXUAL RESPONSIBILITY, PERFORMANCE = SEXUAL COMPETENCE, PERFORMANCE EVALUATION = WIFE'S JUDGEMENT, and SANCTION FOR POOR PERFORMANCE = MARITAL INSTABILITY or INFIDELITY. Thus, the expression "*you no sabi perform*" draws directly from the language of work appraisal and recasts sexual failure as occupational incompetence within marriage. The husband is metaphorically constructed as one whose legitimacy in the marital institution depends on carrying out his sexual "duties" effectively, while the wife becomes the evaluator of that performance.

The passage "*your wife go dey go sleep outside*" extends the employment metaphor by importing the logic of consequence and replacement into the marital sphere. Just as poor job performance may lead to disciplinary action or loss of position, poor sexual performance is represented as producing relational penalty, namely the wife's movement outside the marriage for satisfaction. This mapping frames marriage as a performance-governed institution in which intimacy is conditional upon the husband meeting expected standards. At the same time, both excerpts reveal a shared ideological entailment: within marriage, masculine identity is conceptualised through productivity, adequacy, and successful sexual service. By drawing on the familiar source domains of physical performance and employment, the advertisements make erectile dysfunction intelligible as marital

failure, while presenting the advertised product as the means of restoring not merely potency, but a husband's functional place within marriage.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

Three contexts, namely sexual, medical and marital, were evoked in the advertisements. They formed the basis for the communication and comprehension of the relevance of the drugs. Sexual context drew on the mental model of sexual intercourse, while medical context built on consumers' understanding of medical consultation by positioning the advertiser as a doctor and the consumer as a patient. The marriage context relied on the social construct of sex as the binding force between husband and wife in the marriage institution.

Advertisers strategically employ metaphors to convey messages to adults, leveraging their contextual experiences. Notably, the metaphors in herbal aphrodisiacs' advertisements are not arbitrary; they are meticulously crafted from the cultural and mental experiences of the target audience, resonating with scholars like Yakub et al. (2017), Adegoju (2008), Yakub et al. (2017) and Allen et al. (2019), who emphasise the promotion of cultural practices by herbal drug advertisers.

The contextual aspects explored in this study are intricately woven into the social and cultural fabric, drawing from diverse experiences. Adegoju (2008), Yakub et al. (2017) and Allen et al. (2019) endorse considering cultural practices and social dynamics when crafting herbal drug advertisements. These contexts provide a robust foundation for effective communication and message reception. The findings highlight the prevalent targeting of men in herbal aphrodisiac advertisements, potentially marginalising women. This trend may be attributed to the patriarchal society, fostering inhibited sexual desires in women (Ajayi 2023). This aligns with West and Krychman's (2015) observation that, despite the evolution of herbal aphrodisiacs, many women still resort to natural products to address poor libido due to the limited availability of medications for women's sexual enhancement. As suggested by Fiaveh (2019), the cultural problem that is created by the reality which puts pressure of sexual responsibility on men needs to be addressed through proper sensitisation.

This study positions herbal aphrodisiacs' advertisements as a distinctive genre within herbal medicine advertising in Nigeria. However, it is important to note that it focuses on linguistic elements, excluding the impact of visual cues in the multifaceted nature of advertisements. Therefore, it sets the tone for inte-

grating additional semiotic and visual rhetoric tools for a holistic understanding of the persuasive strategies employed in advertising. This integrated approach will enable insights into the intricate world of advertising, where metaphorical expressions play a pivotal role in shaping consumer perceptions and behaviours.

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'That guy is a good striker': Conceptual metaphor and euphemistic strategies in Nzema sexual discourse

Abstract

In recent times, football has attracted the interest of many Nzema male youth in Ghana. From the perspective of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), this article examines how football terminology is metaphorically mapped onto sexual discourse among Nzema youth. The analysis draws on primary data comprising recorded conversations in which football registers are inserted through code-mixing to euphemistically encode sexual activities and relationships, thereby mitigating obscenity and preserving face. The findings reveal that sexual experiences are systematically conceptualised as a football game, with

metaphors such as TO IMPREGNATE A WOMAN IS TO SCORE A GOAL, EXTRAMARITAL SEX IS AN AWAY MATCH, and ENDING A RELATIONSHIP IS ISSUING A RED CARD. These metaphors not only perform euphemistic and politeness functions but also embed wider socio-cultural ideologies, including constructions of masculinity, fertility, gender roles, and relational dynamics. The study contributes to African metaphor scholarship by showing how football, as a culturally salient practice, provides a productive source domain for encoding sensitive topics in Nzema sexual discourse.

Keywords: Nzema youth, conceptual metaphor, euphemism, sexual discourse, football registers, code-mixing

1. Introduction

Football has become one of the most popular leisure and cultural activities among the Nzema youth in Ghana, shaping not only entertainment but also everyday communication. In particular, football registers are increasingly drawn upon in sexual discourse, where direct references to sex are often considered vulgar or socially inappropriate. This paper examines how Nzema male youth metaphorically conceptualize sexual activities and relationships through the lens of football.

The Nzema are located in the southwestern part of Ghana's Western Region. According to the 2021 Population and Housing Census, their population stands at 342,090. Nzemaland is bordered by La Côte d'Ivoire to the West, the Ahanta people to the East, the Aowin (Anyi) and Wassa peoples to the North, and the Gulf of Guinea to the South (Kwesi 1992). Their language, Nzema, belongs to the Kwa language family of West Africa.

The analysis is grounded primarily in Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), which provides the framework for mapping expressions between the source domain of football and the target domain of sexuality. Code-mixing and euphemistic/politeness strategies are also considered as pragmatic resources that shape how these metaphors are deployed in interaction.

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What football registers are inserted into the Nzema youth sexual discourse?
2. How are these registers metaphorically mapped from the football domain onto the sexual domain within CMT?
3. What euphemistic and politeness functions do these metaphors perform in interaction?
4. What broader cultural and social ideologies (e.g., masculinity, fertility, gender relations) are reflected through these metaphors?

2. Literature review: Metaphors in sexual discourse

Sexual discourse is one of the most metaphorically rich areas of human language, often because direct terms are considered vulgar, taboo, or socially inappropriate. Cross-linguistic studies have shown that speakers frequently draw on familiar experiential domains such as food, war, games, and religion to describe sexual activities (see Allan & Burridge 2006; Charteris-Black 2005). These metaphorical extensions allow speakers to navigate cultural sensitivities while still communicating meaning effectively, often disguising socially delicate topics in playful or acceptable forms.

Some studies highlight the universality of metaphor in sexual talk. In his cross-cultural study of English sexual metaphors, Charteris-Black (2005) found that British English speakers commonly draw on *journey* (e.g., TO GET OFF) and *machine* (e.g., TO BE TURNED ON) source domains. These metaphors reveal underlying cultural models of sex as either a process of movement toward climax or as the activation of a mechanical system. Similarly, Kövecses (2010) notes that American English often conceptualizes sexual intercourse through *violence* metaphors, such as TO BANG or TO HIT IT OFF, which reflect cultural associations of sex with force or conquest. To avoid profanity, metaphors such as SEX IS FOOD, SEX IS WORK and SEX IS JOURNEY, appear to be common conceptual mappings in the cross-cultural discourse of sexuality (Agyekum 2010; Crespo-Fernández 2015). In the SEX IS JOURNEY metaphor, for instance, erection is construed as the starting point and ejaculation (orgasm) is the final destination.

Asian languages provide further evidence of metaphorical diversity in sexual discourse. Yu (1998), for instance, shows that in Chinese, sexual activity is frequently conceptualized through *food* and *eating* metaphors. For example, expressions such as *chī* 'to eat' or *chī xiāròu* 'to eat shrimp meat' euphemistically encode sexual acts. These metaphors reflect cultural associations of sex with consumption, pleasure, and indulgence, while simultaneously softening the obscenity of direct terms. Such food-based metaphors parallel, yet differ from, Nigerian (African) "slanguage" where fruits like *mango* and *banana* are metaphorically extended to sexuality (Mensah & Nkamigbo 2016).

Youth language can reveal youth-based identity and linguistic ideology, as Mensah (2025) suggests. In African youth discourse, metaphors have a particularly important role. Mensah and Nkamigbo (2016), for example, show how Nigerian youth deploy a rich repertoire of sexual metaphors as part of their "slanguage", using domains like *food* (e.g., TO EAT MANGO for SEX) and *war* (e.g., TO FIRE for INTERCOURSE). These metaphors are not only euphemistic but also serve

as markers of in-group identity. This reinforces solidarity and cultural belonging. Yakub (2020) observed that the Nzema youth, to conform to politeness, describe SEXUAL INTERCOURSE as READING A BOOK, since the woman's legs may be opened apart during sex, just as in reading a book. Another study conducted by Yakub, Lomotey, Thompson and Kwaw (2025) showed that the Nzema male youth construe SEXUAL INTERCOURSE as WATERING A CROP, and as PUTTING DRIPS IN A WOMAN. These conceptualizations are based on the fact that sex deals with the release of semen into the woman. By resorting to such metaphorical euphemisms, the speakers avoid obscenity and demonstrate communicative competence.

Despite this rich global literature, studies of African sexual metaphors remain relatively limited, and few have examined the role of *football* as a metaphorical source domain. This is particularly striking given the centrality of football in many African societies, where the sport provides not only entertainment but also a shared cultural repertoire for identity and expression. This study contributes to filling that gap by documenting how Nzema youth use football registers to encode sexual relationships and activities. By situating Nzema data within the broader tradition of sexual metaphor studies, this section establishes that football metaphors are part of a larger phenomenon: the use of familiar, culturally salient domains to euphemistically encode sex.

3. Theoretical background

3.1 Conceptual metaphor theory (CMT)

Traditionally, metaphor, among other figurative tropes such as simile, hyperbole, idioms and proverbs, was noted for its ornamental role in language and literature. However, in their groundbreaking work *Metaphors we live by* (Lakoff & Johnson 1980), metaphors are conceptualized in a fundamentally different way. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that metaphors are not simply poetic parts of speech, or obscure idiomatic expressions, but rather part of our entire cognitive reasoning through which we are able to understand and talk about our social world. Thus, they observe that "the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 5). Recognising the significant place of the cognitive aspects of metaphor in understanding our day-to-day experiences, Steen (2011: 28) states that "metaphor has turned out to be a conceptual mechanism, a 'figure of thought' by which specific and operational knowledge about more concrete phenomena and experience is projected onto a wide range of more abstract ones".

According to CMT, abstract domains (targets) are understood in terms of more concrete, familiar domains (sources). This mapping allows people to conceptualize sensitive, intangible, or complex experiences in more tangible terms (Gibbs 1994, 2008; Steen 2011; Agyekum 2013; Diaz-Vera 2022; Kövecses 2002). For instance, the metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY frames life events as movements along a path, with BIRTH as the STARTING POINT and DEATH as the FINAL DESTINATION (see Psomadakis 2007: 221-22).

CMT is particularly useful for analyzing how Nzema youth use football as a source domain to conceptualize sexuality. Sports, and football in particular, offer rich imagery for mapping competitive, strategic, and goal-driven aspects of human activity. A GOAL in football can be mapped onto CONCEPTION, or a RED CARD onto JILTING A PARTNER. In this study, CMT provides the main framework for identifying and interpreting these conceptual mappings between football and sexual discourse among Nzema youth. A detailed analysis of metaphors occurs in section 5. What is most crucial in this section is establishing CMT as the primary analytical tool, one that integrates seamlessly with the ethnographic data collected.

3.2 Euphemistic and politeness functions of metaphor

Euphemisms are strategies for avoiding taboo or offensive language (Allan & Burridge 2006; Agyekum 2010: 146; Crespo-Fernández 2022; Wardhaugh 2006). In the Nzema culture, direct references to sex, death, body parts, menstruation, or reproductive organs are culturally sensitive and may be considered obscene or inappropriate. They are, hence, often avoided in polite conversation. Euphemism, therefore, serves as a shield, softening or concealing expressions that would otherwise be considered obscene. In this study, football metaphors function as such euphemisms – for example, RED JERSEY for MENSTRUATION, or EXTRAMARITAL SEX for AWAY MATCH.

From a politeness perspective, Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework helps to explain how these metaphors operate as "off-record" strategies. By using metaphorical indirection, speakers preserve both positive face (avoiding embarrassment) and negative face (avoiding imposition) (see Goffman 1967; Leech 1983). By likening sexual activities to football matches – e.g., BAD FOOTBALL PARK AS UNTIDY VAGINA, or PREGNANCY AS CATCHING A BALL – the youth can communicate sensitive information while mitigating potential embarrassment or offense. Football metaphors thus not only describe sexual experiences but also manage the interpersonal dynamics of youth discourse. In short, euphemism and politeness are treated here as functions of metaphorical language use,

not as competing theories. They help explain why Nzema youth prefer football metaphors over direct sexual language: the metaphors make sensitive topics socially acceptable and preserve the speaker's image.

3.3 Code-mixing as a mechanism for metaphor use

The youth of Nzema's use of football metaphors occurs in a context of bilingualism, where Nzema functions as the matrix language and English football registers are embedded within it. This reflects what Myers-Scotton (1993) terms *code-mixing*, where lexical items from one language are inserted into another. In the present data, code-mixing is not the primary phenomenon of interest but rather the mechanism through which English football terms enter Nzema sexual discourse. Because many Nzema youth are ardent football fans, they have acquired football terminology through exposure to local and international matches. When these terms like BALL, RED CARD, STRIKER, DEFENDER, GOALKEEPER, RESERVED PLAYER, and REFEREE are embedded in sexual talk, they provide metaphorical resources that allow the youth to discuss sensitive topics indirectly. Thus, code-mixing here serves as a channel for metaphorical expression rather than a theoretical focus in itself.

4. Methodology

This study draws on ethnographic data collected between January 2020 and December 2021 through naturalistic observation and focus group discussions. Forty (40) Nzema male youth were purposely selected from four viewing centers during live football matches to participate in the focus group discussions. There were four focus groups, each comprising 10 participants. Each discussion lasted about 25-30 minutes. The discussions were focused mainly on understanding the metaphorical and euphemistic functions of the football terms embedded in the participants' sex-related discourses. These were recorded using a portable audio recorder, and were later transcribed and translated.

The participants were between 20 and 40 years of age and had varying levels of formal education, with most having at least secondary schooling. All were Nzema-English bilinguals and long-term football enthusiasts.[1] This explains their

[1] As we observed, the Nzema male youth, like their peers elsewhere, have developed so much "love" for football. Most of them are "self-affiliated" to some local (Ghana based) football teams like Accra Great Olympics, Accra Hearts of Oak, Kumasi Asante Kɔtɔkɔ, Nzema Kɔtɔkɔ, Karela United and Sekondi Hassacas. Many of them also support foreign

familiarity with football registers and ability to insert them into sexual discourse. Through observation, we obtained some of the data unobtrusively. The primary aim was to capture authentic instances of everyday interaction (Saville-Troike 2003; Hancock & Algozzine 2006; Duranti 1997), in which sexual topics are expressed metaphorically.

In the presentation of the excerpts, speakers' real names are anonymized through the use of pseudonyms. This is to align with ethical considerations. The excerpts are classified and examined under relevant themes that emerged. Adopting a thematic analysis allows for greater flexibility in the interpretation and analysis of data, as Braun and Clarke (2021) suggest.

5. Conceptualisation of sexual activities and relationships as a football game

This section presents excerpts that illustrate insertional code-mixing, with football terms highlighted in bold. The analysis demonstrates how these terms function metaphorically, mapping from the source domain of football to the target domain of sexual relationships. It also shows how the metaphors are used euphemistically to avoid obscenity and to preserve the face of interlocutors. Ethnographic backgrounds are provided to contextualise each excerpt. For each metaphor, the underlying conceptual mapping is identified and linked to the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). In addition, the pragmatic functions (euphemism and politeness) and the socio-cultural significance of the metaphors are explained.

5.1 Metaphors of sexual performance and outcomes

This subsection examines five metaphors that frame sexual performance and its outcomes: TO IMPREGNATE A WOMAN IS TO SCORE A GOAL, SEXUAL OUTCOMES ARE PENALTY SHOOTOUTS, VIGOROUS OR EXCITING SEXUAL PERFORMANCE IS WINNING A MATCH, POOR OR INADEQUATE SEXUAL PERFORMANCE IS LOSING A FOOTBALL MATCH, and SEX THROUGHOUT THE NIGHT IS A FULL-TIME MATCH. Collectively, these metaphors highlight how Nzema male youth conceptualise sexual encounters in terms of competition, stamina, success, and failure, reflecting broader cultural values associated with football (Lakoff & Johnson 1980; Kövecses 2002, 2010; Goatly 2007; Charteris-Black 2005).

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clubs, including Arsenal, Barcelona, Chelsea, Manchester United, Real Madrid, and Liverpool. Their delight in football has resulted in the pervasive use of some football terminologies in their sexual communication, in which we are interested in this study.

5.1.1 To impregnate a woman is to score a goal

Background: [Speaker X challenges his friend (Y) to prove his ability to make his wife conceive. Y responds by revealing that he has already impregnated her.]

Excerpt 1:

X---- (Tells Y jovially):

Ɛ-gyale	*bɛlɛra*	*ne*	*la*	*ɛ-hyɛ*	*ɔti*	*kile*	*kɛ*
2SG-marry	lady	DEF	PART	PERF-keep.long	CONJ	show	COMP

ɛ-le	*nrenyia*.
2SG-COP	man

'You have been married to that lady for quite some time, so prove that you are really potent'.

Y---- *Saa*	*ɛ-n-ze*	*a*	*me-se*	*wɔ*	*kɛ*	*me*
COND	2SG-NEG-know	PART	2SG-tell	2SG	COMP	2SG.PERF

[***score goal***]	*dɛba-dɛba*.
EL	old-RED

'If you don't know, I'm telling you: I've already **scored a goal**'.

The metaphor ***to score a goal,*** as illustrated in Excerpt 1, is used by the Nzema youth to describe impregnation. Within CMT, this metaphor is conceptually grounded in the schema SEXUAL INTERCOURSE IS A FOOTBALL GAME, with CONCEPTION IS GOAL SCORING. In football, the aim of the striker is to direct the ball into the opponent's net, resulting in a goal. This maps onto conception, where the sperm successfully reaches and fertilizes the egg. Just as a goal requires accuracy, timing, and strategy, pregnancy is construed as the successful outcome of sexual intercourse. Pragmatically, ***to score a goal*** provides a figurative and socially acceptable way to talk about pregnancy. Rather than using the direct expression *ɔlɛnrenzɛ* 'she is pregnant', which may sound blunt, Nzema youth resort to a playful football imagery. This euphemism functions as an off-record politeness strategy (Brown & Levinson 1987), softening potentially sensitive talk about fertility and protecting against social embarrassment.[2] It also aligns with older Nzema euphemisms for pregnancy (e.g., *yevo anwuma*

[2] Culturally, a major reason for using euphemisms for *ɛnrenzɛlɛ* 'pregnancy' among the Nzema, is to hide the condition from certain assumed evil forces that might attack the pregnant woman (and her unborn baby).

'she has climbed up'), reflecting a cultural preference for indirect reference to conception. Culturally, the metaphor reveals the importance of pregnancy in Nzema society as a source of pride, joy, and masculine validation. Just as scoring a goal in football is the pinnacle of achievement, impregnating a wife is framed as the ultimate proof of virility. The use of figurative language also reflects local beliefs about protecting pregnant women from spiritual harm: indirect pronouncements of pregnancy are thought to shield the expectant mother from evil forces. The football metaphor ***to score a goal***, therefore, not only euphemizes but also embeds pregnancy within broader cultural ideologies of masculinity, fertility, and spiritual protection. During the focus group discussions, the participants unanimously mentioned that the expression *mebɔ medo nu* 'I have kicked it (the ball) inside', can also be used to imply that a man has impregnated a woman.

5.1.2 Vigorous/exciting sexual performance is winning a match

Background: [Speaker A complains that he cannot satisfy his wife sexually. His friend advises him to seek medication and boasts that he always "wins the match and takes 3 points".]

Excerpt 2:

A----	*Ɔwɔ*	*kɛ*	*me-kpondɛ*	*ayile*	*ndɛ-ndɛ*	*me-yɛ,*	*ɔluakɛ*
	Must	COMP	1SG-search	medicine	quick-RED	1SG-do	CONJ
	kenle	*nsa*	*ye*				
	time	recent	DEF				
	Me-n-gola	*me*	*nee*	*me*	*ye*	*ɛn-yia*	*ɛkpa*
	1SG-NEG-can	1SG	CONJ	1SG.POSS	wife	NEG-meet	bed
	zo	*kpalɛ.*					
	top	well					

'I need to get some medication right away: I just can't satisfy my wife these days'.

B----	*Ɛhɛe,*	*kpondɛ*	*ayile*	*yɛ.*	*Ma-me*	*me-le*
	Yes	search	medicine	do	EMPH-1SG	1SG-COP
	nrenyia	*kpalɛ;*	*me-yia*	*me*	*ye*	
	man	well	1SG-meet	1SG.POSS	wife	
	biala	*a*	*me*	[***win match***]	*ne*	*me-nyia*

anytime	PART	1SG	EL	DEF	1SG-get
me	[***3 points***].				
1SG.POSS	EL				

'Yes, you better do that. As for me, I'm a real man – whenever I'm with my wife, I **win** the **match** and take my **three points**'.

The metaphor ***winning a match*** is used by Nzema youth to describe being vigorous and attaining satisfaction during sexual intercourse. Within CMT, this metaphor conceptually draws on the schema SEXUAL INTERCOURSE IS A FOOTBALL GAME, with SEXUAL SUCCESS IS WINNING. In football, winning requires stamina, skills, strategies, and confidence, culminating in joy and celebration. This schema maps onto sex, where vigorous, satisfying intercourse is construed as a "win" that results in mutual happiness. The mention of ***3 points*** extends the mapping, symbolizing the REWARD or BENEFIT derived from success in both football and sexual performance. Pragmatically, ***to win a match*** provides a euphemistic substitute for the direct, vulgar expression *medi me ye kpalɛ* 'I fuck my wife very well'. The football metaphor makes the reference less obscene and more socially acceptable, especially in peer conversations. By embedding the idea in sporting terms, the speaker uses humour and indirection to avoid face-threatening or morally charged language. This functions as an off-record politeness strategy (Brown & Levinson, 1987), allowing the speaker to boast about his sexual prowess while mitigating the risk of sounding vulgar. Culturally, the metaphor reflects the importance placed on male sexual performance as a marker of masculinity. Just as winning a football match brings honour, pride, and reward, satisfying a woman sexually is framed as a masculine achievement that earns recognition and symbolic ***points***. The metaphor also encodes the reciprocal dimension of sexual relationships: rewards (such as affection, praise, or special meals) mirror the symbolic prizes of a football victory. This reveals the extent to which football discourse shapes not only the language but also the cultural values attached to sexuality, framing virility as competition, performance, and reward.

5.1.3 Poor or inadequate sexual performance is losing a football match

Background: [Speaker A laments to his friend that, after finally persuading a woman to accept his proposal, he performed poorly during intercourse. He describes this as "losing a match".]

Excerpt 3:

A----	*Me-bɔ*	*me*	*nwo*	*anyiamgba*	*tɔ.*
	1SG.PERF-do	1SG	self	shame	entirely
	'I have completely disgraced myself'.				

B----	*Duzu*	*a*	*zi-le*	*a?*
	QUES	PART	happen-PST	PART
	'What happened?'			

A----	*Bɛlɛra bie*	*ɛ-kponle*	*zo*	*ɛ-ra*	*me*	*sua*
	Lady	certain	PERF-agree	top	PERF-come	1SG.POSS
	nu,	*noko*	*me.*	[***lose match***]	*ne*	
	house	inside CONJ	1SG.PERF	EL	DEF	
	'A lady I had been chasing for a while finally agreed to visit me – but I **lost the match**'.					

The youth of Nzema use the expression ***losing a match*** to describe poor or inadequate performance during sexual intercourse. Conceptually, this metaphor is also grounded in the schema SEXUAL INTERCOURSE IS A FOOTBALL GAME, with POOR/INADEQUATE PERFORMANCE AS LOSING A MATCH. In football, losing reflects the team's inability to achieve its goal, often due to a lack of preparation, commitment, weakness, or tactical errors. This is mapped onto sexual activity, where the man's inability to satisfy his partner or sustain performance is framed as losing the match. Just as defeat in football is disappointing, sexual underperformance is constructed as a failure that results in shame. Pragmatically, the expression ***to lose a match*** provides a euphemistic way of discussing a sensitive, face-threatening issue – male sexual inadequacy. Instead of bluntly admitting *meangola raalɛ ne di* 'I performed poorly in sex', the speaker couches the confession in sporting language. This humour-laden euphemism makes the disclosure more socially palatable among peers while still communicating the sense of failure. It functions as an off-record politeness strategy (Brown & Levinson 1987), softening embarrassment through indirection. By likening poor sexual performance to ***losing a match***, the metaphor underscores masculinity as tied to notions of endurance, success, and achievement. Failure in this domain is thus equated with both personal shame and social ridicule, mirroring the stigma of defeat in competitive sport. The metaphor also hints at the investment of material and emotional "resources" in both football and sexual encounters, where loss entails not only disappointment but also wasted effort or expense.

5.1.4 Sex throughout the night is a full-time match

Background: [Speaker X tells his friend that he needs rest because he did not sleep the previous night. When asked why, he explains that he "played a full-time match", implying sexual activity that lasted until morning.]

Excerpt 4:

X---- *Ɛnɛ me-hyia nwomenlelielɛ dɔɔnwo, ɔluakɛ me-an-la nɔɔ ye.*
Today 1SG-require rest plenty COMP 1SG-NEG-sleep night
'I need to get some rest today – I barely slept last night'.

Y---- *Duzu ati a wɔ-an-la a?*
QUES reason PART 2SG-NEG-sleep PART
'What kept you up?'

X---- *Me-mbɔ-le* [***fulltime match***] *mɔɔ ɛnee ɔ-n-la aze fee.*
1SG-play-PST EL COMP then 3SG-NEG-lie down at all
'I played a **full-time match**, and it was a tough one'.

In this sex related discourse context, the expression ***to play a full-time match*** is used by Nzema youth to describe engaging in sex throughout the night. Within CMT, this metaphor is grounded in the schema SEXUAL INTERCOURSE IS A FOOTBALL GAME, with PROLONGED SEX IS PLAYING FULL-TIME. In football, a player who completes the ***full-time*** remains active for both halves of the match, exhausting the full ninety minutes. This schema is mapped onto sexual activity by equating a night of prolonged intercourse to playing a complete game – demanding stamina, endurance, and continuous participation. Pragmatically, the metaphor functions as a euphemistic substitute for the direct expression *meli ye too aleɛ ɛhye* 'I had sex with her till daybreak', which may sound vulgar. This indirection represents an off-record politeness strategy (Brown & Levinson 1987), mitigating the face-threatening act of explicitly recounting sexual activity and allowing peers to discuss intimate experiences in a socially acceptable, even humorous, way. Socio-culturally, the metaphor reflects the prominence of football in Nzema youth life, where stamina and endurance in play are admired qualities. Mapping these values onto sexual activity constructs masculinity in terms of sporting achievement, reinforcing ideologies of male virility and sexual prowess. The distinction between a ***full-time match*** (all-night encounter) and a shorter encounter before curfew also reflects the lived realities of youth relationships, where time and space constraints shape sexual practice.

5.1.5 Sexual outcomes are penalty shootouts

Background: [Speaker A confesses to his friend that he had unprotected sex with his fiancée and fears the possible outcome. His friend compares the situation to a penalty shootout.]

Excerpt 5:

A--	*Ɛnee*	*me-kulo*	*kɛ*	*me-gya*	*bɛlɛra*	*ne*	*na*	*ye-ava*	*ɛkolɛ,*
	Then	1SG-wish	COMP	1SG-marry	lady	DEF	CONJ	3SG-take	stomach
	noko	*anoma*							
	CONJ	yesterday							
	me	*nee*	*ye*	*yia-le*	*wɔ*	*mekɛ*	*mɔɔ*	*me-am-bɔ*	*me*
	1SG	CONJ	3SG	meet-PST	at	time	COMP	1SG-NEG-do	1SG
	nwo	*bane*							
	self	protection							

'I wanted to complete the full marriage rites before my fiancée got pregnant – but I ended up sleeping with her without any protection'.

B--	*Ɛhye le*	[***penalty***]*;*	*awie*	*n-ze*	*mɔɔ*	*ba-zi,*	*kyesɛɛ*
	This COP	EL	person	NEG-know	COMP	FUT-happen	until
	ye	*siane*	*ne*	*dwu.*			
	3SG	month	DEF	reach			

'Ah, that is a **penalty**! No one knows what will happen until her period is due'.

The last of the set of metaphors on sexual performance and outcomes is SEXUAL OUTCOMES ARE PENALTY SHOOTOUTS. As excerpt 5 illustrates, the football expression ***penalty*** is used by Nzema youth to describe the uncertainty that follows unprotected sexual intercourse, particularly regarding whether conception will occur. Just like the preceding ones, this metaphor also draws on the schema SEXUAL INTERCOURSE IS A FOOTBALL GAME. In football, a penalty is inherently uncertain: the ball may score, miss, or be blocked. This indeterminacy is mapped onto the unpredictability of pregnancy after sex. Just as spectators wait anxiously to see whether a penalty succeeds, sexual partners wait anxiously to see whether pregnancy results, especially after unprotected sex. Instead of bluntly saying *ɔbayɛ ɛnrenzɛlɛ* 'she might be pregnant', which could be face-threatening or morally charged, speakers frame the situation humorously within the football register. This euphemistic substitution softens the anxiety of the situation while maintaining group solidarity, functioning as an off-record politeness strategy (Brown & Levinson 1987). By comparing the

possibility of pregnancy to a ***penalty shootout***, the metaphor reflects broader masculine ideologies that normalize male-centered perspectives on sexual risk while treating reproduction as a kind of competitive gamble.

5.2 Metaphors of promiscuity and role assignment

This subsection examines three metaphors that conceptualize promiscuity and partner roles: A PROMISCUOUS MAN IS A STRIKER, A CONCUBINE IS A RESERVED PLAYER, and EXTRAMARITAL SEX IS AN AWAY MATCH. These metaphors highlight how Nzema male youth frame sexual behaviour in terms of football strategies, roles, and locations, thereby encoding partner dynamics and transgressive sexual activity in indirect, culturally resonant ways.

5.2.1 A promiscuous guy who impregnates many women is a striker

Background: [KK expresses concern about his younger brother's behaviour. He explains to Speaker BB that his brother is "a good striker", meaning promiscuous and responsible for several pregnancies.]

Excerpt 6:

KK---- *Me diema ekyi ne nyɛleɛ bɔbɔ yɛ me nwanwane.*
1SG.POSS brother little DEF behaviour even make 1SG surprise
'My younger brother's behaviour really amazes me'.

BB---- *Duzu bieko a ye-yɛ a?*
QUES again PART 3SG.PERF-do PART
'What has he done this time?'

KK---- *Kpavolɛ zɔhane le* [***good striker***]; *ɛ-ye m-bɛlɛra nwiɔ*
ne ɛ-sie ahane a.
Guy that COP EL 2SG-take PL-lady two
DEF 2SG-place aside
bieko se ɔ nee ye ɛ-nrenzɛ PART.
another say 3SG CONJ 3SG PERF-pregnant
'That guy is a **good striker**! Apart from those two ladies, another one has just come out to say he is responsible for her pregnancy'.

The expression ***striker*** is employed to describe a promiscuous man who engages in multiple sexual relationships and impregnates women. Conceptually,

this relies on the schema SEXUAL ACTIVITY IS A FOOTBALL GAME, and more specifically, A PROMISCUOUS MAN IS A STRIKER. In football, the striker's key role is to score goals across many matches. This is mapped onto sexual behaviour: a promiscuous man seeks multiple sexual partners, with 'scoring' conceptualized as impregnation. In pragmatic terms, ***striker*** provides an indirect and socially acceptable way of addressing promiscuity instead of bluntly accusing someone of being promiscuous or irresponsible (e.g., *ɛle alimraalɛ* 'you are promiscuous'). Socio-culturally, the metaphor reflects broader gender ideologies in which male promiscuity may be tolerated, or even valourized, when framed in terms of sporting success. By likening sexual conquest to goal scoring, the metaphor constructs masculinity around fertility and sexual achievement. At the same time, it highlights the influence of football as a dominant cultural frame in the life of Nzema youth, where the striker role is associated with visibility, glory, and effectiveness. Thus, ***striker*** not only euphemizes promiscuity but also naturalizes it within a masculine, football-centered worldview, reinforcing gendered double standards that permit or even celebrate male sexual excess.

5.2.2 A concubine is a reserve player

Background: [Speaker A tells his friend that he plans to abstain from sex because his wife has recently delivered. His friend advises him to get a "reserve player", that is, a concubine.]

Excerpt 7:

A--	*Kɛmɔ*	*me*	*ye*	*wo-le*	*tɛ-kyɛle*	*la*	*me-nrɛ-hɔ*	*ɔ*
	Since	1SG.POSS	wife	deliver-PST	NEG-long	PART	1SG-NEG-go	3SG
	nwo	*kɛkala.*						
	body	now						
	'Since my wife just gave birth, I can't make love to her anytime soon'.							

B--	*Kɛmɔti?*	*Me*	*gɔnwo,*	*yɛ*	*kpondɛ*	[***reserve player***],
	QUES	1SG.POSS	friend	do	search	EL
	ɔluakɛ	*nrenyia*	*ɛdeɛ*			
	CONJ	man	EMPH			
	ɔ-n-le	*kpalɛ*	*kɛ*	*ɛ-kye*	*ɛ*	*nwo*
	3SG-NEG-COP	good	COMP	2SG-catch	2SG.POSS	body
	ɛhɔne	*zɔhane*				
	hunger	this way				
	'Why is that? My friend, you should get yourself a **reserve player** – it's not good for a man to starve himself like this'.					

The expression ***reserve player*** is employed by Nzema youth to describe a concubine or side partner. Conceptually, this metaphor draws on the schema SEXUAL PARTNERSHIP IS A FOOTBALL TEAM, with A CONCUBINE IS A RESERVE PLAYER. In football, ***a reserve player*** is a substitute for the main or "key" player when the latter is unavailable due to fatigue, injury, or disciplinary reasons. By mapping this schema onto sexual relationships, a concubine becomes the ***reserve*** who steps in when the wife (the ***key player***) is temporarily unavailable due to childbirth, illness, or absence. Pragmatically, the metaphor provides a socially acceptable way of referring to concubinage instead of using a direct phrase: *kpondɛ raalɛ mɔɔ ɛdi ye ahanle a* 'to get a mistress'. It minimizes the potential face threat in discussing infidelity, recasting it as a matter of substitution in a game rather than a breach of marital norms. Culturally, the metaphor reflects broader social ideologies around masculinity, sexuality, and polygyny (Connell 1995; Goatly 2007; Charteris-Black 2005). It normalizes the idea that man's sexual needs must always be met, even if the wife is temporarily unavailable. This, thereby, reinforces gendered double standards that tolerate or even encourage male concubinage. By conceptualizing concubines as ***reserve players***, the metaphor naturalizes extramarital arrangements within a framework of necessity and play, making them appear less morally transgressive and more culturally intelligible.

5.2.3 Extramarital sex is an away match

Background: [A young man tells his friend about his sexual encounter outside his marriage. He describes this as an "away match", borrowing the term from the domain of football to euphemistically express extramarital sex.]

Excerpt 8:

A---	*Kɛkala,*	*me*	*nwo*	*ɛlɛ-kyele*	*me*	*wɔ*	*me*	*ye*	*asa*	*nu.*
	Now	1SG	self	PROG-suffer	1SG	in	1SG.POSS	wife	hand	inside
	'These days, I'm really suffering at the hands of my wife'.									

B---	*Kɛmɔti*	*a*	*ɛ-maa*	*raalɛ*	*gyegye*	*wɔ*	*wɔ*	*ɛbɛlabɔlɛ*	*nu*	*ɛ?*
	QUES	PART	2SG-let	woman	disturb	2SG	in	life	inside	PART
	'Why do you let a woman embarrass you like that?'									

A---	*Me-ngɔ-mbɔ-le*	[***away match***]	*yɛɛ*	*awie*	*ɛ-ze*	*me*	*ye*		
	1SG-go-play-PST	EL	CONJ	someone	PERF-inform	1SG.POSS	wife		
	ɔti	*ɔ*	*nee*	*me*	*di*	*butule*	*dahuu.*		
	so	3SG	CONJ	1SG	eat	quarrel	always		

'I played an **away match** the other day, and it seems someone told her – that is why she quarrels with me almost every day'.

One striking metaphor used by Nzema male youth, as illustrated in Excerpt 8, is AWAY MATCH to describe EXTRAMARITAL or clandestine sexual encounters. From a CMT perspective, this metaphor is grounded in the conceptual mapping SEXUAL RELATIONS ARE FOOTBALL GAMES. In football, a "home match" represents safety, legitimacy, and territorial advantage, while an "away match" implies risk, uncertainty, and the challenge of competing on foreign ground. By mapping EXTRAMARITAL SEX onto an AWAY MATCH, the youth of Nzema conceptualize such relationships as taking place outside the legitimate domain of the marital home, often involving secrecy and heightened risk. The metaphor also serves an important euphemistic function. Instead of explicitly labelling sexual infidelity (as in, *mehɔli raalɛ gyɛne wɔ ahane* 'I went to have sex with another woman beside my wife'), which would be considered obscene or socially offensive, the youth deploy a light-hearted football expression. This strategy allows them to talk around the taboo (i.e., EXTRAMARITAL SEX) while still conveying the intended meaning (Allan & Burridge 2006; Wardhaugh 2006). From a politeness perspective (Brown & Levinson 1987), the expression constitutes an off-record strategy, reducing face-threatening directness and softening judgment in peer conversations. Culturally, this metaphor reflects the centrality of football in the life of Nzema youth. Thus, the terms in football provide a shared semiotic resource for framing sexual talk. The choice of ***away match*** underscores how deeply sports metaphors are embedded in local discourse, enabling youth to encode morally delicate topics through a familiar and socially acceptable frame.

5.3 Metaphors of bodily states and temporality

This subsection focuses on three metaphors that describe sexual and reproductive states: A PREGNANT WOMAN IS A GOALKEEPER, MENSTRUATION IS A RED JERSEY, and THE VAGINA IS A FOOTBALL PITCH. These metaphors draw on football imagery to euphemistically encode bodily conditions, menstrual cycles, and perceptions of sexual desirability, reflecting both cultural sensitivities and gendered perspectives in Nzema discourse.

5.3.1 A pregnant woman is a goalkeeper

Background: [In a discussion about a lady's pregnancy, a young man refers to her as a "goalkeeper", drawing on football imagery to describe her condition.]

Excerpt 9:

A---- (Inquires from B):

Bɛlɛra	*ne*	*mɔɔ*	*ɔ*	*ze*	*hye-le*	*kpavolɛ*	*ne*	*do-le*
Lady	DEF	COMP	3SG.POSS	father	arrest-PST	guy	DEF	put-PST

nu	*la*	*wɔ*	*ni?*
inside	PART at	QUES	

'Where is the lady whose father had that guy arrested (for dating her)?'

B---- *Kɛkala* *ɔ-le* [***goalkeeper***] *ye-hye* [***catch ball***],
Now 3SG-COP EL 3SG.PERF-grab EL

ɔti	*ye-du*	*ɛke.*
CONJ	3SG.PERF-leave	here

'She is a **goalkeeper** now – she finally **caught the ball** and moved out of the community'.

The expression ***goalkeeper*** is used by Nzema youth to refer to a pregnant woman. Conceptually, this reflects the metaphor PREGNANCY IS GOALKEEPING, which is also part of the broader schema SEXUAL ACTIVITY IS A FOOTBALL GAME. In football, the assigned role of the goalkeeper is to 'catch' or 'stop' the ball, preventing it from reaching the net. Mapped onto sexuality, the woman is metaphorically positioned as the one who ***catches the ball***; that is, conceives and carries a pregnancy. The period elapsing between catching the ball and releasing it to the field can correlate with a pregnancy that takes nine months. One can even argue that the case where a goalkeeper delays the ball unduly after catching it is conceptually synonymous with women whose pregnancies go beyond nine months. Pragmatically, the metaphor functions as a euphemism replacing a more direct statement: *yenrenzɛ* 'she has become pregnant'. In politeness terms, this represents an off-record strategy (Brown & Levinson 1987), softening the potential face-threatening act of referring to a woman's reproductive status. By describing a pregnant woman as a ***goalkeeper***, Nzema speakers draw on a role that is both highly visible and essential in the game, underscoring the centrality of pregnancy in social life. At the same time, the metaphor frames pregnancy in terms of male-centered sporting imagery, reflecting gendered perspectives in which women are positioned in relation to men's goals (Charteris-Black 2005).

5.3.2 Menstruation is red jersey

Background: [A young man explains to his friend why his partner is currently unavailable for sex.]

Excerpt 10:

A---	*Me-nwu-nle*	*wɔ*	*sonla*	*ne*	*wɔ*	*ɛke*	*anoma*	*ɔti*
	1SG-see-PST	2SG.POSS	person	DEF	at	here	yesterday	CONJ
	me-suzu	*kɛ*	*bɛ-lie*	*bɛ*	*nye*	*nɔe.*		
	1SG-guess	COMP	2PL-enjoy	2PL.POSS	eye.PL	night		

'I saw your fiancée here yesterday, so I'm sure you two had a good time last night'.

B---	*Ɔ-le*	*zɔ*	*kɛ*	*ɔ-ra-le*	*noko*	*ɛnee*	[***Kɔtɔkɔ***]	*nee*
	3SG-COP	true	COMP	3SG-come-PST	CONJ	then	EL	CONJ
	[***Manchester***]	*ɛ-yia*	[***park***]	*ne*	*azo.*			
	EL	PERF-meet	EL	DEF	top			

'It is true she came here, but **Kɔtɔkɔ** and **Manchester** were on the **park** (pitch)'.

Kɔtɔkɔ and Manchester United are Ghana-based and England-based football teams, respectively. Players of these teams are predominantly noted for wearing red jerseys, as those in the Chelsea team, for instance, are noted for wearing blue jerseys. In excerpt 10, the expression *Kɔtɔkɔ nee Manchester ɛyia park ne azo* '***Kɔtɔkɔ*** and ***Manchester*** were on the ***park***', alludes to red color (red jersey), which implies that the fiancée was menstruating. Since a direct statement like *ɛnee yeyɛ fualɛ* 'she had menstruated' would sound unpleasant and face-threatening, the speaker employs ***Kɔtɔkɔ*** and ***Manchester*** as having met on the football pitch (while wearing their usual red jerseys). The metaphor arises from a simple association: in football, a jersey is a visible marker of team identity, while ***red*** color is a significant feature of menstruation. This reflects the conceptual metaphor BODILY STATES ARE UNIFORMS OR SIGNS (cf. Lakoff & Johnson 1980; Kövecses 2010; Charteris-Black 2004). Its euphemistic function is clear: *fualɛ* 'menstruation' is a taboo subject in Nzema culture, and direct references to it are avoided, just like in other Ghanaian cultures such as Akan (Agyekum 2002). Agyekum (2002) observes that in Akan, menstruation is viewed as messy, revolting, and polluted – something to be avoided (see Agyekum 2002: 367). By framing menstruation as ***wearing a red jersey***, the youth can talk about it indirectly. From a politeness standpoint, this expression demonstrates speakers' communicative competence and avoids threatening the positive face of women by concealing a potentially embarrassing biological fact. Culturally, the metaphor is powerful because a jersey is a temporary attire, as one wears it for a period and then removes it. By extension, menstruation is framed as a temporary condition, recurring but not permanent. This aligns with broader cultural notions of

cyclical time and bodily change (cf. Buckley & Gottlieb 1988; Delaney, Lupton & Toth 1988), while reinforcing football as a central frame for interpreting even private biological experiences.

5.3.3 Untidy vagina is bad football park

Background: [A young man complains about the condition of a lady's genitalia, likening it to a "bad football park".]

Excerpt 11:

KO---	*Me-bɔ*	*wɔ*	*amaneɛ*	*kɛ*	*ɛkenle*	*me-nyia-le*		*bɛlɛra*	*kɛnlɛma*
	1SG-tell	2SG	message	COMP	last	1SG-meet-PST		lady	pretty
	bie	*ɔ*?							
	certain	QUES							
	'Have I told you that I met a certain beautiful lady the other day?'								
JY---	*Kyɛkyɛ,*	*ɛ-tɛ-bɔle*		*me*	*amaneɛ.*				
	No	2SG.PERF-NEG-tell		1SG	message				
	'No, you haven't mentioned it'.								
KO---	*Me*	*gɔnwo,*	*ɔ-le*	*kɛnlɛma*	*bɔkɔɔ*	*na*	[***park***]	*ne*	*azo*
	1SG.POSS	friend	3SG-COP	pretty	indeed	CONJ	EL	DEF	top
	le	[***bad***].							
	COP	EL							
	'My friend, she is truly pretty, but the **park** (pitch) is **bad**'.								

The metaphor ***bad football park*** is used by Nzema youth to describe an unhygienic or untidy vagina. Just as a football pitch enables smooth play, the vagina is conceptualized as the field on which sexual "play" occurs. A ***bad*** or poorly maintained pitch hampers performance, just as poor hygiene in sexual contexts diminishes satisfaction. Euphemistically, this metaphor allows Nzema speakers to avoid directly naming female genitalia *todɔlɛ* 'vagina', which is considered offensive or vulgar. Furthermore, the speaker uses ***bad football park*** to avoid a direct and derogatory expression in Nzema, such as *ɔ todɔ ɛnyɛ fɛ fee* 'her vagina is unkempt and disgusting'. Politeness theory helps explain this strategy: by using a playful football metaphor, speakers can criticize indirectly, avoiding direct offense and preserving social harmony. Culturally, the metaphor highlights the evaluative judgments that the youth place on sexual partners by linking women's desirability to the quality of a football field. This reflects broader gender ideologies in which women's bodies are subjected to cultural scrutiny (Bordo

1993; Foucault 1978), while also illustrating how football metaphors, rooted in a male-dominated domain, naturalize masculine perspectives on sexuality (Connell 1995; Goatly 2007; Charteris-Black 2005).

5.4 Metaphors of protection and defense

This subsection addresses a single metaphor: A CONDOM IS A DEFENDER. Here, the condom is likened to a football defender who prevents goals, metaphorically representing protection against pregnancy and disease. The metaphor reflects both the practical function of condoms and the cultural need to discuss them indirectly in sexual discourse.

5.4.1 Condom as a defender

Background: [Speaker X tells his friend that he has a sexual encounter planned, but has no condom. His friend responds that he also does not have one, using the word "defender" to stand in for a condom.]

Excerpt 12:

X--	*Me-lɛ*	[***match***]	*bie*	*me-bɔ*	*ye*	*nɔe*	*o,*	*na*	*me-n-lɛ*	
	1SG-have	EL	certain	1SG-play	3SG	night	EMPH	CONJ	1SG-NEG-have	
	[***defender***].									
	EL									

'I have got a **match** to play tonight, but I don't have a **defender**'.

Y--	*Me-dame*	*noko*	*me-n-lɛ*	*bie,*	*ɔti*	*nea*	*ɛleka*	*fofolɛ*	*na*	
	1SG-EMPH	also	1SG-NEG-have	some	COMP	check	place	new	CONJ	
	tɔ	*bie.*								
	buy	some								

'I don't have any either, so you will have to check elsewhere and buy some'.

The football term ***defender*** is used by Nzema youth to conceptualize a condom in sexual discourse. This is based on the schema PROTECTION IS DEFENSE. In football, defenders support the goalkeeper by blocking opponents from scoring. Just as defenders are crucial in preventing goals, the condom is framed as crucial in preventing pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections. In Ghanaian rural contexts, condoms are often the most accessible and recognized contraceptive method, and likening them to ***defenders*** underscores their protective role. At the same time, the metaphor reflects masculine-centered perspectives in which sexual intercourse is framed as a competitive game requiring strategy and

defense. Importantly, the metaphor also acknowledges the fallibility of condoms, just as defenders sometimes fail to block a goal, an observation that resonates with local understandings of risk.

5.5 Metaphors of discipline, warning, and termination

This subsection analyses two metaphors that encode disciplinary actions in relationships: WARNING A PARTNER IS ISSUING A YELLOW CARD and ENDING A RELATIONSHIP IS ISSUING A RED CARD. These metaphors draw on the disciplinary system of football to express relational tensions, signalling warning or termination while mitigating the bluntness of direct language.

5.5.1 Warning a partner is issuing a yellow card

Background: [Speaker A complains to his friend about his wife's continued bad behaviour. He explains that he has "issued her a yellow card", meaning he has warned her.]

Excerpt 13:

A---- *Agɔnwolɛ kpalɛ, wɔ-mɔ kɛkala me-suzu kɛ ɛ ye*
Friend good 2SG-EMPH now 1SG-guess COMP 2SG.POSS wife
anye ɛ-ha aze.
eye PERF-calm down
'My good friend, I suppose your wife has been behaving herself these days'.

B---- *Aa, ɔ-tɛ-kakyi-le na me-lɛ-yɛ ye bɛtɛ-bɛtɛ.*
Well 3SG-NEG-change-PAST CONJ 1SG-PROG-manage 3SG gradual-RED
'Well, not really, but I am managing her little by little'.

A---- *Me ye tɛ-kile ye subane ɛtane*
1SG.POSS wife still-show 3SG character bad
ne. Kɛkala ɔ-lɛ-fonle me ɔti me-maa
DEF Now 3SG-PROG-pass 1SG so 1SG.PERF-give
ye [***yellow card***].
3SG EL
'My wife continues to have a bad attitude. I am getting fed up, so I have issued her a **yellow card**'.

The expression ***yellow card*** is used to describe issuing a warning to a sexual partner or spouse. Conceptually, this draws on the schema WARNING

A PARTNER IS A YELLOW CARD. In football, ***a yellow card*** is shown to caution a player for foul play, signalling that repeated misconduct will lead to harsher punishment (***a red card***). This schema is mapped onto intimate relationships, where a partner's misbehaviour triggers a ***yellow card***, symbolizing a warning before more severe consequences, such as separation or divorce (the ***red card***). Instead of directly saying *mehakye me ye* 'I have warned my wife', which foregrounds conflict and the wife's misbehaviour, the football metaphor frames the warning playfully, softening the harshness of the act. It functions as an off-record politeness strategy (Brown & Levinson 1987), toning down the face-threatening potential of admitting marital discord. By invoking the imagery of ***yellow*** and ***red cards***, speakers draw on a globally recognized set of rules to structure relational discipline. This not only naturalizes the idea of progressive punishment in relationships but also highlights gendered dynamics where men frame themselves as referees who control the game (Connell 1995; Goatly 2007; Charteris-Black 2005). In doing so, the metaphor reinforces male authority within marital relationships while simultaneously making light of conflict by embedding it in the language of sport.

5.5.2 Jilting a partner is issuing a red card

Background: [A man recounts to his friend that he has decided to end his relationship with his partner. He describes this decision as giving her a "red card", meaning dismissal.]

Excerpt 14:

X---- *Mekɛ ɛhye, me-n-nyia raalɛ biala ɛn-do aleɛ ɛm-maa me o.*
Time this 1SG-NEG-get woman any NEG-cook food NEG-give me EMPH
'These days, I do not have any woman to prepare food for me'.

Y---- *Kɛmɔti? Wɔ nwewe kɔkɔlɛ kɛnlɛma ne ɛn-le ɛkɛ ɔ?*
QUES 2SG fiancée fair beautiful DEF NEG-live there PART
'Why is that? Is your beautiful fiancée not available?

X---- *Ye-mɔ me-maa ye* [***red card***] *dɛba-dɛba.*
3SG-EMPH 1SG.PERF-give 3SG EL old-RED
'As for that lady, I issued her a **red card** a long time ago'.

As excerpt 14 illustrates, another salient metaphor ***issuing a red card*** is used to describe jilting a partner. Within CMT, this draws on the mapping RELATIONSHIP

CONFLICT IS A FOOTBALL GAME. In football, a red card signifies a severe violation that results in immediate expulsion from the match. When applied to romantic relationships, the metaphor frames jilting as a decisive termination: just as a referee removes a player from the field, one partner ends the other's participation in the "game" of the relationship. The metaphor serves as an indirect and euphemistic substitute for the more face-threatening expression "to dump" or "to abandon" (as in, *bɛgyakyi ye* or *bɛbɔ ye ewole* 'he/she has been jilted or divorced').

5.6 Metaphors of mediation and social roles

This subsection considers one metaphor: A MEDIATOR IS A REFEREE. The metaphor captures the role of third parties in conflict resolution while framing it in playful, familiar football imagery.

5.6.1 A mediator between lovers is a referee

Background: [Speaker A complains to his cousin that his girlfriend is angry and refuses to visit him. The cousin advises him to seek a mediator, likening such a person to a referee.]

Excerpt 15:

A-- *Me* *nwewe* *ne* *ɛ-nyia* *me* *nwo* *ɛya;* *ɔ-m-ba*
1SG.POSS fiancée DEF PERF-get 1SG self anger 3SG-NEG-come
me *nwo* *ko.*
1SG.POSS body again
'My girlfriend is angry with me, and she hasn't been coming around'.

B-- *Saa* *ɔ-le* *zɔhane* *a,* *ɛnee* *bɛ-hyia* [***referee***]
COND 3SG-COP so PART then 2PL-need EL
'If that is the case, then it sounds like the two need a **referee**'.

The expression ***referee*** is used by the youth of Nzema to describe a mediator who resolves disputes between lovers. This metaphor is grounded in the schema A MEDIATOR BETWEEN LOVERS IS A REFEREE. The referee's role is to enforce rules, prevent unfairness, and settle disputes between opposing teams. By mapping this onto romantic relationships, the youth of Nzema conceptualize quarrels between partners as competitive interactions that require an impartial third party to ensure fairness and restore balance. The ***referee*** thus becomes the counsellor or mediator who facilitates reconciliation

between estranged lovers. The metaphor is used rather than a blunt expression *bɛhyia sonla mɔɔ kɛziezie bɛ avinli la* 'you need a mediator to settle the case between you', which might reveal that there is a conflict between the lovers. It functions as an off-record politeness strategy (Brown & Levinson 1987), reducing the potential embarrassment of openly admitting relationship troubles while still communicating the need for external intervention. By invoking the figure of ***a referee***, the metaphor naturalizes the idea that disputes in relationships, like those in football, are expected and resolvable through neutral arbitration. At the same time, the metaphor reflects broader social ideologies in which relationships are framed competitively, with lovers seen as players who may clash but must be guided by a regulating authority (Lakoff & Johnson 1980; Kövecses 2005).

6. Summary and conclusion

This study has examined how Nzema male youth metaphorically conceptualise sexual activities and relationships through the lens of football. Drawing on conversational data, it showed that football registers are inserted into sexual discourse via code-mixing and then mapped onto sexuality through Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). Expressions such as TO IMPREGNATE A WOMAN IS TO SCORE A GOAL, EXTRAMARITAL SEX IS AN AWAY MATCH, PREGNANCY IS GOALKEEPING, THE VAGINA IS A FOOTBALL PITCH, and WARNING A PARTNER IS ISSUING A YELLOW CARD demonstrate how football provides a rich source domain for encoding sensitive sexual topics. Beyond their metaphorical structure, these expressions perform important pragmatic functions. They serve as euphemisms that mitigate obscenity, preserve politeness, and allow speakers to show communicative competence as they navigate cultural taboos around sexuality. At the same time, they carry broader socio-cultural significance: they reflect ideologies of masculinity, where virility and sexual endurance are equated with sporting success; they naturalise gendered perspectives, framing women's bodies and roles through the logic of football; and they underscore the cultural centrality of football as a shared reference point in Nzema youth life. The study contributes to African metaphor scholarship by showing how football, a culturally salient practice, functions as a productive source domain for sexual discourse. It demonstrates that metaphors are not only cognitive mappings but also social resources that index cultural values, relational dynamics, and politeness strategies. Future research could extend this investigation by examining how women deploy or interpret these football metaphors, by comparing metaphorical practices across Ghanaian youth communities, or by exploring how such

metaphors evolve in online and digital communication. Such directions would enrich our understanding of how metaphors simultaneously encode cognition, pragmatics, and culture.

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Abbreviations:

1SG = 1st person singular
2SG = 2nd person singular
2PL = 2nd person plural
3SG = 3rd person singular
COMP = Complementizer
COND = Conditional marker
CONJ = Conjunction
COP = Copular
DEF = Definite article
EMPH = Emphatic morpheme
EL = Embedded language (English words/football terms inserted in the Nzema discourse)
FUT = Future marker
PL = Plural marker
PST = Past marker
PART = Particle
PERF = Perfect marker
POSS = Possessive marker
PROG = Progressive marker
NEG = Negative marker
QUES = Question marker
RED = Reduplicated morpheme

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The non-Swahili African component in Nubi: Evidence from lexicon and idiomatic structure

Abstract

The present article is an attempt at establishing the origins of Africanisms found in Nubi, a Sudanese Arabic-lexifier creole spoken in Uganda and Kenya, with a large number of substrate and adstrate languages. The focus is on loanwords and potential idiomatic calques which can be traced to African languages other than Swahili. Based on the criteria formulated in Haspelmath (2009) and Parkvall & Baker (2012), 93 loanwords and 5 potential idiomatic calques were identified. These results suggest that Nubi retains a South-Sudanic substrate more robust than previously recognised and reflect the growing influence of Luganda, one of its adstrate languages. The findings are also discussed with reference to the closely related Juba Arabic and to other pidgin and creole languages.

Keywords: Nubi, substrate, adstrate, loanwords, idiomatic calques

1. Introduction

Nubi is a Sudanese Arabic-lexifier creole, originating together with Juba Arabic in a pidginized form of Arabic which arose as an interethnic means of communication between Arab slave riders and local groups, generally labelled East African Pidgin Arabic. The Mahdist revolt, which started in 1881, eventually brought about the end of Turkish-Egyptian control over Equatoria, in southern Sudan. Following an invasion by Mahdist rebels, the governor fled to Uganda in

1888, accompanied by slave soldiers loyal to the central government. This forced population displacement marks the separation of Nubi from Juba Arabic, which further developed in southern Sudan. While some of the Nubi troops remained in Uganda, others were moved to Kenya and Tanzania in the late 1890s and early 1900s. This led to the dialectal division between Ugandan and Kenyan Nubi. Like the closely related Juba Arabic, Nubi started out as a military pidgin, then underwent stabilization and expansion. It is the only Arabic-lexifier fully creolized variety, that is, a native language for its entire speech community. Nubi is currently spoken in Uganda – in Bombo, Kampala and Arua, by some 15,000 people, as well as Kenya – in Kibera (Nairobi) and Mombasa, by an estimated 10,000; other estimates, however, put the combined number of speakers at about 50,000.

The substrate of Nubi is represented by a large number of languages, belonging to two super phylums: Nilo-Saharan and Niger-Congo (Owens 1985; Wellens 2005: 286; Nakao 2012: 132; Luffin 2005: 17; Avram 2020a: 327; Lang 2023: 3). The former includes Eastern Sudanic languages, such as Bari – including its dialects Kakwa, Pojulu, and Mundari,[1] Lopit and Lotuho (Eastern Nilotic), Acholi, Belanda Bor, Dinka, Jur, Luo, Nuer, Päri, Shilluk (Western Nilotic), Didinga (Surmic), and Central Sudanic languages, such as Avokaya, Baka, Bongo, Kreish, Lendu, Lugbara, Ma'di, Mamvu, Moro / Muru. The Niger-Congo super-phylum is represented by, e.g., Zande, in particular, and Mundu.

As for the adstrate languages, these are all Bantu: Luganda and Swahili, in particular, but also Lunyoro and Lingala.

The varieties of Nubi as spoken in Kenya and Uganda, respectively, are all undergoing an ever-growing influence from Swahili, which is discussed and illustrated by Luffin (2003-2004, 2005, 2014). Also, Nakao et al. (2023) indicate for most of the relevant entries in their dictionary that they are derived from Swahili. The present article, therefore, focuses on the loanwords from and potential idiomatic calques after African languages, to the exclusion of Swahili.

The article is structured as follows. Section 2 presents the sources for the Nubi data and for their etymology, as well as the methodology. Section 3 focuses on loanwords from the African substrate and adstrate languages and on potential idiomatic calques after African substrate languages. Section 4 discusses the findings in an areal and historical perspective, in comparison with the closely related Juba Arabic as well as with reference to other pidgins and creoles. Section 5 summarizes the conclusions.

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[1] Sometimes considered to be separate languages (see, e.g, Wellens 2005: 286).

2. Corpus and methodology

There are no published dictionaries of Nubi. Under the circumstances, the Nubi data are from the following sources: Luffin (2004), which is confined to the variety of Nubi spoken in Mombasa, Kenya; Wellens (2005), a description of the variety spoken in Uganda; Nakao et al. (2023), a pilot version of a Nubi-English dictionary, reflecting mainly the variety spoken in Kibera (Nairobi), Kenya; *Kamus ta rutan Nubi ma Ingilis – Nubi/English Dictionary*, a community-based effort aiming to safeguard the Nubi language.

The sources consulted for identifying African loanwords consist mainly of lexicographic works: Acholi – Kitching (1932), Savage (1955), Blackings (2009); Bari – Owen (1908); Belanda Bor – Asan et al. (2015); Bongo – Moi et al. (2018); Dinka – Mitterrutzner (1866), Nebel (1979), Blench (2005a); Jur – Pozzati & Panza (1993); Lopit – Ladu et al. (2014); Luganda – Snoxall (1967), Murphy (1972), Bukenya & Kamoga (2009), Sternfeld & Nickshere (2015); Lugbara – Crazzolara (2018), Aiko's Lugbara dictionary (n.d.); Lunyoro – Maddox (1902); Luo – Kamoga (1971), Pozzati & Panza (1993), Odaga (2005), Capen (2019); Ma'di – Blackings & Fabb (2003); Moro – Blench (2005b) Nuer – Stigand (1923), Huffman (1929); Päri – Simeoni (1978); Pojulu – Lokosang (2010); Shilluk – Westermann (1912), Kohnen (1994); Zande – De Angelis (2002).

The etymologies of selected Nubi words are discussed in Nhial (1975), Pasch & Thelwall (1987), Kaye (1987), Kaye (1991), Kaye & Tosco (1993), Nakao (2012), Nakao et al. (2023).

As put by Haspelmath (2009: 43-44), words are identified "as loanwords if they have a shape and meaning that is very similar to the shape and meaning of a word from another language from which it could have been taken". The loanwords in Nubi listed in 3.1 have all been identified on the basis of both phonological and semantic criteria. Another condition mentioned by Haspelmath (2009: 44) is that "a plausible language contact scenario exists". This requirement is also met, as far as the substrate and the adstrate languages of Nubi are concerned. Finally, as shown in 3.1, in a number of cases, multiple etymologies are possible. This is in line with Haspelmath's (2009: 44) caveat that, when attempting to trace loanwords to a particular language, "the similarities [should] have no plausible alternative explanations". The latter also holds for the potential idiomatic calques in 3.2.

3. Loanwords and potential idiomatic calques

3.1 Loanwords

All the loanwords discussed in this section can be traced to certain or, at the very least, plausible etyma. Lexical items of possible African origin, but for which no source language has been identified, are excluded.

For expository reasons and ease of comparison, the loanwords are listed in alphabetical order, as in, e.g., Kaye (1987), Pasch & Thelwall (1987), and Nakao (2012). Each entry consists of the Nubi lexical item, its meaning, the etymon or etyma, and includes all the variants recorded in the sources mentioned. All words (and their variants) appear in the orthography or system of transcription used in the sources. In the absence of a standardized orthography for some languages, forms are transcribed in the IPA system.

(A)DÁNGÁ 'bow'. Hillelson (1926: 36) mentions a form *danga* 'bow', adding the specification "Negro Ar. in Southern Sudan". A possible etymon is Bari *dáng* 'bow' (Yokwe 1987: 122); cf. *daṅ* '*Bogen*' (Müller 1864: 39), *dang* '*der Bogen (zum Schiessen)*' (Mitterrutzner 1867: 168), *dang* 'bow (for shooting)' (Owen 1908: 127). This is the etymon indicated by Pasch & Thelwall (1987: 142) for modern Nubi *dángá* 'bow' and by Nakao (2012: 133) for Juba Arabic *dáŋgá* 'bow' and modern Nubi *dángá* 'arrow'. However, there are two other possible etyma. One is Dinka: *dang* '*Pfeilbogen*' (Mitterrutzner 1866: 214), *dhang*[2] 'bow' (Nebel 1979: 27), *dhaŋ* 2) 'bow (for hunting)' (Blench 2005: 51); note, however, that the entry for *dang* in Mitterrutzner (1866: 214) includes the specification "B. [= Bari] *dang*". The other possible source is Luo *daŋ* 'bow of flexible wood' (Pozzati & Panza 1993: 88). The following are less likely etyma: Lopit *raŋ* [ráŋ] 'bow for shooting arrows' (Ladu et al. 2015: 37) has word-initial [r], while Nuer *daŋ* 'wedding stick' (Huffman 1929: 11) and Shilluk *daŋ* 'dancing stick (on the extremity bent as a bow)' (Kohnen 1994: 40) differ in their meaning. The donor language cannot be identified.

ÁFOYÓ / *ÁPOYO* 'hare, rabbit'. According to Wellens (2005: 48), the variant containing [p] is limited to the north of Uganda. The word can be traced to Belanda Bor *afɔyɔ* 'hare, rabbit' (Asan 2015: 10). Phonetically similar forms are found in two other substrate languages: Acholi *apwoyo* 'rabbit' (Snoxall 1932: 40), *apwoyo* 'hare, rabbit' (Savage 1955: 2), *apwoyo* [àpwóyō] 'rabbit, hare' (Blackings 2009: 9);

[2] Where <dh> represents the voiced dental stop [d̪] (Nebel 1979: IX).

Luo *apwɔyo* (Pozzati & Panza 1993: 30), *apwoyo* 'rabbit, hare' (Kokwaro & Johns 2013: 154, Odaga 2005: 39, Capen 2019: 11).

AŊONYO 'type of insect' (Juma et al. 2022: 4). A possible etymon is Bongo *ngo'ngo* 'housefly' (Moi et al. 2018: 40).

ARAPÁPA 'butterfly'. The word is a borrowing from either Ma'di *arapapa* 'butterfly' or, given the [l] ~ [r] free variation in Nubi (Avram 2020b: 10), from Lugbara *alapapa* (*Aiko's Lugbara dictionary* n.d.).

BANG'BANG' 'fool'. Wellens (2005: 294) derives it from Acholi *abaŋbaŋ* 'mentally deprived, fool'; a form *abaŋbaŋ* 'fool' is listed in Kitching (1932: 74), but not in Savage (1955) or Blackings (2009). Kakwa *'bang'* 'stupid' (Yokwe 1987: 187) is a less likely candidate.

BÁNGÍRÍ / *BWÁNGÍRÍ* 'cheek; jaw'. Kaye (1987: 157) and Nakao (2012: 133) propose the Bari etymon *gwangére* / *gwangré* and *gwangiri* 'cheek', respectively. Kaye (1987: 157) argues that "the *gw* is *gb* in other Nilo-Saharan languages" and that "it is not surprising to see the *g* deleted in Nubi" which "doesn't have this phoneme or initial consonant cluster". However, /gw/ does occur in loanwords, e.g., *gwánda* 'cassava' (see below). On phonetic grounds, the most likely etymon is Lugbara *bangiri* 'jaw' (*Aiko's Lugbara dictionary* n.d.).

BÁNJÁ 'debt'. According to Kaye (1987: 157), the word is etymologically derived from Bari *bánjá* 'debt', itself "a loan from Bantu, e.g. Luganda *(e)bbanja* 'debt'". More recently, Nakao et al. (2019) also indicate a Luganda origin. However, other etyma may be Lugbara *banja* 'loan, debt' (*Aiko's Lugbara dictionary* n.d.), Lunyoro *ibanja* 'debt' (Maddox 1902: 130). The source language cannot be determined.

BÓFLO 'loaf-shaped bread'. According to Nakao et al. (2023), the word is a borrowing from Swahili. While Swahili has *bofulo* '(European type of) bread' (Rechenbach 1967: 34) or *boflo* 'loaf of bread' (Mpiranya 2024: 363), similar forms are found in two other relevant languages: consider Lugbara *bofulo* (*Aiko's Lugbara dictionary* n.d.) and Luganda *bbofulo* 'loaf' (Bukenya & Kamoga 2009: 5). Therefore, the donor language cannot be established.

BOGOYA / *BOGOYO* 'banana'. Nakao et al. (2023) trace the word to Luganda, without mentioning the relevant form. A form *bbogoya* is listed in Bukenya & Kamoga (2009: 4). Note that *bogoya* 'big sweet banana' is also attested in Acholi (*Acholi Language Manual* 2009) and *bogoya* 'banana' is found in Lugbara as well (*Aiko's Lugbara dictionary* n.d.). Therefore, the donor language cannot be established.

BÚNIA 'blow, punch'. The etymon is Lugbara *bunia* 'fist, boxing sport' (*Aiko's Lugbara dictionary* n.d.).

BÚRA 'cat'. There are at least six substrate languages in which the term for 'cat' is phonetically similar: Acholi, Bongo, Dinka, Lugbara, Ma'di and Päri. Pasch & Thelwall (1987: 142) and Nakao (2012: 133) also list the Bari form *burön* 'cat', which can be discarded on phonetic grounds. Acholi *bura* (Savage 1955: 4, Nakao 2012: 133), *bura* [bùráà] (Blackings 2009: 19) 'cat' raises no problems; however, in an earlier source (Kitching 1932: 41), the form given is *bora*. For Ma'di and Lugbara, the following forms are listed in the sources: *bő́rà* (Crazzolara 2018: 217) and *bura* (*Aiko's Lugbara dictionary* n.d.). The Bongo, Dinka and Päri equivalents, however, are all considered to be loanwords from Arabic: the entry for Bongo *bura* 'cat' in Moi et al. (2018: 19) includes the specification "Bw [= borrowing] Arabic"; similarly, Nebel (1979: 17) glosses Dinka *bura* as 'ar. [= Arabic] cat'; finally, Simeoni (1978: 98) in his entry for cat specifies for Päri "*bura* (Ar.) [= Arabic]". Indeed, a form *burra*, meaning either 'cat' or 'young cat' is listed in Behnstedt & Woidich (2011: 326 – map 112, 329) as attested in Sudan. Note, however, that Behnstedt & Woidich (2011: 329) attribute this form to an onomatopoeic origin: "auf das Schnurren bezieht sich wohl auch *burra*". This may indeed be the case, since Nuer, for instance, has *bure, bure* 'to call pussy, pussy' (Huffman 1929: 7). Consequently, this somewhat weakens the case for *bura* 'cat' being an Arabic loanword in the African languages mentioned, since onomatopoeia can hardly serve as convincing evidence of borrowing. To conclude, an African origin of this item is less certain than assumed by others (e.g., Pasch & Thelwall 1987: 142; Nakao 2012: 133), but is not necessarily to be ruled out.

CHALO / *CHARO* 'village'. The etymon is Luganda *kyàlo* [ʧa:lo] 'village' (Wellens 2005: 48). The two Nubi variants attest to the occurrence of [l] ~ [r] free variation.

CHARAN 'sewing machine'. According to Wellens (2005: 294), the Nubi word is a borrowing from Swahili. However, the phonetic shapes of the Swahili forms are *cherehani* / *cherahani* / *charahani* (Rechenbach 1967: 53; TUKI 2001; Mpiranya 2024: 371), which are rather different from that of the Nubi word. In fact, the latter derives etymologically from Luo *charan* 'sewing machine', named after Charan Singh, the first Indian tailor to introduce the machine to the region of Kisumu, Kenya, in 1890 (Kitone 2025). Note also that the Swahili forms are borrowed from Luo, contra Owino (2003: 203), who lists Luo *charan* among the loanwords from Swahili. Forms phonetically similar to the Nubi one are found in one substrate language, Lugbara *carani* 'sewing machine' (*Aiko's Lugbara dictionary* n.d.), and one adstrate language, Luganda *kyalaani* [ʧala:ni] 'sewing machine' (Sternefeld & Nickshere 2015).

DINGILI 'round'. The word can be traced to Belanda Bor *ndingili* 'round' (Asan et al. 2015: 25).

DÓNGÓ 'back of the head'. A possible etymon is Bari *doŋon* / *doŋoŋ* 'back of the head', as also suggested by Nakao (2012: 134).

FUTUKU 'hoof (as foodstuff)'. Assuming the plausible sound change /p/ > /f/, the word can be traced to Lugbara *putuku* 'cooked hoof of a cow' (*Aiko's Lugbara dictionary* n.d.), Ma'di *putuku* 'hoof' (Nakao 2012: 135).

GÍRÍGÍRÍ 'spotted'. The etymon is Ma'di *giri-giri* 'multicoloured', as also suggested by Nakao (2012: 135).

GÓDÓGÓDÓ 'slim, thin'. According to Kaye (1987: 157), "this word is used […] in many languages of Equatoria Province, including Latuko, Muru, Bari, Acholi, Zande, Avokaya and Bakaa to mean 'very weak, thin, sick(ly)'". One can only agree with Kaye's (1987: 157) conclusion that "it is difficult to determine the exact donor language".

GONJA 'large, sweet banana'. The word is etymologically derived from Luganda *gònjâ* 'large, sweet banana' (Murphy 1972: 108), as also mentioned by Wellens (2005: 45).

GWÁNDA 'cassava'. Kaye (1987: 157) writes that "this is a loanword from Bari (same pronunciation)" and adds that "in some Bari dialects it is *gbanda*". Indeed, Yokwe (1987: 169) has *gwándà* 'cassava'. Note, however, that phonetically similar forms, with word-initial [gb] instead of [gw], are also attested in other substrate languages. Belanda Bor *gbanda* (Asan et al. 2015: 17), Bongo *gbanda* 'cassava' (Moi et al. 2018: 26), Lugbara *gbandà* 'cassava' (Crazzolara 2017: 253), Ma'di *gbándà* 'cassava' (Blackings & Fabb 2003: 15), Zande *gbanda* 'cassava' (De Angelis 2002: 67). Since the Nubi reflex of /gb/ in loanwords is [gw], this accounts for the form for 'cassava' and given that "the *gw* is *gb* in other Nilo-Saharan languages", as observed by Kaye (1987: 157), the donor language cannot be identified.

JÁNJABA 'to take care of'. The etymon is Luganda *jjanjaba* 'to nurse, to attend (a sick person), to take good care of, to look after the needs of' (Murphy 1972: 120).

JÚÚJÚ 'small mouse'. This is a loanword from Bari, in which *júúju* means 'shrew' (Kaye 1987: 158).

KÁKOBÉ 'purple'. Nakao et al. (2023) indicate Luganda as the source language, without mentioning the etymon. The word derives etymologically from Luganda *kakobe* 'purple' (Murphy 1972: 140).

KASÍNGÍRÍ 'tobacco'. The word can be traced to *kasingiri* 'a type of tobacco pipe' used in Uganda. According to Nakao et al. (2019), the source language is Luganda, but they do not mention the etymon.

KASÚKU 'parrot'. According to Nakao et al. (2019), the Nubi word is from Swahili, in which the term for 'parrot' is indeed *kasuku* (Mpiranya 2024: 426). However, identical forms are also found in two other relevant languages: Lugbara *kasuku* 'parrot' (*Aiko's Lugbara dictionary* n.d.), Lunyoro *kasuku* 'parrot' (Maddox 1902: 98). The source language cannot be determined.

KÉÉKE 'sieve'. As suggested by Kaye (1987: 158), Bari *kééké* 'sieve, strainer (for flour)' is the etymon. Kaye (1987: 158) further writes that "the word also occurs in Acholi, where it was probably borrowed from Bari". Nakao (2012: 134) mentions Acholi *keekee* 'sieve'. However, in other sources, the Acholi forms are phonetically less close to the Nubi one: *kèyìkéyì* 'sieve' (Blackings 2009: 175), *kekei* 'sieve' (*Acholi Language Manual* 2009). A phonetically similar form is also found in Ma'di: *keyikeyi* 'sieve' (Nakao 2012: 134). To conclude, Bari is in all likelihood the donor language.

KENÍ 'co-wife'. The word is etymologically derived from Bari *köyini* 'co-wife', as also suggested by Nakao (2012: 134).

KIÁTA 'potato'. Pasch & Thelwall (1987: 142) suggest a Swahili etymon *kyazi*[3] 'sweet potato', which is not sufficiently similar to the Nubi form. Tallantire & Goode (1975: 240) list Kakwa *kiata* and Ma'di *kata* for 'potato'. The Bari form in Yokwe (1987: 171) is *kàyátà* 'sweet potato'. In addition, Nakao (2012: 133) lists the following possible etyma: Acholi *kiyata* / *layata*, Ma'di *kaata* / *kiata*, Pojulu *kayata* 'sweet potatoes'. Now, variants such as Acholi *layata* and Ma'di *kaata* cannot be the etyma and should, therefore, be excluded from the list. Bari *kàyátà* and Pojulu *kayata* are also phonetically close to the Nubi form, but the Kakwa form or the Ma'di variant *kiata* are identical with it. Hence, the latter are probably the etyma.

KIBIRA 'forest'. According to Pasch & Thellwall (1987: 142) and Nakao (2012: 133), the etymon is Luganda *e-kibira* 'forest'. The alternative origin suggested by Kaye (1991: 13) is less convincing. In his discussion of the etymology of the name Kibera, a suburb in Nairobi where the Nubi live, Kaye (1991: 13) claims that Kenyan Nubi *kibra* and Ugandan Nubi *kibíra* are derived from Sudanese Arabic *kabra* 'thorny gate or fence for a corral; dried thicket' and in Shukriyya Arabic also 'corral'. Phonetically, "the a > i is a special KN [= Nubi] development

[3] The Swahili form is actually *kiazi* and it means 'potato, Irish potato' (Mpiranya 2024: 430).

of SCA [= Sudanese Colloquial Arabic] dialects, probably to be explained via dissimilation" (Kaye 1991: 13). According to Kaye (1991: 13), "when Kibera was founded around 1900, it had lots of corrals, trees, bushes, and shrubs [and] it was only natural for the first SUD [= Sudanese] KN speakers to call it *kíbra*". Moreover, Kaye (1991: 13) concludes that "this is a SCA borrowing into Luganda rather than the other way around". Several objections can be raised. Firstly, Kaye's account needs to invoke a "special KN development". Secondly, no independent evidence is provided for the dissimilation *a > i. Note also that similar forms exist in another relevant Bantu language: Lunyoro *kibira* 'forest' (Maddox 1902: 99). Summing up, the etymon is certainly Bantu, very likely, but not necessarily, from Luganda.

KÍNGÍLO 'rhinoceros'. Possible etyma include Bari *kingili* 'rhinoceros' (*Wildlife Information Booklet* 1982: 26), Avokaya *kiŋgili* 'rhinoceros' (Tucker 1940: 353), Moro *kingile* 'rhinoceros' (Nakao 2012: 134). To conclude, the source language cannot be determined.

KOFÚTA 'foam, bubble'. The word derives etymologically from Lugbara *kafuto* 'foam, lather' (*Aiko's Lugbara dictionary* n.d.).

KÓÍKÓÍ 'riddle'. The etymon is either Luganda *kkoyi kkoyi* '(opening formula to a riddle) here is a riddle' (Bukenya & Kamoga 2009: 37) or Lugbara *koi koi* / *koyi koyi* 'riddle, quiz' (*Aiko's Lugbara dictionary* n.d.). Hence, the donor language cannot be established.

KOKÓBÓ 'bark (of a tree)'. Kaye's (1987: 158) suggested etymon, Bari *kóɓóɓo* 'bark' can be excluded on phonetic grounds. The Nubi word derives from either Bari *koko'bo* 'bark' (Nakao 2012: 133) or Ma'di *kɔ̄kɔ̄bɔ̀*, *kɔkɔbɔ* (Boone & Watson 1996: 162), so the donor language cannot be specified.

KÓMBO 'lye'. The word derives etymologically from Kakwa *kombo* 'lye' (*Kakuwa Fauna and Flora* n.d.).

KÓNKÓME 'lizard'. The etymon is Luganda *kkonkomì* 'large lizard (green, red, or blue)' (Snoxall 1967: 150), *kkonkome* 'kind of large multicolored lizard' (Murphy 1972: 222), 'a rough-skinned lizard that inhabits both trees and thatched roofs' (Bukenya & Kamoga 2009: 37).

KORÓFO 'leaf'. The source language is certainly Bari, in which the following forms are attested: *karofo* 'Blatt' (Müller 1864: 45), *korópo (korófo)* 'n. pl. Blatt eines Baumes' (Mitterrutzner 1867: 202), *koró'fo* 'leaves' (Owen 1908: 140), *kòrópò* 'leaf' (Yokwe 1987: 170), *kɔɾɔpɔ* / *koropo* 'leaves' (Kaye & Tosco 1993: 300; Nhial 1975: 89) and Nakao (2012: 133).

KULÚKULÚ 'turkey'. The word derives etymologically from Lugbara *kùlúkùlú* 'turkey' (Crazzolara 2017: 270).

KUNGÚ 'song'. The etymon is Bari *kungo* 'entertainment with music, dancing' (Junker 1890: vol. 1: 340), *kungo* 'public rejoicing' (Junker 1890: vol. 1: 353), *kungu* 'type of dance' (Seligman 1913: 732).

KÚRI 'hawk'. The word derives from Bari *kuri* 'falcon', as also proposed by Nakao (2012: 134).

KÚRUJU 'to cultivate'. The word can be traced to Bari *korgu*[4] '*ackern, anbauen*' (Müller 1864: 48), *kurju* '*anbauen, ackern*' (Mitterrutzner 1867: 205), *kurju* 'to cultivate, to plough' (Owen 1908: 140). This is also the etymon suggested by Nhial (1975: 89) and by Nakao (2012: 133).

KWÁTÁ 'wrestling'. In Nakao (2012: 134, n. 6), Juba Arabic *kwátá* 'wrestling' figures among the "non-Arabic words […] whose etymologies are still unknown". According to Nakao (2013: 100), Juba Arabic *kwátá* 'wrestling' is a borrowing from Nilo-Saharan languages, but no specific language is mentioned. The Nubi form (as well as the Juba Arabic one) can be traced to Zande *kpátá* 'fight, blow' (De Angelis 2002: 152), with the etymological labial-velar co-articulated stop /kp/ realized as [kw].

LÁNGA 'to roam, to walk around'. Nakao (2012: 134) derives this word from Bari *laŋgu* 'to transgress'. On both phonetic and semantic grounds, however, a more likely etymon is Mundari *laŋa* 'to travel' (Wani et al. 2013: 23).

LÁNJÚRÁ 'bachelor'. The word derives etymologically from Lugbara *lanjura* 'single, unmarried man' (*Aiko's Lugbara dictionary* n.d.).

LENG' 'white'. A possible etymon is Acholi *leng* [lɛ̀ɛ̀ng] 'clean' (Blackings 2009: 75).

LENGLENG 'clear'. The etymon is Acholi *leng leng* 'clear' (*Acholi Language Manual* 2009).

LOBOLO 'banana, plantain'. Phonetically similar forms are found in several substrate languages: Acholi [lạ̀bọ̀lɔ̀] 'banana, plantain' (Blackings 2009: 65), Ugandan Luo *labolo* 'banana' (Kamoga 1971: 241), Ma'di *lābōlō* 'banana' (Blackings & Fabb 2003: 645). The Bari form is *ràbòlò* 'banana' (Yokwe 1987: 174). A form *rabolo* 'banana' is attested in Lopit (Ladu et al. 2015: 37) and Kenyan Luo (Odaga 2005: 293; Kokwaro & Johns 2013: 78), and it occurs as a variant in Ma'di as well

[4] Where <g> should read <ǵ>, which stands for [ɟʒ].

(Nakao 2012: 133). The situation is further complicated by the occurrence in Nubi of [l] ~ [r] free variation. To conclude, the donor language cannot be determined.

LUB(W)AKÉ 'flea'. The etymon is Bari *lugwake* 'flea', as also suggested by Nakao (2012: 133). A phonetically similar form, *lógbákí* 'flea', also occurs in Kakwa (Onziga & Gilley 2012: 4).

MACHÚNGA 'orange'. The word derives etymologically from Luo *machunga* 'orange' (Odaga 2005: 188; Kokwaro & Johns 2013: 33; Capen 2019: 81). The alternative potential etymon would be Swahili *machungwa,* the plural of *chungwa* 'orange'. However, this would presuppose that the Nubi word is derived from the Swahili plural form. Moreover, the labio-velar glide [w] occurring in Swahili *machungwa* [ma'ʧuŋgwa] makes it phonetically less similar to the Nubi form.

MANDAZI 'flat doughnut'. The word derives etymologically from Luganda *mandazi* 'a mixture of wheat flour, yeast and sugar fried into small balls' (Murphy 1972: 324). The Luganda form is phonetically closer to the Nubi one than Swahili *maandazi*, the plural of *andazi* 'bun, doughnut, fried round sweet bread'.

MANGADA 'very sweet orange'. The word derives etymologically from either Luganda *mangada* 'tangerine' (Katende et al. 2000: 12) or Lugbara *mangada* 'tangerine' (*Aiko's Lugbara dictionary* n.d.). Therefore, the source language cannot be specified.

MÁNYÁ 'alligator'. Potential etyma are: Avokaya *manya* '(warana) lizard' (Tucker 1940: 356); Bari *mányáng* 'alligator' (Yokwe 1987: 156) – with variants such as *manya* 'the Nile lizard' (Mitterrutzner 1867: 217; Owen 1908: 144), *manya* / *manyaŋ* 'monitor lizard' (Nakao 2012: 134), *manye 'Nileidechse'* (Mueller 1864: 52); Ma'di *manya* '(warana) lizard' (Tucker 1940: 356). The donor language cannot be established.

MAPÉRA 'guava'. In Nakao (2012: 134), Luganda *mapēra* 'guavas', the plural of *ppera*, is given as the etymon. Nakao et al. (2023) indicate Swahili as the source language. However, the Swahili form for 'guava' is sg. *pera*, pl. *mapera*. The case for a Luganda or Swahili origin is somewhat weakened by the fact that it would presuppose that the Nubi word is derived from the plural form. Moreover, other likely etyma are to be found in at least three substrate languages: Kakwa *mapera*, Lugbara *mapera*, Ma'di *mapera* (Tallantire & Goode 1975: 241). Therefore, the donor language cannot be identified.

MATOKE 'plantain'. The etymon is Luganda *matooke* 'plantains' (Sternefeld & Nickshere 2015).

MAWÚLIRE 'newspaper'. The word is borrowed from Luganda, in which *mawulire* means 'news' (Murphy 1972: 329), as also stated by Wellens (2005: 53).

MBERÉNGE 'pop corn'. The word is etymologically derived from Luganda *mberênge* 'dry corn/maze; dried ear of corn; pop corn' (Murphy 1972: 331). This is also the etymon indicated by Wellens (2005: 45).

MBERÚ 'rainbow'. The etymon is Moro *mberu* 'rainbow' (*Moru – language and culture learning program (MLCLP)*).

MBÍRÓ 'oil palm'. The word derives etymologically from either Lugbara *mbírò* 'oil palm' (Crazzolara 2017: 281) or Zande *mbíró* 'oil palm' (De Angelis 2002: 191).

MÉMVU '(sweet) banana'. Wellens (2005: 294) and Nakao et al. (2023) indicate Luganda as the source language. However, the closest Luganda form is the plural *amenvu* of *lyenva* / *eryenvu* 'banana' (Murphy 1972: 314). Phonetically, a better match is Lugbara *menvu* 'banana' (*Aiko's Lugbara dictionary* n.d.).

MÓTOKA 'car'. Nakao et al. (2023) trace the word to English or Luganda. In addition to Luganda *mmotoka* 'motor car' (Bukenya & Kamoga 2009: 55), similar forms are found in at least three other relevant languages: consider Acholi *motoka* (*Acholi Language Manual* 2009), Lugbara *motoka* (*Aiko's Lugbara dictionary* n.d.) and Swahili *motokaa* (Mpiranya 2024: 483). The Swahili form can be discarded since it is stressed on the last syllable and ends in a stressed vowel [mɔtɔ'kɑ:]. Summing up, the originally English word *motorcar* must have entered Nubi through the intermediary of Luganda, Acholi or Lugbara.

MPÁFU 'olive'. The word is derived etymologically from Luganda *mpafù* 'fruit of the *muwafu* tree, like a damson' (Snoxall 1967: 207), 'incense berry' (Bukenya & Kamoga 2009: 55), 'fruit of the *muwafu* tree resembling a large dark olive' (Murphy 1972: 342) or *empafu* 'fruit resembling an olive' (Sternefeld & Nickshere 2015: 24).

M(U)CHELE / *MUCHÉRE* 'rice (husked or cooked)'. The first variant, without [u], might be traced to Swahili *mchele* 'rice, rice grains (uncooked)' (Mpiranya 2024: 472). However, the first variant, with [u], could derive etymologically from two substrate languages: Acholi *mucele* 'rice' and Luo *muchele* 'rice' (Kokwaro & Johns 2013: 39). As for the second one, exhibiting [r], it could be accounted for in terms of the occurrence in Nubi of [l] ~ [r] free variation and it could, therefore, be derived from the Swahili word. Again, however, forms which are phonetically identical to the second variant occur in one substrate language, Lugbara *mucere* 'rice' (*Aiko's Lugbara dictionary* n.d.), and one adstrate language, Luganda *muceere* 'rice' (Murphy 1972: 350), 'rice, especially in dried grain form or as

a dish' (Bukenya & Kamoga 2009: 56). Therefore, the donor language cannot be established.

M(U)LEMA 'physically disabled, crippled person'. There are two possible etyma: Luganda *mulema* 'cripple, crippled person, lame person' (Murphy 1972: 367) and Lunyoro *mulema* 'lame man' (Maddox 1902: 108). To conclude, the source language cannot be determined.

MURÁLO 'shepherd'. The etymon is Luganda *mulaalo* 'herdsman, tender of livestock' (Murphy 1972: 365).

MUSUJJA 'malaria'. The word derives etymologically from Luganda *musujja* 'fever' (Bukenya & Kamoga 2009: 60). This is also the etymon proposed by Kaye (1987: 159).

MWANYI 'coffee bean'. The etymon is Luganda *mmwanyi* 'coffee berry, coffee bean' (Bukenya & Kamoga 2009: 55), as also suggested by Kaye (1987: 159) and Nakao (2012: 134).

NAMWANDU 'widow'. The word derives etymologically from Luganda *nnamwandu* 'widow' (Behstedt & Woidich 2011: 49).

NÁNGU 'to beseech'. The etymon is Dholuo *nang'o* 'to beseech, to appeal for protection' (Capen 2019: 99).

NGÚLÚŃGÚLÚ 'round'. Nakao (2012: 134) derives the word from Bari *guluŋguluŋ* 'round', which would presuppose substitution of [ŋg] for the etymological word-initial [g] as well as the deletion of the etymological word-final [ŋ]. Therefore, I suggest that Kakwa *ᵑgúluᵑgúlú* 'round-shaped' (Onziga & Gilley 2012: 4) is actually the etymon.

NTULEGE 'zebra'. Nakao et al. (2023) indicate Luganda as the source language, in which the word for 'zebra' is *ntulege* (Bukenya & Kamoga 2009). However, a phonetically identical form is also attested in another adstrate language: Lunyoro *ntulege* 'zebra' (Maddox 1902: 112). Therefore, the donor language cannot be specified.

NYALAMÁ 'gap in the teeth'. The etymon is Bari *nyàlàmá* 'gap in the teeth' (Yokwe 1987: 129).

NYÁNYA 'tomato'. According to Wellens (2005: 294) and Nakao et al. (2023), the word is etymologically derived from Swahili, in which *nyanya* means 'tomato' (Mpiranya 2024: 505). However, *nyanya* is also the word for 'tomato' in Lugbara (*Aiko's Lugbara dictionary* n.d.) as well as in both Ugandan Luo (Capen 2019: 111) and Kenyan Luo (Odaga 2005: 245). It follows that the source language cannot be ascertained.

NYÉKÉM / *NYEKEMU* 'chin'. The word derives etymologically from Bari *nyékém* 'chin' (Yokwe 1987: 137).

NYER(E)KÛ 'child'. A possible etymon is Dinka *nyer-kug* '1) *Kind*; 2) *jung*' (Mitterrutzner 1866: 272). A Dinka etymon, *nyárkuk* 'child', is also suggested for Juba Arabic *nyirikuk* 'child' by Yokwe (1987: 328). Behnstedt & Woidich (2011: 37) indicate Dinka *nyarkúk* as the etymon of both Juba Arabic *nyirikuk* and the Nubi word. Note, however, that the Dinka forms given by Mitterrutzner (1866: 17), Yokwe (1985: 328) and Behnstedt & Woidich (2011: 37) do not appear in either Nebel (1979) or Blench (2005). Another possible etymon is Bari *nyerkuk* '*Kind*' (Müller 1864: 55). There is also a Bari form without word-final /k/: Owens (1985: 238) etymologically derives the Nubi word from Bari *nyereku* 'child', while in Owens (1997: 161) the Bari form given is *nyerku*. This etymon is also accepted by Pasch & Thelwall (1987: 142) and by Wellens (2005: 294). Since etymological word-final consonants are frequently deleted in Nubi (Avram 2020b: 12), the Nubi form could equally well be traced to Bari or Dinka. Note also that a form *nyarkúk* is found in Sudanese Arabic (Nhial 1975: 89; Wellens 2005: 294), but the latter is unlikely to have been the donor language: it contains the decidedly non-Arabic palatal nasal [ɲ], which only occurs in loanwords from African languages. The Sudanese Arabic form is, in all likelihood, a borrowing from Bari or Dinka, in which /ɲ/ occurs quite frequently.

NYIDO 'gap referring to missing tooth or teeth'. The etymon is Bari *nido* 'teeth pulled out' (Owen 1908: 149).

N(Y)ILÂ 'sandals worn by men'. The etymon is Lugbara *nyila* 'shoes' (*Aiko's Lugbara dictionary* n.d.).

NYÍRÍNYÍRÍ 'tiny'. The word is derived etymologically from Lugbara *ŋïrî´* 'very small, little' (Crazzolara 2017: 297).

OVAKÉDO 'avocado'. Lugbara *ovakedo* (*Aiko's Lugbara dictionary* n.d.) is phonetically closer to the Nubi form than Luganda *wowakedo*. This suggests that English *avocado* entered Nubi through the intermediary of Lugbara.

PAPÁI / *PAPÁLI* 'papaya'. The first variant can be traced to either Zande *papai* 'papaya' (De Angelis 2002: 268) or Swahili *papai* (Rechenbach 1967: 429); the source language cannot therefore be established. As for the second variant, occurring in Ugandan Nubi, it is derived etymologically from Luganda *ppaapaali* 'papaya' (Bukenya & Kamoga 2009: 83).

POKOPOKO 'loose talk'. The etymon is Lugbara *pokopoko* 'loose talk' (*Aiko's Lugbara English dictionary* n.d.).

PONDU 'cassava leaf'. The word derives etymologically from either Lingala *pōndú* 'cassava leaf' (Kilabalala 2007: 72) or Pojulu *pöndu* (Lokosang 2010: 131). The donor language cannot be determined.

POTOPOTO 'mud, muddy'. The etymon is Lingala *pōtōpótō* 'mud' (Kilabalala 2007: 73), *pɔtɔpɔ́tɔ* (Ngalasso-Mwatha 2013: 704). The probable ultimate origin of the word is Hausa *potopoto* 'mud, slush' (Author). More importantly, *potopoto* 'mud' is "widely attested in the pre-1900 Lunyoro data (and still present in today's Lingala)" (Meeuwis 2019). Since the word "is foreign to Bobangi or any other original language of the region", Meeuwis (2019) concludes that "it is fair to hypothesize that it was brought into the Bobangi pidgin by the West African workers/soldiers" whom the European occupiers had brought with them.

SAMBA 'to kick'. The etymon is Luganda *samba* 'to kick' (Bukenya & Kamoga 2009: 84), as also suggested by Nhial (1975: 90).

SERÎ 'fence'. The etymon is Lugbara *sə̀ërí* 'fence' (Crazzolara 2018: 345), 'type of plant used for fencing' (*Aiko's Lugbara dictionary* n.d.).

SIGIRI 'kitchen'. The word can be traced to Luganda *ssigiri* 'portable iron stove using charcoal' (Bukenya & Kamoga 2009: 89) or Lugbara *sigiri* 'charcoal stove' (*Aiko's Lugbara dictionary* n.d.). The source language cannot be established.

TAMPÉKO 'tumbler'. The word is etymologically derived from Lugbara *tampeko* 'metallic cup' (*Aiko's Lugbara dictionary* n.d.).

TIGIRÍ 'African cabbage'. The etymon is Luganda *tegiri* 'African spiderflower' (Grosskinsky & Gullick 2000: 117). Note that phonetically similar forms are attested in two other substrate languages: Lopit *tagiri*, Lotuho *atagiri* 'hibiscus' (Grosskinsky & Gullick 2000: 117).

TǏTǏ 'kind of bird'. The word derives etymologically from Zande *títí* 'red-breasted finch' (De Angelis 2002: 346).

TRÓZI / *TORÓZI* 'trousers'. Ultimately of English origin, from *trousers*, the word appears to have entered Nubi via Lugbara, in which the form is *torozi* 'pair of trousers' (*Aiko's Lugbara dictionary* n.d.).

TUMBI / *NTÚMBI* 'calf (leg)'. The word can be traced to Luganda *ntumbwe* 'calf (of the leg)' (Bukenya & Kamoga 2009: 78).

TÚNDA 'to sell'. The etymon is Luganda *tunda* 'to sell' (Bukenya & Kamoga 2009: 92).

TÚRJU 'to chase'. The most probable etymon is Bari *turǵo* '*einstürzen*' (Müller 1864: 60), *turjö* '*einstürzen*' (Mitterrutzner 1867: 251). The etymon indicated by

Nakao (2012: 133) is Bari *tur-jö* 'chase away'. An Arabic etymon has also been suggested in the literature. According to Nhial (1975: 90), Juba Arabic *túrju* 'chase out, expel, dismiss' "is a corruption of the Arabic word [ṭarad] (past), (yaṭrad) (present)". Similarly, Wellens (2003: 295) derives modern Uganda Nubi '*turuju* 'chase' from the Sudanese Arabic imperative form *aṭrudu* 'chase him!'. However, a Sudanese Arabic etymon is less similar phonetically to the Nubi form. Moreover, it makes it necessary for Nhial (1975: 90) to posit "the substitution of [j] for [d]" and for Wellens (2005: 295) to assume aphesis of /a/ and d > ǧ, as an example of what she calls "rare cases of consonant changes". Under the circumstances, it would seem that positing a Bari etymon is the most convincing solution.

TUTU 'kind of bird'. The word derives etymologically from Luo *tutu* 'coucal' (Kokwaro & Johns 2013: 145), 'lark-heeled snake eater' (Capen 2019: 154).

WÁRAGI / *WÉREGI* 'gin'. The etymon is Luganda *walagi* 'very strong indigenous alcoholic drink distilled from banana beer' (Murphy 1972: 584), also spelt *waragi*, and pronounced [waragi] or [waraʤi]. A Sudanese Arabic origin of the word, from *ʕarag*, is unlikely on phonetic grounds: the Nubi reflex of Arabic /ʕ/ is Ø. Note, incidentally, that the commonly accepted etymon for the Luganda word is English *war gin*, which would account for the word-initial [w] in the Luganda and Nubi forms.

3.2 Potential idiomatic calques

Several idiomatic calques found in Nubi may reflect the influence of its substrate languages. The potential calques at issue are either compounds or phrases, which are idiomatic collocations that align between Nubi and its substrate languages. As shown below, in most cases, such idiomatic calques could be traced to several substrate languages.

For ease of comparison, the potential idiomatic calques are alphabetically listed, as in, e.g., Parkvall & Baker (2012).

IIDA LAKÁTA / *IDÂN TA SHEDERÂN* 'branch', lit. 'arm of a tree'. Structurally identical calques are found in the following substrate languages: Belanda Bor *ba'd yat* 'branch' (Asan et al. 2015: 10), lit. 'arm tree'; Luo *bade yath* 'branches of a tree' (Pozzati & Panza 1993: 16), lit. 'arms tree'; Shilluk *bade yath* 'branches of a tree' (Kohnen 1994: 16), lit. 'arms tree'. Consider also the similar form in Zande *be ngúà* 'branch' (De Angelis 2002: 242), lit. 'arm tree'.

JINA GǏDDA 'chicken', lit. 'child hen'. The Nubi form may be modelled on the following: Dinka *manh ajith* 'chicken' (Nebel 1979: 118), lit. 'child hen'; Lugbara *a'ú*

mvá 'chicken' (Crazzolara 2018: 285), lit. 'hen child'; Luo *nyathi gweno* 'chicken' (Capen 2019: 112), lit. 'child hen'.

JÉNA KURÂ 'toe', lit. 'child foot'. A structurally similar form is found in Lugbara: *pá mvá* 'toe' (Crazzolara 2017: 285), lit. 'foot child'. Also worth mentioning is the Acholi compound *anyira tyɛn* 'toes' (Savage 1955: 160), lit. 'girl foot'.

MOYO ÉNA / *MOYÉNA* / *MOÉNA* / *MWĚNA* 'tear', lit. 'water eye'. Structurally identical compounds are attested in several substrate languages. These include, in addition to Acholi *pig-waŋ* 'tear', lit. 'water eyes' mentioned by Nakao (2012: 136), forms in five other Nilo-Saharan languages: Belanda Bor, Dinka, Luo, Päri and Shilluk. Here are the compounds at issue: Belanda Bor *fi waŋ* 'tear' (Asan et al. 2015: 15), lit. 'water eye'; Dinka *piu nyin* 'tear' (Blench 2005: 144), lit. 'water eye'; Luo *pi wɔŋ* 'lacrima' (Pozzati & Panza 1993: 265), lit. 'water eye'; Päri *pii-nyiŋ* 'tear' (Simeoni 1978: 111), lit. 'water eye'; Shilluk *pi nyiŋ* 'tears' (Kohnen 1994: 160), lit. 'water eye'.

RÁS JÚA 'roof', lit. 'head house'. Structurally similar forms are widely attested in the Nilo-Saharan substrate languages: Acholi *wi-ot* 'roof' (Nakao 2012: 136); Bari *kwe na kadi* 'roof' (Nakao 2012: 36), lit. 'head + POSS + house'; Bongo *dörüü* 'roof' (Moi et al. 2014: 24), lit. 'head house'; Dinka *qotnhom* 'roof' (Nebel 1979: 181), lit. 'house head'; Lotuho *axou xaji* 'roof' (Nakao 2012: 136), lit. 'head house'; Lugbara *jo-dri* 'roof' (*Aiko's Lugbara dictionary* n.d.), lit. 'house head'; Ma'di *ʤɔ́ drì* 'roof' (Blackings & Fabb 2003: 51), lit. 'house head'; Nuer *wic dwɪl* 'roof' (Huffman 1929: 50), lit. 'head house'; Päri *wi-otto* 'roof' (Simeoni 1978: 22), lit. 'head house'; Shilluk *wiy wot* 'roof' (Westermann 1912: 285), lit. 'head house'. Consider also Zande *ri bambu* 'head of the hut' (De Angelis 2002: 288), lit. 'head hut'.

4. Discussion

4.1 Lexical categories

As is generally the case with loanwords, the majority are nouns. 79 out of the 93 loanwords identified, i.e., 84.9% belong to this category.

There are only 8 adjectives, i.e., 8.6%. These are: *dingili* 'round', *gírígírí* 'spotted', *góbógóbó* 'slim, thin', *kákobé* 'purple', *leng* 'white', *lengleng* 'clear', *ngúlúngúlú* 'round', and *nyírínyírí* 'tiny'.

Only 7 verbs, i.e., 7.7 %, figure among the loanwords discussed: *janjaba* 'to take care of', *kurúju* 'to cultivate', *langa* 'to roam, to walk around', *nángu* 'to beseech', *samba* 'to kick', *tunda* 'to sell', and *turju* 'to chase'.

As can be seen, borrowing is limited to content words, to the exclusion of any functional words.

4.2 Semantic fields

As shown in Table 1 below, 57 of the loanwords identified, i.e. 61.3%, are distributed in six main semantic fields:

TABLE 1. Main semantic fields

Semantic field	Number of items
Food, beverages	23
Fauna	15
Body	6
Flora	5
Kinship, marital status	4
Household	4

These semantic fields are illustrated below.

Food, beverages: *bóflo* 'loaf-shaped bread', *bogoya* / *bogoyo* 'banana', *futuku* 'hoof (as foodstuff)', *gonja* 'large, sweet banana', *gwanda* 'cassav', *kiáta* 'potato', *kómbo* 'lye', *lobolo* 'banana', *machunga* 'orange', *mandazi* 'flat doughnut', *mangada* 'very sweet orange', *mapéra* 'guava', *matoke* 'plantain', *mberénge* 'pop corn', *mémvu* '(sweet) banana', *m(u)chele* / *muchere* 'rice (husked or cooked)', *mpáfu* 'olive', *mwanyi* 'coffee bean', *nyánya* 'tomato', *ovakedo* 'avocado', *papai/papáli* 'papaya', *pondu* 'cassava leaf' and *wáragi/wéregi* 'gin'.

Fauna: *áfoyó* 'hare, rabbit', *aŋoŋo* 'type of insect', *arapápa* 'butterfly', *bura* 'cat', *júújú* 'small mouse', *kasuku* 'parrot', *kíngílo* 'rhinoceros', *kónkóme* 'lizard', *kulúkulú* 'turkey', *kúri* 'hawk', *lub(w)aké* 'flea', *mányá* 'alligator', *ntulege* 'zebra', and *tĭtĭ* 'kind of bird', *tutu* 'kind of bird'.

Body: *bángírí* / *bwángírí* 'cheek; jaw', *dóngó* 'back of the head', *nyalamá* 'gap in the teeth', *nyékém* / *nyekemu* 'chin', *nyido* 'gap referring to missing tooth or teeth', and *tumbi* / *ntumbi* 'calf (leg)'.

Flora: *kibira* 'forest', *kokóbó* 'bark (of a tree)', *korófo* 'leaf', *mbíró* 'oil palm', and *tigiri* 'African cabbage'.

Kinship, marital status: *kení* 'co-wife', *lánjúrá* 'bachelor', *namwandu* 'widow', and *nyer(e)kû* 'child'.

Household: *kééke* 'sieve', *serî* 'fence, *sigiri* 'kitchen', *tampéko* 'tumbler'.

4.3 Substratal and adstratal lexical input

Allowing for discrepancies in the quantity and quality of the available sources for the relevant languages, which may skew the results, the data in 3.1 point to the following conclusions regarding the lexical substratal and adstratal lexical input in Nubi.

Bari, and its dialects Kakwa, Mundari and Pojulu, is the donor language or one of the possible source languages for 30 Nubi words, almost one third of the non-Swahili African component of Nubi. These numbers confirm the fact that Bari is rightly considered to be the primary substrate language of Nubi. The second most important contributor is Lugbara, with 24 words. The next contributors, in descending order, are Acholi with 11, Ma'di with 8 and Luo with 7 words. Other, less important contributors are Zande with 6, Belanda Bor with 3, Avokaya with 2, Bongo with 2, Dinka with 2, and Moro with 2 words. The data show that by far most of the substratal lexical input originates in languages belonging to the Nilo-Saharan super-phylum, i.e. Eastern Nilotic, Western Nilotic and Central Sudanic languages. The contribution of the Niger-Congo superphylum, represented by loanwords from Zande, is numerically far less important. All in all, the substrate languages account for almost 60% of the non-Swahili African component of Nubi.

Also, it appears that loanwords from South-Sudanic substrate languages have survived to a much larger extent in Modern Nubi as spoken in Kibera (Nairobi). Luffin (2005: 419) writes with respect to the variety of Nubi spoken in Mombasa, Kenya, that "*l'apport des langues sud-soudanaises au kinubi est* […] *minime*" and that his recordings contain only three such words: "*gwánda* 'manioc', *kúrudju* 'cultiver', *nyákam* 'voler'".

As for the adstratal lexical input, the most important contributor (to the exclusion of Swahili) is Luganda, which is the donor language or one of the source languages of 29 Nubi words. Lunyoro is a distant second, having contributed at most 6 words. These results show that Luganda has a growing influence on Nubi.

4.4 Shared areal lexicon

As seen in section 3.1, for 21 of the 93 lexical items discussed, multiple etymologies were suggested, which appears to somewhat defeat the purpose of the present paper. However, this is in fact a direct consequence of the complexity of the language contact situation in which Nubi emerged and developed.

For instance, some lexical items which could be the etyma of Nubi words are widespread in the substrate languages, even though many authors indicate Bari as the donor language. Cases in point are the terms for 'bow' (Nubi *(a)dángá*), 'cat' (Nubi *bura*), 'slim, thin' (Nubi *gódógódó*), 'cassava' (Nubi *gwándá*), 'rhinoceros' (Nubi *kíngílo*), 'banana' (Nubi *lobolo*), 'alligator' (Nubi *mányá*), all attested in at least three of the substrate languages of Nubi. This confirms the caveat formulated by, e.g., Luffin (2005: 37) to the effect that "*se focaliser sur le bari crée un problème méthodologique*".[5] Moreover, two of these – the words for 'slim, thin' and 'cassava' – are found not only in several Sudanic languages, but also in Zande, a Niger-Congo language, i.e., they cut across genetic affiliations. On currently available documentation, it is difficult, not to say impossible, to determine in such cases the donor and the recipient language(s). For instance, it is tempting to suppose that the term for 'cassava' is Sudanic and that the Zande form *gbanda* is therefore a borrowing. However, according to Moi et al. (2018: 26), the identical form occurring in Bongo, a Sudanic language, is borrowed from Zande. If so, the word for 'cassava' is a Sudanic loanword in Zande, but a Zande loanword in Bongo, itself a Sudanic language, and Zande is both a recipient and a donor language.

Other Nubi lexical items can be traced either to one or several Sudanic substrate languages or to one of the Bantu adstrate languages, i.e., again cutting across genetic affiliations. Consider the terms for 'banana' (Nubi *bogoya* / *bogoyo*), 'riddle' (Nubi *kóíkói*), 'very sweet orange' (Nubi *mangada*), 'papaya' (Nubi variant *papái*), 'car' (Nubi *mótoka*), 'cassava leaf' (Nubi *pondu*), 'kitchen' (Nubi *sigiri*).

Further evidence pointing to areal diffusion consists of Nubi lexical items found in one or several Sudanic substrate languages and also in two or three Bantu adstrate languages. This is the case of the following: the terms for 'debt' (Nubi *bánjá*), 'loaf-shaped bread' (Nubi *bóflo*), 'parrot' (Nubi *kasúku*), 'guava' (Nubi *mapéra*), 'rice (husked or cooked)' (Nubi *m(u)chele* / *muchére*), *nyanya* 'tomato' (Nubi *nyánya*). Note that four of these, *bóflo*, *kasúku*, *mapéra* and *nyánya* have been all too readily traced to Swahili by other authors.

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[5] See also Lang (2023: 93).

Under these circumstances, then, given the areal distribution of such "mots voyageurs", neither the donor language nor their status as direct borrowings vs. indirect borrowings can be safely determined.

4.5 Diachrony

Determining when a given loanword entered Nubi is by no means an easy task, in particular since documentation of the language as spoken in its original homeland is virtually non-existent. However, several facts and pieces of evidence can be pulled together in an attempt at establishing a chronology.

First, as shown by Tosco & Manfredi (2013: 503), after the arrival in Uganda, the speakers of Nubi were cut off from both its Sudanese Arabic lexifier and its Nilotic substratum. As a rule of thumb, then, the relative chronology is as follows: loanwords from the substrate languages must have entered Nubi when its speakers were still in southern Sudan, while loanwords from the adstrate languages made it into the language after their arrival in East Africa.

There is also some evidence pointing to a more precise delimitation. For instance, at least 15 loanwords found in Modern Nubi have long been in the language, as evidenced by the fact that they are attested in early 20th-century sources. As can be seen in Table 2, some of these are listed in two or even three independent sources.

TABLE 2. African loanwords attested in Early and Modern Mubi

Cook (1905)	Jenkins (1909)	Meldon (1913)	Modern Nubi
banja 'debt; owe'	_____	_____	*bánjá* 'debt'
bura 'cat'	*burra* 'cat'	*burra* 'cat'	*búra* 'cat'
danga 'bow'	_____	*dangah* 'bow'	*(a)dángá* 'bow'
godogodo 'thin from illness'	_____	_____	*gódógódó* 'slim, thin'
kibra 'forest'	*kibera* 'thick forest'	*kibrah* 'forest, clump of trees'	*kibira* 'forest'
korufu 'leaf'	*karrafa* 'leaf'	*korāfah* 'branch'	*korófo* '(edible) leaf'
kungu 'dance; hymn'	_____	*kungu* 'dance, feast, wake'	*kungú* 'song'

Cook (1905)	Jenkins (1909)	Meldon (1913)	Modern Nubi
kuruju 'to cultivate'	_____	_____	*kúruju* 'to cultivate'
kwata 'wrestle'	_____	_____	*kwátá* 'wrestling'
kyata 'potatoes'	*khiaātā* 'sweet potatoes'	_____	*kiáta* 'potato'
labolo 'banana'	*lobolo* 'bana'	_____	*lobolo* 'banana'
nyila 'boots'	*nīlāt* 'slippers'	_____	*n(y)ilâ* 'sandals (worn by men'
nyaruku 'baby, child'	_____	*nerakūk* 'child'	*nyer(e)kû* 'child'
seri 'fence'	_____	_____	*serî* 'fence'
turuju 'to chase away; to divorce'	*tarajū* 'to expel' *torjū* 'driving out'	*turuju* 'to drive, to eject'	*túrju* 'to chase'

Significantly, of the 15 loanwords above, only *bánjá* may be a loanword from an adstrate language, Luganda or Lunyoro, as shown in 3.1. Note also that the words in Table 2 include two which "*ne sont plus utilisés en kinubi actuellement*" according to Luffin (2005: 419): *(a)dángá* 'bow' and *kungú* 'song'. This again reflects dialectal differences between the varieties of Nubi spoken in Mombasa and Kibera (Nairobi).

Consider next the fact that at least 25 of the loanwords discussed in section 3 may be assumed to go back to what Nakao (2012: 133) calls "the proto-level stage" of Juba Arabic and Nubi, i.e. before the dispersal of Nubi speakers to East Africa. Therefore, these must have been borrowed before the split into what are today Juba Arabic and Nubi, since, as shown in Table 3, they are attested in both languages:[6]

[6] The Juba Arabic forms and glosses in Table 2 are from Smith & Ama (2003) and Nakao (2012: 133).

TABLE 3. African loanwords shared by Modern Nubi and Juba Arabic

Modern Nubi	Juba Arabic
bángírí 'jaw'	*bánggírí* 'cheek'
bánjá 'debt'	*banja* 'debt'
búnia 'blow, punch'	*buniya* 'fist'
búra 'cat'	*bura* 'cat'
(a)dángá 'bow'	*danga* 'bow'
dóngó 'back of the head'	*dóngóng* 'back of head'
gírígírí 'spotted'	*giringgíríng* 'spotted'
ngúlúngúlú 'round'	*gulunggúlúng* / *ŋulúnŋulún* 'round'
kení 'co-wife'	*kení* 'second wife'
júújú 'shrew'	*jújú* 'shrew'
kibira 'forest'	*kibra* / *kibira* 'forest'
korófo '(edible) leaf'	*korofa* / *korófo* 'leaf'
kúri 'hawk'	*kúri* 'falcon'
kúruju 'to cultivate'	*kuruju* 'to dig; to cultivate'
kwátá 'wrestling'	*kwata* 'wrestling'
lobolo 'banana plantain'	*laboro* / *labolo* / *loboró* 'banana'
lánga 'to roam, to walk around'	*langga* 'to wander'
mányá 'alligator'	*mányáng* 'monitor lizard'
mbíró 'oil palm'	*mbiro* 'palm oil tree'
nyékém 'chin'	*nyekem* 'chin'
nyalamá 'gap in the teeth'	*nyelama* / *nyalamá* 'broken tooth; toothless'
nyer(e)kû 'child'	*nyirikuuk* / *ɲerkúk* 'baby, child'
pondu 'cassava leaf'	*pondu* 'cassava leaves'
futuku 'hoof (as foodstuff)'	*putuku* 'hoof (food)'
tigirí 'African cabbage'	*tegirí* 'small dark green leaves'
túrju 'to chase'	*toruju* / *túruju* 'to expel, to dismiss, to throw out, to chase away''

Here again, with two possible exceptions – *bánjá* and *pondu*, all these loanwords can be traced to the substrate languages of Nubi, as shown in 3.1. Note also the word for 'round' which Luffin (2005: 434) lists among the Juba Arabic "*termes empruntés aux langues sud-soudanaises, qui n'apparaissent pas en kinubi*". Presumably, this is one more instance of inter-dialectal differences between Kibera (Nairobi) and Mombasa Nubi.

Finally, assuming the rule of thumb mentioned above, the adstratal lexical input constitutes a historically later layer, after the arrival in East Africa of the Nubi speakers. As put by Tosco & Manfredi (2013: 503), "Nubi communities are now surrounded by a majority of Swahili and Luganda speakers". In the context of the present paper, this accounts for the growing lexical influence of Luganda.

4.6 Calques or traces of former pidginhood?

The potential idiomatic calques listed in section 4 are also attested in the earliest Nubi vocabulary (Avram 2020c: 58):

TABLE 4. Potential calques in Early and Modern Nubi

Cook (1905)	Modern Nubi
ida (bita latap) 'branch'	*iida lakáta* 'branch' *idân ta shederân* 'branch'
jina kidada 'chicken'	*jina gĭdda* 'chicken'
jina kora 'toe'	*jéna kurâ* 'toe'
moya ena 'tear	*moyo éna* / *moyéna* / *moéna* / *mwĕna* 'tear'
raso jua 'roof'	*rás júa* 'roof'

Since the above potential idiomatic calques are also found in Juba Arabic, they can presumably be traced to the proto-level stage of Juba and Nubi, i.e., before the displacement of Nubi speakers to East Africa:

TABLE 5. Potential calques shared by Nubi and Juba Arabic

Modern Nubi	Juba Arabic
iida lakáta 'branch' *idân ta shederân* 'branch'	*ída* ta ségera 'branch'

Modern Nubi	Juba Arabic
jina gǐdda 'chicken'	*jéna jidéda* 'chicken'
moyo éna / *moyéna* / *moéna* / *mwěna* 'tear'	*móya éna* / *móyo éna* 'tear'
rás júa 'roof'	*râs ta júwa* / *râs júwa* 'roof'

The potential idiomatic calques appear to provide evidence for an "idiomatic structure" (in the sense of Owens 1996), which Nubi and its substrate and adstrate languages share and which is the result of areal convergence. However, as shown below, forms structurally similar or identical to those are also recorded in pidgins or creoles with different substrate and adstrate languages (Parkvall & Baker 2012; Avram 2020b).

Compounds of the type 'water eye / eye water' are widely attested in English-, French- and Portuguese-lexifier pidgins and creoles (Avram 2003: 35-36; Parkvall & Baker 2012: 237; Avram 2017a: 10, 2017b: 42-43, 2020d: 185 and 191). As specifically mentioned by Parkvall (2000: 113), *eyewater* "could predictably be invented on the spot by anybody not knowing any other word" and this is typically done by lexicalizing semantically transparent compounds. Parkvall (2000: 113) suggests that "much of what may look African in Creole semantics may therefore well be but an indirect manifestation of former Pidginhood". It may be the case, then, that for some speakers "struggling to communicate" in the multilingual contact situation, such compounds are "lexical innovations" (Parkvall & Baker 2012: 231-232), i.e. they are not necessarily calqued after the substrate and/or adstrate languages.

The use of a word meaning 'child' in compounds to designate the young of an animal or bird is attested in other pidgins and creoles, e.g. the Arabic-lexifier pidgin Turku *ouled bagar* 'veau', lit. 'child cow', and a number of French-lexifier creoles (Avram 2019: 19). Moreover, in Modern Ugandan Nubi "by placing 'jina in front of the noun, diminution is expressed" (Wellens 2005: 19). Similarly, in Modern Kenyan Nubi *jina* 'child' also functions as a diminutive marker (Nakao et al. 2019). In other words, *jína* 'child' has been grammaticalized into a diminutive marker. This again parallels developments in several French-lexifier creoles, in which French-derived *piti* 'child; small' has turned into the diminutive prefix *ti-* (Avram 1998).

Consider, finally, the compound 'head house' for 'roof', which is also attested in Turku: *rass bett* 'toît' (Avram 2019: 20), lit. 'head house'.

Summing up, some of the potential idiomatic calques cannot necessarily be attributed to the substratal input in Nubi. However, even if they are independent lexical innovations in Nubi, they may be illustrative of substrate reinforcement.

5. Conclusions

This article has examined the contribution of African substrate and adstrate languages, with the exception of Swahili, to the lexicon of the Arabic-lexifier creole Nubi. Etymologies have been proposed for a total of 93 loanwords. These include 17 lexical items previously listed among the Nubi lexicon of unknown origin. It has been shown that in a number of cases, the donor language cannot be determined.

Comparison with the closely related Juba Arabic indicates that some of the loanwords and potential idiomatic calques date from before the split of the two languages, given that they are recorded in both.

The potential idiomatic calques have been traced to several possible source languages. Their status as calques has been discussed as evidence of possible areal features cutting across genetic affiliations or as possible traces of former "pidginhood".

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Areal influences and superstrate inheritance in Nigerian Pidgin English proverbs

Abstract

Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE), considered as a *lingua franca* in Nigeria, is a relatively young language that is still evolving. The purpose of the paper is to present an analysis of NPE proverbs, particularly in terms of their content, with special reference to their possible equivalents in other Nigerian languages. Data collected on the Internet (i.e. blogs, forums, Facebook sites) has been verified in consultation with NPE speakers and compared with the already published sources related to NPE and selected African languages. The results have shown that West African languages have had greater influence on NPE proverbs, as is demonstrated particularly in terms of shared conceptualizations. Furthermore, the examination has revealed the existence of a distinct group of proverbs identified as being of NPE origin. The findings of the research have provided important insights for further analysis and have demonstrated that NPE should be perceived as a mature language.

Keywords: Nigerian Pidgin English, proverbs, conceptualization patterns, West African languages, areal influences.

1. Introduction

Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE), considered a *lingua franca* in Nigeria, is a relatively young language which is still evolving. Established in the 17th century, as a result of contact between the languages of the local people living on the

Nigerian coast of the Gulf of Guinea, Portuguese and English, provides a good avenue for linguistic research into language development. Even though its official name still keeps the word "pidgin", it has already reached a creole language status by becoming a native language for some part of Nigerian society and gained a new name: Naija. Although there already exist at least two grammatical descriptions of language (Faraclas 1996; Elugbe 1991), it has not been standardized yet. Moreover, the approach presented in a majority of research was related to grammatical constructions analyzed as of superstrate language simplification (Mensah 2012; Aikhenvald 2006; Ativie 2010; Dillon 2003; Mowarin 2008; Frąckiewicz 2010; Faraclas 2013; Mazzoli 2013). While the initial research was rather concerned with structures and features common for pidgins and creole languages, further scientists started to examine also structures in terms of areal common features as well as substrate influence on pidgin and creole language development (Siegel 2003; Eme 2012; Frąckiewicz 2019; Frąckiewicz 2020). Although the grammatical and structural aspects of language have been widely examined, the cultural aspects of the pidgin and creole languages still have not been thoroughly studied. Bearing in mind that linguists distinguish different levels of pidgins and creoles development, the following criteria need to be met to assume language as fully developed and mature: (a) stabilized and settled grammar and vocabulary with reduced variability among its speakers; (b) language is widely used in social, cultural, professional context; (c) it has been adapted as a native language for society; (d) it has official status or is accepted by the community; (e) it constitutes a key part of heritage and identity of its users (Panigrahi 2018). Nigerian Pidgin English is rich in proverbs, which can be regarded as one of the criteria of the language's maturity. Bakker observes that "A pidgin […] may evolve into an expanded pidgin (our "pidgincreole") if it is used in a range of functions (e.g., not only trade, but also art)" (Bakker 2008: 132). The presence of innovative proverbial coinages in NPE aligns the language with Bakker's *pidgin creole* rather than *pidgin*. In this paper, it is assumed that proverbs are taken as a form of expressive language use in line with Bakker's notion of art. What is more, by examining proverbs, we may gain an insight into the linguistic worldview of West Africa. In addition, proverbs, as a specific type of conventionalized structures, provide valuable knowledge about cultural habits and values.

The paper aims to present an analysis of NPE proverbs with special reference to their possible equivalents in other Nigerian languages. The analysis encompasses both the meaning (i.e., message) of the proverb and conceptualization patterns used to code this meaning.

1.1 Data and methodology

The corpus comprises 163 proverbs. However, the paper provides 42 numbered examples, which have been selected as representative of described conceptualization patterns. A full list of proverbs has been placed in the Appendix. The original spelling used by language users has been kept. The data was collected during 12 months of online observation covering Facebook pages (BBC Pidgin, African proverbs) and discussion fora (Nairaland, Reddit). Each example has been cross-checked with at least two occurrences and has been verified by NPE speakers. Examples have been compared with published sources related to proverbs in major Nigerian languages: Hausa (Merrick 1905; Baldi 2012; Zając 2018), Igbo (Nwankwo 2015; Chinonye 2020; Ibekwe 2017), Yoruba (Owomoyela 2005; Babasola 2014). The analysis has also been extended to other West African languages such as Kanuri, Akan, Ewe, and Urhobo.

In the next steps, proverbs identified as equivalent in meaning and following the same conceptualization pattern have been classified as a) proverbs that constitute an exact calque of an original proverb, and b) proverbs merely "inspired" by the original ones. The proverbs, which have not been found either as having an origin in West African languages or having a superstrate origin, were assumed to have been created by NPE speakers and constitute the unique worldview of NPE speakers. The research has shown that 94 NPE proverbs have no equivalents in local Nigerian languages, i.e., ***Dog no dey chop dog, but dog say who first die be meat*** 'the victim is the scapegoat', ***No mata how car full reach, dem no dey follow driver drag im seat*** 'some things in this life are constant', ***The difference between puff – puff and doughnut na packaging*** 'don't judge based on appearance'. It should be underlined that the conceptualization of these 94 NPE-internal proverbs is close to the ones which have been copied directly (the direct copy is understood as proverb whose lexical composition and conceptualization matches the one from the source proverb on a one-to-one basis, with possible minor changes) or indirectly from other Nigerian languages or English. The Nigerian Pidgin English proverbs have included references to the forces of nature, have encapsulated the wisdom of society, and have constituted the guidance of life. Moreover, the fact that proverbs are found within language resources confirms their full-fledged language status.

This classification aims to determine to what extent NPE proverbs reflect the influence of the substrate languages or English as the superstrate, or both.

Based on the availability of proverb collections, most of the examples come from three major languages of the area in which NPE is used, namely Hausa,

Igbo, and Yoruba. The equivalents of NPE proverbs were also identified in some other languages, which gave rise to the assumption that these proverbs have a wider areal distribution and proverbs encountered in more than three or four languages can be considered as a common substrate resource. The current study focuses on Nigerian languages. However, the development of some NPE proverbs seems to be motivated by the English superstrate.

The proverbs discussed in the following sections include a presentation of the meaning (i.e., message) that is common to languages being compared. The examples are provided with their literal meaning and interpreted in terms of the basis for conceptualization. The meanings attributed to the analyzed proverbs were identified on the basis of their attested usage, including academic descriptions, online discussion fora, and social media platforms such as Facebook or Instagram, where Nigerian Pidgin English is actively used. This triangulation of written and oral sources allows the proposed interpretations to be grounded in actual language practice rather than relying on elicited data. However, it should be noted that the corpus consists of written records of proverbs and does not include audio recordings. A comparison of NPE proverbs with proverbs of at least two Nigerian languages and with English equivalents are presented in the subsequent sections.

1.2. Presentation conventions

Each example used in the paper has been presented in a four-tier format:

(i) proverb in NPE in italics in original spelling used by the native speakers,

(ii) a literal (word-to-word) meaning, marked as 'lit.',

(iii) an English translation accompanied by a bibliographical reference if applicable,

(iv) the basis for conceptualization in a form of formula linking the two key elements of the proverb.

2. Equivalents of NPE proverbs in West African languages

The analysed data has been presented in the following order: Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, English. This order is not related to the relative quantitative contribution of a particular language to the NPE corpus, but follows the geographical north-to-south localization of the three major languages of Nigeria.

2.1 Hausa

Eight Hausa proverbs have been identified in the data. Two of them are also found in other Nigerian' languages (see section 3) and, therefore, the remaining six were scrutinized.

(1) Meaning of the proverb: What goes up must come down – a metaphor for the cyclic nature of life

NPE: *Anything wey go up dem no born am well e must come down.*
(lit. 'anything what goes up and wasn't created for that must fall')
'Whatever goes up, must go down'.
The basis for conceptualization: rising up – falling down

Hausa: *Komai nisan jifa kasa zai dawo.*
(lit. 'no matter how far you throw, it still falls to the ground')
'Whatever goes up, must go down'. (Asabe Kamir 2014:895)
The basis for conceptualization: rising up (by throwing) – falling down

Both proverbs draw on the gravity image schema (Lakoff and Johnson 1980).

(2) Meaning of the proverb: Prevention is better than cure/ Learn from others' experiences.[1]

NPE: *If your neighbour beard catch you go quick soak your own for water.*
(lit. 'when your neigbour's beard catches fire, you will soak your own into the water')
'Prevention is better than cure'.
The basis for conceptualization: Neighbour's burning beard – water for your own beard

Hausa: *Ìdan kā ga gēmùn dan uwankà yā kāmà wutā, shòfā wà nākà ruwā.*
(lit. 'when your brother's beard catches fire, pour water on yours')
'Prevention is better than cure'. (Saleh 2014:88)
The basis for conceptualization: brother's burning beard – water for your own beard

(3) Meaning of the proverb: The most challenging, desperate, or hopeless moments in life often precede a positive turnaround:[2]

NPE: *Na sun dey follo evri black night.*
(lit. 'it is the sun following every black night')

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[1] However in English there are two different sentences, both of them are used to express that it is better to prevent the occurrence of action.
[2] In English also there might be found as "It is always darkest before the dawn" or " The darkest hour is just before the dawn".

'After every night day comes'.
The basis for conceptualization: (black) night – (rising) sun

Hausa: *Kome nisan dare, gari ya weye.*
(lit. 'however long the night, morning will come')
'No matter how long the night, the day will break/dawn will surely break'. (Usman 2014: 895)
The basis for conceptualization: (black) night – (rising) sun

(4) Meaning of the proverb: What will be, will be.

NPE: *No matter how high you traway stone, e must come down.*
(lit. 'no matter how far you throw a stone, it has to fall to the ground')
The basis for conceptualization: throwing (a stone) – falling

Hausa: *Komi tsannani'n jifa bissa kassa ta ke fadua*.
'However hard a thing is thrown into the air, it always falls to the ground'. (Merrick 1905: 30)
The basis for conceptualization: throwing (something) in the air – falling

(5) Meaning of the proverb: Good things in life don't come easily.

NPE: *Soup wey sweet na money kill am*.
(lit. 'soup which is sweet it is the money which kills it')
'Good things do not come cheap or easily'.
The basis for conceptualization: sweet soup – high price

Hausa: *Zaki ba na seye ba, ba a – rena gwanda'n daji*.
'Sweet food that has cost you nothing is not to be despised even if it is only a bush pawpaw'. (Merrick 1905:16)
The basis for conceptualization: sweet (food) – great value

Among proverbs mentioned above perceived as having a Hausa origin, only two are direct copy ((1) and (4)), while the remaining ones have just been inspired by the Hausa proverbs ((2), (3), and (5)).

As can be noticed, examples (1) and (4) have similar conceptual meaning even if they are expressed in a unique way. Both are present in the language. It should be mentioned that proverb (1) also functions in Standard English as 'what goes up, must come down'. While the English one focuses on the inevitability of descent, the African examples foreground the intensity of human effort, i.e. throwing in the air, emphasizing that even maximal force cannot override natural or social limits.

The proverb found in example (3) can be found in Igbo (*Ka anyasị eteka, chi ga-efo*, lit. 'However long the night, the dawn will break').

In terms of content, this group consists of proverbs related to life, its changing nature, and unpredictability.

2.2 Yoruba

The Yoruba language is another major source contributing to NPE proverbs. Eight proverbs were identified of Yoruba origin, but two of them were assumed to be universal 'Pan-Nigerian' ones (see section 3). Hence, only six are the subject of the following analysis:

(6) Meaning of the proverb: Sticking to the fundamentals is essential for success.

NPE: *Any river wey forget where e come from go dry off las las*.
(lit. 'any river which forgets where it comes from will dry totally')
The basis for conceptualization: river forgetting source – existential threat

Yoruba: *Odò kì í sàn kó gbàgbé ìsun.*
'A river does not flow and forgets its source'. (Owomoyela 2005:308)
The basis for conceptualization: river flow forgetting its source – existential threat

(7) Meaning of the proverb: Look first at yourself before you judge others.

NPE: *As you dey point person with one finger, di remaining 4 fingers dey point yourself.*
(lit. 'when you are pointing a person with one finger the remaining four fingers are pointing at yourself')
The basis for conceptualization: pointing one finger – pointing the rest fingers

Yoruba: *Eni to n"oka kan si enikeji, merin y"oku ntoka si.*
(lit. 'he who points one finger to his neighbour has the other four fingers pointing back to him' (Babasola 2014:53))
The basis for conceptualization: pointing one finger – pointing the rest fingers

(8) Meaning of the proverb: A warning against living in illusion.

NPE: *Cat wey dey pursue dog think for im mind say im be tiger.*
(lit. 'cat which is pursuing dog, perceives itself as tiger')
The basis for conceptualization: cat (perceiving itself as tiger) – dog (seen as weak)

Yoruba: *Ológìnní lè lé ajá tó bá rò pé ọmọ ẹkùn lòun.*
(lit. 'a cat that thinks it's a leopard's cub may dare to chase a dog')[3]

[3] https://www.facebook.com/oweyoruba/posts/ológìnní – lè – lé – ajá – tó – bá – rò – pé – ọmọ – ẹkùn – lòun – a – cat – that – thinks – its – a – leopards – cu/303714959730272/ [8 May 2026].

The basis for conceptualization: cat (perceiving itself as leopard's cub) – dog (seen as weak)

(9) Meaning of the proverb: Sadness or misfortune does not give one the excuse to misbehave or be sloppy.

NPE: *Eye wey dey cry still dey see road*.
(lit. 'eye that cries sill is seeing road')
The basis for conceptualization: crying (because of bad situation) – proper perception

Yoruba: *Ti a ba nsu'kun, a ma nri'ran*.
(lit. 'crying shouldn't get in the way of clear vision')[4]
The basis for conceptualization: crying (because of bad situation) – proper perception

(10) Meaning of the proverb: Some things cannot remain hidden.

NPE: *One day wind go blow and fowl yansh go open*.
(lit. 'one day wind will blow and fowl's buttocks yansh will be seen')
The basis for conceptualization: wind – fowl's buttocks (exposed) discover

Yoruba: *Afẹfẹ ti fẹ a ti ri idi adiyẹ*.
'The wind has blown, the buttocks of the fowl will be revealed'.[5]
The basis for conceptualization: wind – fowl's buttocks (revealed) discover

(11) Meaning of the proverb: Be careful in whatever you do because some kindness may cause you great trouble.

NPE: *Person way use him head break coconut, no dey follow chop inside*.
(lit. 'person who uses his head to break coconut, will not eat what is inside it')
The basis for conceptualization: coconut (smashed with head) – a big problem (with eating the inside) doer – excluded from action

Yoruba: *Ẹni tí a bá fi orí – i rè fó àgbọn ò níí jẹ níbè*.
'The person on whose head a coconut is broken will not share in eating it'. (Owomoyela 2005:117)
The basis for conceptualization: coconut (smashed with head) – a big problem (with eating the inside) doer – excluded from action

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[4] https://www.facebook.com/YorubaProverb/posts/ti – a – ba – nsun – ekun – a – ma – nri – ran – crying – shouldnt – get – in – the – way – of – clear – visionypt/865569960184421/ [8 May 2026].
[5] https://hintng.com/nigerian – proverbs – and – meanings/ [8 May 2026].

All analyzed proverbs constitute the direct copy of an original proverb. It shows that the Yoruba language is the closest source of their conceptualization patterns. However, there might occur small differences in the literal meanings. Proverbs seem to be almost directly borrowed from an original language: The river dries vs. does not flow in example no. (6), in example no. (7), it is 'person' while its equivalent in indigenous language is 'neighbour'. Similarly in no. (8), there is a difference in imagined animals (tiger vs. leopard) as well as in no. (9) where the 'road' is substituted by 'clear vision', while no. (10) and (11) constitute a copy of the original proverbs in terms of both conceptualization as well as wording. In terms of subject, proverbs of Yoruba origin in NPE are related to the unchangeable character of fate. In expressing general concepts, typically shared across cultures, Yoruba NPE proverbs draw on observations of the surroundings. The underlying conceptualization refers to the contrast between night and day, the behaviour of cats, dogs, and fowls, and, above all, environmental characteristics, with an emphasis on natural processes and manual activities such as river flow or breaking a coconut.

2.3 Igbo

The proverbs of Igbo origin represent the largest group. They consist of direct copies of proverbs and those inspired by the original ones. Igbo is the donor language for sixteen of the eighteen proverbs presented here; the remaining two are common to other Nigerian languages (see section 3):

(12) Meaning of the proverb: Don't judge people's decisions if you don't know their situation.

NPE: *Anything wey pursue rat enter fire, dey hotter dan dat fire*.
(lit. 'anything that pursued rat to enter into fire is hotter than that fire')
The basis for conceptualization: rat – entering fire

Igbo: *Mgbe ị hụrụ òké ka ọ na-agbaba n'ime ọkụ, i kwesịrị ị mara na ihe o si na ya na-agbalaga dị oké ọkụ karịa ọkụ nkịtị*.
(lit. 'when you see a rat running into a fire, then you know that what it is running away from is hotter than the fire')
The basis for conceptualization: rat – entering fire

(13) Meaning of the proverb: Be aware with whom you deal.

NPE: *Bird wey dey dance for road sumtin dey inside bush dey nack band for am*.
(lit. 'bird that is dancing on the road, something in the bush plays music for it')[6]
The basis for conceptualization: dancing bird – bush music

[6] Saying used by Chinua Achebe in the *Arrow of God* (Ukwuaba 2015: 92).

Igbo: *Nwa nnụnụ na-agba egwu n'akwa nduru, nwere ihe na-akụrụ ya egwu n'ime ọhịa*
(lit. 'a young bird dancing in a dove's nest has something playing music for it in the forest')
The basis for conceptualization: dancing bird – bush music

(14) Meaning of the proverb: It is better to listen to good advice before it is too late.

NPE: *Chicken wey dey stubborn, na inside soup e dey hear word*
(lit. 'chicken that is stubborn, inside soup listens word')
The basis for conceptualization: chicken (in pot) – a lesson (in obedience)

Igbo: *Okuko nti ike na anu ihe na ite ofe*.
(lit. 'a stubborn chicken learns its lesson in the hot pot of soup')[7]
The basis for conceptualization: chicken (in pot) – a lesson (in obedience)

(15) Meaning of the proverb: Learn to adapt your plans to ever changing situations.

NPE: *Dem no dey drink pepper soup like water*.
(lit. 'they are not drinking pepper soup like water')
The basis for conceptualization: demanding situation – cautious approach

Igbo: *Nwayo, nwayo Ka eji a lasha ofe di oku*.
(lit. 'you don't lick a hot or peppery soup in a hurry')[8]
The basis for conceptualization: demanding situation – cautious approach

(16) Meaning of the proverb: Do the things at a suitable time.

NPE: *Dem no dey find black goat for night*.
(lit. 'they are not finding black goat at night')
The basis for conceptualization: (searching) black goat – night

Igbo: *Chọ́ éwú ójii mgbe ihé di*.
(lit. 'look for a black goat when there is daylight' (Nwankwo 2015: 58))
The basis for conceptualization: (searching) black goat – daylight

(17) Meaning of the proverb: When you have good advice and seek mentors, you can avoid pitfalls that many face.

NPE: *Fly wey no dey hear word na im dey follow dead body enter grave*.
(lit. 'fly that is not listening word it is the one that puts corpse into the grave')
The basis for conceptualization: disobedient fly – death

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[7] https://nigeriandictionary.com/okko – nti – ike – na – amr – ako – na – ite – ofe – di – ok [8 May 2026].
[8] https://www.scribd.com/document/413742019/1000 – Proverbs – in – English – and – Igbo – Languages [8 May 2026].

Igbo: *Ịjịjịi enweghị nduṃọdụ na eso ozu aba nâ ili.*
(lit. 'a fly that has no counselor puts the corpse to the grave')[9]
The basis for conceptualization: Fly (that does not listen to other) – death

(18) Meaning of the proverb: A person who has means but his undoing is a laziness.

NPE: *If you find a dead rat on top of a bag of rice, he didn't die of starvation. He died of happiness.*
(lit. 'if you find a dead rat on top of bag of rice, it did not die because of starvation but because of happiness')
The basis for conceptualization: rat – having too much of something

Igbo: *Ewu nwụrụ n'ọba ji abụghị agụrụ gburu ya.*
(lit. 'a goat that dies in a barn was not killed by hunger' (Ibekwe 2021:23))
The basis for conceptualization: goat – having too much of something

(19) Meaning of the proverb: Whatever is worth doing at all is worth doing well.

NPE: *If you go chop frog, chop the biggest one.*
(lit. 'if you eat a frog, eat the biggest one')[10]
The basis for conceptualization: (eating) frog – (selecting) the largest specimen

(20) Meaning of the proverb: Don't risk everything if you are not sure about the situation.

NPE: *Na only fool dey check how deep water dey wit im two legs.*
(lit. 'only fool is the one who checks the depth of water with two legs')
The basis for conceptualization: (testing the depth of) river – (putting) both feet in the water

Igbo: *Naani onye nzuzu na–eji ụkwụ ya abụọ anwale otú osimiri si dị omimi.*
(lit. 'it is only a fool who tests the depth of a river with both feet')[11]
The basis for conceptualization: (testing the depth of) river – (putting) both feet in the water

(21) Meaning of the proverb: Every man is an architect of his own fortune.

NPE: *Na stubbornness dey make fly follow dead body inside grave.*
(lit. 'it is stubbornness making fly follow a dead body into a grave')
The basis for conceptualization: (stubborn fly) – death

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[9] https://www.facebook.com/adaigbosongs/photos/a.1751425261586094/5675682745826973/?paipv=0&eav=AfbDfAHoFNxgyeGurb7_FByrVK6ZweLvseKgY238GerWptTge0umEDU1bDmGt7Ff_aE&_rdr [8 May 2026].
[10] https://www.allthingsnigeria.com/2011/igbo – proverbs/ [8 May 2026].
[11] https://www.facebook.com/groups/409144465918125/posts/3214334562065754 [8 May 2026].

Igbo: *Ọkúkọ ńtị íke, n"ézu ike n"eko ńnụnụ*.
(lit. 'a stubborn fly ends in the grave' (Nwankwo 2015: 58))
The basis for conceptualization: (stubborn) fly – death

(22) Meaning of the proverb: Conditions make actions possible.

NPE: *Na tree near tree na im make monkey fit day jump*
(lit. 'it is tree near tree what makes monkey able to jump')
The basis for conceptualization: trees growing close together – monkey (jumping)

Igbo: *Enwe ma ka eji amagharị n'ọhịa bụ na osisi dị ya nso*.
(lit. 'the monkey's dexterity in jumping from tree to tree is because the trees are close by')[12]
The basis for conceptualization: trees growing close together – monkey (jumping)

(23) Meaning of the proverb: One person alone cannot accomplish as much as many people.

NPE: *One tree no fit make di forest*.
(lit. 'one tree cannot make the forest')
The basis for conceptualization: individual – no big accomplishments

Igbo: *Otu osisi adighi eme oke ohia*.
(lit. 'a tree does not make a forest' (Nwankwo 2015: 59))
The basis for conceptualization: one tree – many trees (as a forest)

(24) Meaning of the proverb: Discretion is the better part of value.

NPE: *Person when fire dey burn him house no they go chase rat*.
(lit. 'a person, when fire is burning his house, will not chase rat')
The basis for conceptualization: burning house – catching rats (as inappropriate action)

Igbo: *Ónyéúlọ yá na-agbáókụ anághị achú oke*.
(lit. 'one whose house is burning does not catch rats' (Nwankwo 2015: 58))
The basis for conceptualization: burning house – catching rats (as inappropriate action)

(25) Meaning of the proverb: If you ferment trouble, you will also be a participant in the trouble.

NPE: *Pikin wey say im mama no go sleep im no go sleep*.
(lit. 'child who says its mother will not sleep, will not sleep')
The basis for conceptualization: mother's troubles – child's troubles

[12] https://www.facebook.com/groups/163735070716436/ [8 May 2026].

Igbo: *Nwa sị na nneyé agahụ araha ụra, agahụ araha keye*.
(lit. 'the child that says their mother will not sleep will also not sleep' (Chidera 2018))
The basis for conceptualization: mother's troubles – child's troubles

(26) Meaning of the proverb: It is always someone who knows a person who hurts others.

NPE: *Rat wey dey house na e dey tell de one wey dey outside say food dey house*.
(lit. 'the rat that is in the house is the one who tells the one that is outside that there is food in the house')
The basis for conceptualization: (knowledge of) the house rat – (source of information for) bush rat

Igbo: *Obu oke no n'uno gwara oke no n'ofia n'azu di na ngigia*.
(lit. 'it is the house rat that informed the bush rat that there is fish in the perforated fish safe' (Onyejegbu 2020: 185))
The basis for conceptualization: (knowledge of) the house rat – (source of information for) bush rat

(27) Meaning of the proverb: One will never know the extent of the journey because the person has been assisted all the way.

NPE: *Small pikin wey dem carry for back no know say journey dey far*.
(lit. 'small child who is carried on back does not know that the journey is far')
The basis for conceptualization: small child (on its mother's back) – journey

Igbo: *Nwata nne ya kwo na azu amaghi na uzo di anya*.
(lit. 'a baby on its mother's back does not know that the way is long')[13]
The basis for conceptualization: small child (on its mother's back) – journey

Like in the case of Yoruba proverbs, some of them are slightly modified, even though the main meaning and conceptual base were kept, i.e., in no. (14), the original 'like water' was replaced by 'in a hurry', while in no. (15), the verb 'look for' was changed into 'find'. Furthermore, in example no. (17), the idea of 'counselor' was replaced by 'not listening to the word'. Finally, in example no. (18), an original 'goat in the barn' in the NPE proverb was replaced by 'rat on top of the bag of rice' and in no. (24), the 'catching rats' was replaced by the verb 'chasing'.

The proverb in example no. (13), which is attributed to Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* (Anyachonkeya 2019: 8; Ukwuaba 2015) has not been found in sources consulted. Furthermore, the conceptualization pattern of this proverb 'a dancing

[13] https://www.igboguide.org/guests/igbo – proverbs.htm [8 May 2026].

bird – bush music' pushes the observer to look beyond what is visible – it expresses unseen forces (Anyachonkeya 2019 :8).

The NPE proverbs of Igbo origin offer advice on how to cope with life, including recommendations for listening to others and obedience. Conceptualization includes references to local fauna such as rats, monkeys, goats, and local food (pepper soup).

3. Pan-Nigerian proverbs

Some NPE proverbs were identified as common to more than two Nigerian languages. A striking example refers to the conceptualization of a (sitting) elder – (climbing) child, which is present in proverbs from various Nigerian languages. A set of examples conveys the wisdom of the elders, which cannot be compared to what children represent, despite their best efforts.

Example (28) shows that although the reference of the notion of height may vary (e.g., ladder, silk cotton tree, height, standing), the conceptualization is the same and depicts the important position of elders and their knowledge in a society.

(28) Meaning of the proverb: Wisdom comes with age.

NPE: *De thing wey old papa dey sidon see pikin wey dey on top lader no fit see am.*
(lit. 'the thing which the old father sitting sees, the child who is on top of the ladder cannot see it')
The basis for conceptualization: (sitting) elder – (climbing) child

Hausa: *Abin da babba ya hango yaro ko ya hau rimi ba zai hango ba.*
(lit. 'what an elder sees, a boy cannot see it, even if he climbs a tree' (Chamo 2012: 139))
The basis for conceptualization: (sitting) elder – (climbing) child

Igbo: *Ihe okenye nọ n'ala were hụ. nwata rigoro nâ elu, ọ gaghị ahụ ya.*
(lit. 'what elderly sees while sitting may not be seen by a child though he climbs to heights' (Ibekwe 2021: 18))
The basis for conceptualization: (sitting) elder – (climbing) child

Yoruba: *Uun yi agbalagba ri n'oiho joko, omoiton le ri un n'oiho uduo.*
(lit. 'what an elder can see while sitting down, a child cannot see when standing up')[14]
The basis for conceptualization: (sitting) elder – (climbing) child

[14] https://folklore.usc.edu/uun – yi – agbalagba – ri – noiho – joko – omoiton – le – ri – un – noiho – uduo – proverb/ [8 May 2026].

Efik: *Sé ákámbá ówò étié dé tié ó kút, éyénọwọñ ídáhá dá íKút*.
(lit. 'the thing an elder sits down to see cannot be seen by a child that is standing')[15]
The basis for conceptualization: (sitting) elder – (climbing) child

Another set of proverbs from various Nigerian languages also shares a common conceptualization pattern, which refers to hand washing before meals as a prerequisite to eating together. All proverbs are addressed to children, who learn that belonging to society is achieved by respecting common rules.

(29) Meaning of the proverb: If you are an achiever, you will find yourself in the company of kings.

NPE: *Pickin wey wash hand well dey eat with king makers*.
(lit. 'child who washes hands well is eating with king makers')
The basis for conceptualization: (well – washed) hands – eating with kings

Igbo: *Nwáta kwóchàá áká, o soro ókenye rié ńri*.
(lit. 'when a child washes his hands clean, he dines and wines with the elders' (Nwankwo 2015: 55))
The basis for conceptualization: (well-washed) hands – dining with elders

Yoruba: *Omo to ba m"owo we a ba agba jeun*.
(lit. 'a child who knows how to wash his hand will eat with the elders' (Babasola 2015: 53))
The basis for conceptualization: (well-washed) hands – eating with elders

Urhobo: *Omo Re OWho robofo_oye Lele Ekpako Riemu*.
(lit. 'a child who washes his hands clean, eats with elders')[16]
The basis for conceptualization: (well-washed) hands – eating with elders

4. Standard English

As was already mentioned, some of the proverbs perceived as originating from indigenous languages have also been found in Standard English ((1) and (3)). Other superstrate proverbs that have been reflected in NPE are:

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[15] https://africanmanners.wordpress.com/2012/07/07/efik – proverbs – 56 – in – total/ [8 May 2026].
[16] https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=2322847394603061&id=1854113621476443&set=a.1854131731474632 [8 May 2026].

(30) Meaning of the proverb: Don't risk everything on the success of one venture.

English: *Don't put all your eggs in one basket*.
NPE: *Don't pull all your eggs in one basket*.
(lit. 'don't put all your eggs in one basket')
The basis for conceptualization: all resources (in one place) – total loss

(31) Meaning of the proverb: There is someone for everyone.

English: *There's a lid for every pot*.
NPE: *Every ben ben pot get e cover*.
(lit. 'every pot has its cover')
The basis for conceptualization: pot – matching lid

(32) Meaning of the proverb: When you are visiting another place, you should follow the customs of the people of that place.

English: *When in Rome, do as Romans do*.
NPE: *If dog dey waka with lions dem the dog go begin dey behave like lion)*
(lit. 'if dog Is walking with lions, then the dog will begin behaving like a lion')
The basis for conceptualization: new environment – adopting to local behavior

(33) Meaning of the proverb: Make something good out of bad experience.

English: *When life gives you lemons, make lemonade*.
NPE: *If life dey show you pepper, make pepper soup from am*.
(lit. 'if life is showing you pepper, make pepper soup of it')
The basis for conceptualization: bitter ingredient – productive transformation

(34) Meaning of the proverb: Knowledge is practically useless without wisdom.

English: *Knowledge without wisdom is like water in the sand*.
NPE: *Knowledge na when you know say tomatoes na fruit, wisdom na when you nor use for fruit salad*.
(lit. 'knowledge means when you know that tomatoes are fruits, wisdom means when you do not use them for a fruit salad')
The basis for conceptualization: recognition of facts – appropriate use

(35) Meaning of the proverb: Do not act badly towards the person who is helping or has helped you.

English: *Don't bite the hand that feeds you*.
NPE: *Make you no bite di hand wey dey feed you*.
(lit. 'don't bite the hand that is feeding you')
The basis for conceptualization: benefactor – act of harming

(36) Meaning of the proverb: Victimized or hurt by one's own scheme.

English: *Hoist with his own petard*.[17]
NPE: *Person way put on fire no mean say fire no go burn am*.
(lit. 'person who puts fire does not mean that fire will not burn him')
The basis for conceptualization: setting fire (action) – being burnt (consequence)

(37) Meaning of the proverb: Our strength can surpass challenges and obstacles.

English: *The same boiling water that softens the potato, hardens the egg*.
NPE: *Na the same hot water wey dey make egg hard dey make potato soft*.
(lit. 'it is the same hot water which is making egg hard, is making potato soft')
The basis for conceptualization: same situation – contrasting reaction

(38) Meaning of the proverb: Different people like different things.

English: *One man's meat is another man's poison*.
NPE: *One man food na another man poison*.
(lit. one's man food is another man poison)
The basis for conceptualization: same substance – opposite effect

(39) Meaning of the proverb: One should not cause problems in places in which one finds oneself regularly.

English: *You don't shit where you eat*.
NPE: *Pesin no dey poo for wia e dey chop*.
(lit. 'person is not pooing where is eating')
The basis for conceptualization: place of sustenance – inappropriate behavior

(40) Meaning of the proverb: Satisfaction breeds indifference, whereas hunger breeds appreciation.

English: *One who is full loathes honey from the comb, but to the hungry even what is bitter tastes sweet*.
NPE: *To a hungry man, bitter is sweet*.
(lit. 'for a hungry man bitter tastes sweet')
The basis for conceptualization: hunger – different taste perception

(41) Meaning of the proverb: No condition is permanent.

English: *Laugh today, cry tomorrow*.
NPE: *They tin wey make you laugh today em go make you cry tumoro*.

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[17] Used in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

(lit. the thing which makes you laugh today it will make you cry tomorrow)
The basis for conceptualization: present joy – future sorrow

Another proverb also has the same meaning:

(42) Meaning of the proverb: No condition is permanent.

English: *Today's newspaper is tomorrow's fish and chips paper.*
NPE: *Today's newspaper na tomorrow Suya*[18] *wrap.*
(lit. 'today's newspaper is tomorrow suya wrap')
The basis for conceptualization: value of news – obsolescence

(43) Meaning of the proverb: An imperfect solution can still solve the problem.

English: *Dirty water will quench fire.*
NPE: *Water to take quench fire no need to dey clean.*
(lit. 'water used to quench fire does not need to be clean')
The basis for conceptualization: imperfect means – functional outcome

As visible in the examples, among the proverbs identified as superstrate origin, most of them seem to be directly copied, however it should be emphasized that they were modified and adapted to the Nigerian environment, i.e., in proverb (30) the original 'Romans' were changed into lions that seem to be more appropriate for African society, while in proverb (40), the original 'fish and chips paper' has been replaced with 'suya wrap'. Similarly, in Proverb (31), where in English lemons are mentioned, in the Nigerian Pidgin English version they have been substituted with peppers and in proverb (36), where 'meat' is replaced by 'food'. Also, it should be mentioned that the English proverb in (29) also exists in Dutch in the same form *Op ieder potje past wel een dekseltje* (lit. 'in every jar there fits a lid'). This particular proverb *There's a lid for every pot* can be used with respect to more abstract domains. On the other hand, the same meaning can be expressed with different words, as in proverb (34), keeping the same conceptual sense.

5. Conclusions

This paper attempted to examine the NPE proverbs, particularly their similarities with various West African languages. This comparative study has aimed to contribute to a better understanding of the conceptualization expressed in the proverbs of NPE.

[18] Suya – is a type of fried meat on a stick, similar to kebab.

The examination helped to identify the groups of proverbs that are copied from or inspired by West African languages and Standard English. Furthermore, the comparative approach has helped to determine the extent to which the superstrate and substrate have influenced the proverb's creation or borrowing process. The results show that West African languages have exerted a greater influence on NPE proverbs than Standard English. Among these, Igbo displays the most frequent influence (Igbo: 16; Yoruba: 6; Hausa: 6). This asymmetry suggests that the substrate input comes predominantly from the southern part of the country, which is consistent with the historical context of NPE's emergence in the coastal trading zone.

The identified group of proverbs originating from West African languages consists mostly of adaptations rather than direct copies, whereas the examples attributed to Standard English are largely direct copies. However, it should be emphasized that proverbs directly copied from Standard English have been adapted to suit Nigerian contexts. Finally, the analysis has revealed the existence of a distinct group of proverbs identified as originating within NPE.

In terms of their conceptual basis, three schemas can be distinguished: action-reaction, body parts as determinants of direction, and animals acting as tricksters. An-action-requires-a-reaction schema was often expressed by body parts or natural forces, like throw up – go down, lift up – drop, pull – push, etc. (c.f. examples (1) and (4)) called *image schemas of gravity* (Lakoff & Johnson 1980). On the other hand, body parts can be metaphorically used to express direction and position, i.e., finger pointing, head as highness, feet as connection to the ground/bottom, buttocks or back in terms of 'behind', and so on. Therefore, proverbs should be interpreted multidimensionally, regarding the cultural context and wisdom of society (Baldi 2012), i.e., the cat who overestimates itself (compare with example 8) or the rat who betrays its kin (compare with example 26).

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Appendix

List of proverbs:

1. *Akara and moi moi get di same parents, na wetin dem pass through make dem different*.
2. *Any pesin wen snake bite if him see rope he go jump*.
3. *Any river wey forget where e come from go dry off las las*.
4. *Anything wey pursue rat enter fire, dey hotter dan dat fire*.
5. *Anytin wey you no learn go teach you lesson*.
6. *As you dey point person with one finger, di remaining 4 fingers dey point yourself*.
7. *Becos rose flower di smell good pass cabbage no mean say u fit use cook good soup*.
8. *Befor you see monkey for tree, monkey don see you already*.
9. *Bible wey you thief no fit carry you enter heaven*.
10. *Bird wey dey dance for road sumtin dey inside bush dey nack band for am*.
11. *Bring suya bring suya na from cow body o*.
12. *Cat wey dey pursue dog think for im mind say im be tiger*.
13. *Chicken wey dey stubborn, na inside soup e dey hear word*.
14. *Coconut say di journey far n aim make am carri im own water*.
15. *Cow wey dey rush to go abroad go come back as corn beef*.

16. *Cunny man die, cunny man burry am.*
17. *De thing wey old papa dey sidon see pikin wey dey on top lader no fit see am.*
18. *Dem no dey carry water for mouth dey blow fire.*
19. *Dem no dey cry for pesin wey ball of fufu kill.*
20. *Dem no dey drink pepper soup like water.*
21. *Dem no dey find black goat for night.*
22. *Dem no dey tell blind man say rain dey fall e dey feel am.*
23. *Di same teeth dog dey use play with im owner, na im e dey use bite.*
24. *Di tori wey corn dey tell fire go end wen corn don roast finish.*
25. *Di waka of one thousand miles dey start wit transport money.*
26. *Dis one good, dis one good, na im make mad man carry load.*
27. *Dog no dey chop dog, but dog say who first die be meat.*
28. *Dog wey dey patient, na hunger go kill am.*
29. *Don't pull all your eggs in one basket.*
30. *Elephant no fit hide inside cocoa farm.*
31. *Every ben ben pot get e cover.*
32. *Every mallam with em own kettle,every aboki with em own radio.*
33. *Eye wey dey cry still dey see road.*
34. *Fire no dey follow firewood come.*
35. *Fly wey no dey hear word n aim dey follow dead body enter grave.*
36. *Fowl no dey use one leg dey scratch ground.*
37. *Fowl no know how much dem dey sell corn for market but e dey chop am.*
38. *Frog wey no dey hear word go follow lizard dey dance.*
39. *Goat wey one leg dey pain am, no dey look for trouble.*
40. *God wey give person big teeth go also give am big mouth to cover am.*
41. *If dog dey waka with lions dem the dog go begin dey behave like lion.*
42. *If life dey show you pepper, make pepper soup from am.*
43. *If pesin too tey for party, e go follow dem wash plate.*
44. *If toad promise say e go give you chair, ask am why im dey squat.*
45. *If trust dey exist wata for no fit cook fish.*
46. *If you find a dead rat on top of bag of rice he didn't die of starvation. He died of happiness.*
47. *If you go chop frog, chop the biggest one.*
48. *If you go thief for cement shop, ready to carri load.*
49. *If you say Maiduguri no far try enter am from Ibadan.*
50. *If your neighbour bear bear catch fire you go quick soak your own for water.*
51. *Instead make bad thing happen, make heavy rain kukuma fall.*
52. *Jollof rice wey dey for bottom of pot today go dey top of cooler tomorrow.*
53. *Just because tiger get headache no mean say antelope fit do anyhow.*

54. *Kenya dey two hours ahead of Nigeria no mean say nigeria is late.*
55. *Knowledge be like a baobab tree; no one pesin fit embrace am.*
56. *Knowledge na when you know say tomatoes na fruit, wisdom na when you nor use for fruit salad.*
57. *Knowledge without wisdom na like water in di sand.*
58. *Lion fit call imself king, but no bi wen e deh among di soldiers of bees.*
59. *Lion say if na big belle dem dey look, he for nor be King for the same bush wen elephant dey.*
60. *Lizard go fit waka like crocodile but im no go fit talk like crocodile.*
61. *Make you no bite di hand wey dey feed you.*
62. *Make you no count your chicken before dey hatch dem.*
63. *Man na im get beautiful wife make like farmer na im plant corn for road side.*
64. *Masquerade wey no dance for house no dey go dance for King palace.*
65. *Monkey dey work babon dey chop.*
66. *Monkey no fine but im mama like im.*
67. *Monkey sef dey sweet, na hair wey dey im back dey cover am.*
68. *Na condition make crayfish bend.*
69. *Na fence wey fall...Na im make goat fit climb am.*
70. *Na from clap e dey enter dance.*
71. *Na hot pepper dem dey take spice rotten fish.*
72. *Na only fool dey check how deep water dey wit im two legs.*
73. *Na over sabi jump make frog jump inside hot water.*
74. *Na over sabi make monkey brek leg.*
75. *Na size of head man dey look before e dey buy cap.*
76. *Na stubboness dey make fly follow dead body inside grave.*
77. *Na sun dey follo evri black night.*
78. *Na the same hot water wey dey make egg hard dey make potato soft.*
79. *Na tree near tree na im make monkey fit day jump.*
80. *Na true say frog like to sidon for water, but no be when di water dey boil.*
81. *Na wen you climb good tree, pipo go begin cari you up.*
82. *Na wet pant dey fall dry pant from rope.*
83. *No be on top of evri tree bird dey build im nest.*
84. *No bodi too get sense to see di back of im ear.*
85. *No mata di kind hunger inside jungle lion no fit chop grass.*
86. *No mata how car full reach, dem no dey follow driver drag im seat.*
87. *No mata how head strong e no fit break coconut.*
88. *No mata how persin tall, him must bend down to enter short persin house.*
89. *No mata how you sabi swim for inside reach… fish go still be master and baba for game.*

90. *No matta how horns big reach, e no go heavy for di head of cow wey must cari am*.
91. *No matter as lizard take do press up reach him chest no go big like alligator own*.
92. *No matter as lizard take do press up, e no fit buff reach crocodile*.
93. *No matter dey size of how nose big e get tobacco (snuff) way go full dey nose*.
94. *No matter how eye big e no fit sabi food wey sweet*.
95. *No matter how high you traway stone, e must come down*.
96. *No matter how small pepper be, e must still hot for mouth*.
97. *No matter how you cook stone reach e no go fit soft like beef*.
98. *No matter the weight of elefant e no fit cause earthquake*.
99. *Okoro no fit tall pass im owner*.
100. *One day wind go blow and fowl yansh go open*.
101. *One man food na another man poison*.
102. *One tree no fit make di forest*.
103. *Persin wey no hear leave am go hear sorry*.
104. *Person di start dance na by shaking of the head before all body move*.
105. *Person way put on fire no mean say fire no go burn am*.
106. *Person way use him head break coconut, no dey follow chop inside*.
107. *Person wey belle full today, go hungry tomorrow*.
108. *Person wey dey swim for river no suppose to abuse crocodile*.
109. *Person wey kill elephant, no dey take backyard enter house*.
110. *Person wey look up troway spit no be him plant him plough*.
111. *Person wey naked no dey put hand for pocket*.
112. *Person wey snake bite if e see lizard he go run*.
113. *Person when fire dey burn him house no they go chase rat*.
114. *Person when nor fit climb tree, na from ground him suppose talk say him nor fit*.
115. *Pesin character be like smoke wey dey inside bottle. Even if you cover am e go escape las las*.
116. *Pesin no dey poo for wia e dey chop*.
117. *Pesin wey bees dey pursue, if house fly make noise inside im ear, na run e go run*.
118. *Pesin wey de hungry no go allow im food make e burn for fire*.
119. *Pesin wey dey rent house no dey plant tree for compound*.
120. *Pesin wey dey roast corn no dey go far*.
121. *Pesin wey dey wear leaves dress, no dey take goat as im friend*.
122. *Pesin wey do for anoda pesin, dey do for imsef*.
123. *Pesin wey neva taste bitter leaf no fit appreciate honey*.
124. *Pesin wey swallow mango seed know how big im bum-bum be*.

125. *Pickin wey use agbada take start shakara go talk wetin e go wear wen e old*.
126. *Pickin wey wash hand well dey eat with king makers*.
127. *Pikin wey say im mama no go sleep im no go sleep*.
128. *Pringles na kuli-kuli wey school abroad – pringles posh pass peanut candy (kulikuli)*.
129. *Rat wey dey house na e dey tell de one wey dey outside say food dey house*.
130. *Rat wey go tiff sardine go tok how im wan take open am*.
131. *Rice just dey hear about fire, na suya wey see am alive*.
132. *Rolling stone, ofcourse na person push am now*.
133. *Say cat sabi swim no go make am catfish*.
134. *Small pikin wey dem carry for back no know say journey dey far*.
135. *Soup wey sweet na money kill am*.
136. *Sun and moon no bi enemybut dem dey give way for each other*.
137. *Temper hot, temper hot but e no still fit boil beans*.
138. *The cassava today fit be garri tomorrow*.
139. *The difference between puff-puff and doughnut na packaging*.
140. *The water wey dem use take make eba can never be recovered*.
141. *Them no dey talk about rope for house wen their person die by hanging*.
142. *They tin wey make you laugh today em go make you cry tumoro*.
143. *To a hungry man, bitter is sweet*.
144. *To form crase no hard, na di trekking be wahala*.
145. *Today's newspaper na tomorrow suya wrap*.
146. *Tomato wey fresh pass for market na hin dey enter pot of soup*.
147. *Wata don pas gari*.
148. *Water no get enemy, fire no get friend*.
149. *Water to take quench fire no need to dey clean*.
150. *Water wey you go drink no go pass you*.
151. *Weather hot no mean say fowl go lay boiled eggv*
152. *Wen garri see wetin hot e go change im name to eba*.
153. *Wen mosquito land for man blokos, e go sabi say, dem no dey use force solve evri problem*.
154. *Wetin concern agbero with overload*.
155. *Wetin goat see comot eye na im dog see dey bark*.
156. *Wetin one ear hear, e no go hide am from di other one. Ear no sabi keep secret*.
157. *Weting concern fish if rain dey fall*.
158. *When he don better for fisherman na paddle he dey take wave him friends*.
159. *When money dey, friend go dey. When money go, friend go go*.
160. *Who no get trouser no dey drag belt*.

161. *Wind no fit blow make e trowey water wey dey inside coconut*.
162. *Woman wey dey find pikin no dey war pant go sleep*.
163. *You no need tell blind man say salt de for soup*.

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Cultural representations of Turks of African origin (Afro-Turks) in urban spaces[1]

Abstract

The article examines forms of cultural representations of Turks of African origin in urban spaces, with a particular focus on İzmir and İstanbul. The emergence of this ethnocultural minority is linked to the Ottoman Empire's expansion into Africa and the forced displacement of enslaved people. Upon arriving in Anatolia, Africans worked as domestic servants in elite mansions and middle-class households, agricultural labourers, porters, and as eunuchs in the Ottoman Palace. This research reconstructs Afro-Turks' historical presence, social roles, and the processes of emancipation after the formal abolition of the slave trade in 1857. Employing Stuart Hall's constructivist theory of cultural representation and Michel de Certeau's concept of "practised space", the author argues that Afro-Turks were not merely passive subjects of dominant narratives but actively co-produced urban life through everyday practices and expressions of identity. Although literary discourses about Afro-Turks were framed by the majority group, they generally lacked pejorative connotations. Instead, Afro-Turks were represented as loyal and respected members of families with whom they maintained close emotional bonds. This paper highlights the multicultural character of the Late Ottoman Empire, emphasises determinants of Afro-Turkish identity, and explores how this community shaped its own microcosms. The study is based primarily on Turkish memoir literature, autobiographies, press articles, and unpublished documents from Ottoman state archives.

Keywords: Afro-Turks, Late Ottoman Empire, slavery, cultural representation, urban space

[1] All translations are the author's own unless otherwise stated.

Geography is destiny. This means that one can, for better or worse, come to terms with it — as long as its demands are accepted, and one adapts accordingly (Tanpınar 2022: 88).

1. Introduction[2]

The emergence of the community of Turks of African origin (Afro-Turks) is linked to the territorial expansion of the Ottoman Empire in Africa. In 1516, the Ottomans established the Regency of Algiers, a year later – the Egyptian province, in 1551 – the Regency of Tripoli, in 1555 – the Abyssinian province, and in 1574 – the province of Tunis. The Afro-Turkish population is the result of a series of forced migrations of enslaved Africans to Anatolia. The local inhabitants referred to this ethnocultural minority as "blacks" (*zenci*) or "Arabs" (*Arap*), terms that at the time carried a neutral connotation, but were later regarded as inappropriate or even vulgar. Afro-Turks were employed in the households of the urban elite, who resided in coastal mansions known as *yalı*, mostly in İstanbul and İzmir. Women held roles such as cooks and wet nurses (nannies), while men worked as coaches and gardeners. Black slaves in the Ottoman Empire were used predominantly as domestic help and to a lesser extent as agricultural labourers. Afro-Turks, in the households where they served, were respected and treated as members of the family, and after gaining their freedom, most chose to stay alongside them. The article explores how Afro-Turks have been represented in Turkish cultural discourse and in what ways, through everyday practices, this ethnic minority has shaped and reinterpreted urban spaces in İzmir and İstanbul. These metropolises have been recognised as highly representative sites of Afro-Turkish presence, as they hosted the largest diasporic communities. At the heart of this investigation lies Stuart Hall's constructionist theory, which defines representation as the process through which members of a culture use language, images, and signs to produce and exchange meaning (1997: 15). These meanings are historically and culturally contingent, determined by shared conceptual frameworks within the same society (Hall 1997: 18). Turkish autobiographical writers, journalists, and archivists – here understood as cultural producers – constructed representations of Afro-Turks from personal perspectives, cultural backgrounds, and by using their own language. Representation is always embedded in relations of power, which determine who has the authority to speak about someone (Hall 1997: 259).

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Following this approach, it is important to note that narratives about Afro-Turks have not been formed by themselves but instead have been created by members of Turkish society. These representations were not necessarily pejorative. Dominant narratives depicted Afro-Turks as loyal and valued members of the families with whom they shared emotional bonds. Drawing on Foucault's notion of historicised discourse (1982: 791), Hall emphasises that representations must be understood within the specific socio-political contexts in which they emerge. In line with this, the article traces the historical presence of Afro-Turks in Turkish metropolises and situates their everyday practices within a broader discursive framework shaped by state politics and cultural representations.

Hall's theory helps explain how Afro-Turks have been represented by others, while Michel de Certeau's concept of spatial practice offers a lens for examining the means by which members of this minority have influenced and transformed urban spaces through everyday routines and cultural expressions. According to de Certeau (1988: 117), *space is a practised place*. It is through walking, storytelling, cooking, celebrating, and other ordinary acts that individuals inscribe meaning into the city. Afro-Turkish urban presence is interpreted here as a network of what de Certeau (1988: 93) calls *mobile, intersecting writings and manifold stories*. İstanbul and İzmir were not neutral spaces but areas where cultural identities were constantly negotiated. This article interprets Afro-Turkish cultural activities as forms of tactical resistance. Afro-Turks did not merely adapt to the existing urban space – they produced it. Through music festivals, religious rituals, and local activism, they engaged in what de Certeau would describe as the creation of hybrid spaces that subvert, pluralise, and reconfigure Turkish urban identity.

Methodologically, this paper combines critical discourse analysis with interpretative spatial reading. The primary sources include: (1) Turkish memoir literature and autobiographies, which provide insight into subjective narratives and representations of Afro-Turks by elite and middle-class members; (2) press articles, analysed for how they reproduce or contest popular discourses and imagery surrounding Afro-Turks; (3) previously unpublished Ottoman archival documents from Kağıthane, which offer an institutional perspective on the state's categorisation of Afro-Turks. This article argues that the representation of Afro-Turks occurred through dominant cultural narratives, revealing asymmetrical power relations. Nevertheless, the minority has been able to exercise its own forms of spatial and cultural autonomy. Urban spaces emerge here as sites of presence, memory, and identity formation.

2. Cultural pluralism and Afro-Turks in the Late Ottoman Empire

Biculturalism was not an uncommon phenomenon in the Ottoman Empire. The state's multiethnic and multireligious character persisted due to the authorities' selective tolerance, which allowed each group to maintain its cultural practices within limits set by those in power. A strong sense of ethnic belonging, including the emphasis on one's place of origin, could coexist with Ottoman identity and loyalty to the Ottoman state (Gökkaya 2021: 327-332). The model that emerged corresponded to the concepts of "fragmented pluralism" and "interactive pluralism", both of which emphasised the importance of preserving one's own culture while also engaging in dialogue with other groups (Żaliński 2019: 44). Among Afro-Turks, fragmented pluralism was reflected in the tendency, beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century, to settle in the same areas within cities (Boratav 1951: 87). For example, at that time, five poor districts of İzmir – Ballıkuyu, Dolaplıkuyu, İkiçeşmelik, Temaşalık and Sabırtaşı – were inhabited predominantly by members of the Afro-Turkish community (Güneş 1999: 5). Pertev Naili Boratav, an expert in the field of Anatolian folklore and folk literature, in the first comprehensive study dedicated to the Black population in İzmir, estimated that up to two thousand Afro-Turkish families had settled in the districts mentioned above (1982: 125). In the mid-nineteenth century, İzmir's population grew from around 150,000 to over 200,000 by 1890 (Goffman 1999: 130). Throughout that period, İzmir was a predominantly non-Muslim city, and a significant number of Afro-Turks, after gaining their freedom, chose to remain with the elite families they had served, due to the paternalistic ties and emotional bonds that had developed. Thus, the proportion of Afro-Turks within İzmir's total population likely approached 10%. İzmir was home to the largest Afro-Turkish diaspora, due in part to the growing demand for labour. The 1867 law granting foreigners the right to purchase property resulted in significant acquisitions of farmland, particularly by British citizens. These investors, having designated Aegean lands for cotton and tobacco plantations, became employers of Afro-Turks (Kayacan & Karaer 2008: 37).

Against this backdrop, the growing intervention of European powers in the internal affairs of the Ottoman Empire was evident. The demand for the "spread of civilisation" voiced in Occidental discourse, alongside pressures from the British abolitionist movement, contributed to the violation of the sovereignty of the Ottoman state and the internal arrangements of the Empire's elites. Slavery in the Ottoman Empire was not perceived as negatively as in the West. This was due to the fact that after several years of service, a slave could participate in social life as an equal member of society. Sultan Abdülmecid I (1839-1861) decided

on 27 January 1857 to formally prohibit the trade of Black slaves throughout the Empire. The abolition of the Black slave trade, as well as the granting of freedom and settlement rights to Africans in Anatolia, compelled them to maintain intercultural dialogue with the dominant society. The vast majority of former slaves chose not to return to their native African cities (Akkaya 2017: 266).

Although the Sultan's decree explicitly prohibited the enslavement of Africans arriving in Anatolia after its enactment, the legal status of those already present in the region before 1857 remained unresolved. In society, there was a widespread practice of granting freedom to slaves after several years of service. This was considered a virtuous act that is suited to a devout Muslim. The custom of regularly emancipating slaves led the Ottoman ruling elites to the mistaken belief that there was no need to intervene in the situation of Africans who had arrived in Anatolia before the decree came into force. In their view, the permanent cessation of the slave trade into the empire would naturally lead to the abolition of slavery itself (Erdem 2023: 172). The Sultan's decision to approve the ban on the African slave trade was, on the one hand, the result of pressure from foreign powers as part of broader diplomatic efforts and, on the other hand, motivated by humanitarian concerns. The Ottoman authorities were aware of the high mortality rate among Africans during maritime transport, often due to plague infections (BOA, A} DVN., 15.82; 07 Cemazeyilevvel 1262 [03 May 1846]).

Abdülmecid, and later his successors, sought to be perceived as guardians and defenders of the vulnerable. In 1860, the Commission for Migrants (*Muhacirin Komisyonu*) was established to oversee efforts to combat slave trafficking and coordinate the resettlement of newly arrived migrants in Anatolia (Taşbaş 2018: 138). In line with these objectives, Katadori Efendi, who represented the Ottoman Empire at the Brussels Conference (1889-1890), signed the convention on the suppression of the slave trade on behalf of Sultan Abdülhamid II (1876-1909). Through this act, the Ottoman state committed itself to protecting freed Afro-Turks. The assistance provided by signatory states was to include the establishment of shelters and educational institutions for former slaves and their children (Treaty Series 1892: 59). The authorities viewed the fight against slavery as a way to improve the lives of former slaves and to save the Empire from collapse. From 1890 onward, state-run shelters (*misafirhane* and *dârü'l-aceze*) began to be established in İzmir and İstanbul to provide accommodation for homeless, orphaned children, the elderly and other vulnerable groups (BOA, DH.MKT., 2021.87; 26 Rabiulahir 1310 [17 November 1892]). Former slaves who remained homeless after emancipation were relocated to these care institutions from various provinces of Anatolia. Afro-Turks received not only accommodation and food, but

also financial support to facilitate their social integration (BOA, DH.MKT., 124.21; 16 Rabiulevvel 1311 [27 September 1893])[3]. To ensure more permanent solutions, the authorities allocated 19 villages, then called 'sultan's farms' (*padişah çiftlikleri*), within the Aydın province, for the construction of small houses to accommodate nearly 1,500 members of the Afro-Turkish community (Olpak 2013: 125).

The resettlement of part of Afro-Turks to Aydın coincided with Abbas Hilmi Pasha's[4] decision to bring African families from Egypt and Sudan to work on his agricultural estate in Dalaman. As a result, Africans arrived by sea in Anatolia in 1905 to, among other tasks, build a railway station in Dalaman (Genç 2022). When Hilmi Pasha lost these lands to the Ottoman Empire, most of the Sudanese and Egyptian families remained in Dalaman, receiving free plots of land from the state around Ortaca. Despite the resettlement to Aydın and Ortaca, a significant Afro-Turkish presence remained in İzmir. In the early 20th century, a large group of Afro-Turkish waiters, fishermen, rowers, and porters, known as *hamal*, still spent their time in the port of İzmir (Ferguson 2014: 101-102). While the largest diaspora of Afro-Turks resided in the Aegean provinces, a smaller part of this ethnic minority – numbering several thousand – was engaged in cotton cultivation on the fertile Cilician Plain (*Çukurova*) in south-eastern Anatolia, specifically in the vicinity of Adana. The economic development of this region began in the 1830s, largely due to an influx of African – predominantly Egyptian – labour force (Zürcher 2013: 228). This not only confirms the geographical diversity of Afro-Turkish settlement but also suggests that their presence was more widespread and deeply rooted within local communities than is commonly assumed.

3. Cultural representations of Afro-Turks in İzmir, Memoirs of Halit Ziya Uşaklıgil

The memoirs of Halit Ziya Uşaklıgil provide a representative testimony. They reveal the way Afro-Turks were represented in literature – a perspective that was later reproduced across other elite autobiographies. A prominent novelist and

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[3] Two of these shelters have survived to this day. One of them, still under ministerial supervision, continues its original social mission under the name "Darülaceze", located close to the Bomonti district in İstanbul. The other has been transformed into a high school *Mithatpaşa Mesleki ve Teknik Anadolu Lisesi* and is situated near the small Karantina port in İzmir.

[4] Abbas II Hilmi Pasha – governor of Egypt from 1892 to 1914, great-grandson of Mehmet Ali Pasha – founder of the Kavalalı dynasty in 1805. Egypt formally remained a province of the Ottoman Empire until 1914.

intellectual, Uşaklıgil lived in İzmir between 1878 and 1890 and bore witness to its rapid urban transformation. His autobiographical reflections represent a rare form of cultural documentation from a member of the Ottoman elite. In his recollections, Uşaklıgil described encounters with Afro-Turks embedded in everyday practices. One notable example is Ziver, a 14-year-old Afro-Turkish boy who worked as an *ocakçı*[5] in the Basmane district. Ziver was raised by a café owner who taught him reading, writing, arithmetic and the coffee trade. Locals referred to Ziver as *çuçana* – a term meaning 'mulatto' in İzmir's vernacular (Uşaklıgil 2023: 111). This usage of racialised local vocabulary reflects a broader representational framework in which Afro-Turks were both visible and linguistically marked.

In 'Stories from İzmir' (*İzmir Hikâyeleri* 1950), Uşaklıgil recounted the story of Ayni Tata – an Afro-Turkish homeless madman with a mysterious nickname – who inhabited the streets of İzmir. He embodied the ambivalent cultural perceptions of Afro-Turks in the city's urban folklore. Eliciting both affection and unease from the inhabitants, Ayni Tata reflected the contradictory ways in which Afro-Turks were imagined in the public sphere. Uşaklıgil's narrative drew on the conventions of magical realism – a strategy that merges the ordinary with the fantastical, the inexplicable, and the mythical. Within such a representational framework, reality and unreality coexist harmoniously, without tension (Yücel 2023: 35, 38-39). When Ayni Tata mysteriously disappeared, an earthquake struck the city – a moment interpreted as retribution, anchoring his presence in local myth (Uşaklıgil 2023: 119-121). This fusion of the real and the fantastical constructed Afro-Turkish identity as both visible and elusive: rooted in everyday urban life yet refracted through symbolic storytelling. Halit Ziya showed how Afro-Turks entered collective memory through metaphor, affect, and cultural imagination.

In the Uşaklıgil family autobiography, Halit Ziya related his observation of a romantic bond between the coachman Abdi and Karanfil – an Abyssinian servant – during a visit to the family's private 'sea bath' (*deniz hamamı*)[6] in Göztepe. This episode represents a rare attempt in the literature to reflect on the fate of

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[5] The term *ocakçı* refers to a person responsible for brewing tea and coffee in traditional coffeehouses. Using a round metal tray with a handle, the *ocakçı* serves the prepared beverages to customers.

[6] Sea bath – a bathing structure built on the sea, enclosed on all sides, with an open roof and a seawater pool in the centre. Sea baths originated in the Ottoman Empire as a response to prevailing social norms and the necessity to respect privacy. In the early 1920s, sea baths began to be transformed into beaches – in the modern sense of the word – where mixed bathing, involving both women and men, became possible.

enslaved Africans, grounded in a genuine empathetic understanding of their history and the journey they undertook before settling in Anatolia.

> One must consider how those African girls, who are seen in groups among us as well as in İzmir households – and there are hundreds of them, especially in İstanbul and other large Turkish cities – arrived all the way here, and who knows through what phases they passed in a life of slavery. These poor people were dispersed not only throughout our homeland but across the entire world. Those who were brought to us mainly originate from the regions around Lake Chad, from the Afno, Bagermi, Borno tribes, and even from Congo, Sudan and Abyssinia [...] Each of them has their own painful story of the household to which they were sold. [...] To witness a small example of the fate that awaited them, one must go to the Black neighbourhood spreading its squalor on the hill of Kadifekale and observe this poignant, heart-wrenching sight of the rubbish dump (Uşaklıgil 2023: 131-132).

Uşaklıgil not only documented the social reality of his era, but also, through evocative language and striking metaphors, constructed a critical narrative that confronted the mechanisms of enslavement. Halit Ziya's extraordinary interest in the fate of this ethnocultural minority most likely stemmed from the fact that, during his childhood, he was raised by three women of African origin – Gülfidan, Dilhoş, and Kademhayır. In his autobiography *Forty Years* (*Kırk Yıl* 1936), Uşaklıgil emphasised the emotional bond he shared with his nannies, introducing the reader to the traditional African customs they practised in his home. "When [Gülfidan] went to wash my nappies, she would wrap me in a long shawl and tie me to her back – in keeping with the custom she had brought with her from Lake Chad" (Uşaklıgil 2008: 60). However, it appears that the strongest bond connected him with the Abyssinian nanny Dilhoş, to whom he dedicated three stories in the collection *The Most Painful of All* (*Hepsinden Acı* 1934).

> 'Come. Let's go up to the roof. You fly the kite, and I will darn your socks,' she used to say. […] It was a game that enchanted me the most. Now, when I think about it, I come to the conclusion that those were the happiest moments of my childhood. […] While I tried to make my kite do somersaults, she – sheltering herself in the moving shade created by the sheets hanging in the wind and which, under the influence of the gusts, formed various shapes and images – most often busied herself with darning my socks; it was said that I was a master at making holes in them at the toes and heels. At that time, she would hum songs in her own language, which she had brought from her native land (Uşaklıgil 1968: 21).

In addition to the African nannies who cared for Halit Ziya on a daily basis, three formerly enslaved Black men also served in the Uşaklıgil family's summer house (*yazlık*) by the Salacak beach in Üsküdar, İstanbul – Refik Ağa, Server, and Ziver.

Refik Ağa, the eunuch of Halit Ziya's grandfather, was a figure of unquestioned authority among the household members. This derived [...] "not only from the trust my grandfather placed in him but above all from the ugliness of his face, which never smiled" (Uşaklıgil 2008: 73). In Halit's childhood memories of summer holidays, Server and Ziver – boys of Abyssinian origin – left a significantly more positive impression.

4. Afro-Turkish cultural practices in İstanbul

The past of Afro-Turks, such as those who lived with the Uşaklıgil family, reflects a fragment of the history of urban life in İzmir and in İstanbul. This is spatially manifested in the way the city was used, perceived, and ultimately experienced by Afro-Turks. Every ethnocultural minority understands the shared occupation of space with others according to its own logic (Smyrnelis 2020: 19). In Anatolia, mixed marriages between Black and White individuals were common, which poses an additional challenge for contemporary scholars attempting to estimate the approximate number of Afro-Turks within society.[7] Afro-Turks, who settled in the same districts, have dispersed across entire cities since the Republican era. Historically, they inhabited, among other places in İstanbul, the district of Akaretler near the port in Beşiktaş, Çilehane on the hill of Çamlıca, the coastal areas of Salacak, the Princes' Islands and the now-defunct Kasap İlyas neighbourhood within Fatih. In these districts and adjacent areas, Afro-Turks were employed as porters at the Haydarpaşa port and as labourers in the Feshane textile factory in Eyüpsultan (BOA, A} MKT.NZD., 122.100; 23 Rabiulevvel 1271 [14 December 1854]).

An eyewitness to the presence of Afro-Turks in Üsküdar was the journalist Ahmet Semih Mümtaz. Mümtaz recalled the Afro-Turkish festival held on the hill of Çilehane, which took place annually on the first Saturday of May.[8] "When I lived in Çamlıca, I witnessed [this celebration] – and not just once. On that day, all Arabs from İstanbul would gather at Çilehane. [...] They sang Abyssinian folk songs" (1948: 148). Mümtaz's observations offer a partial image of the phe-

[7] According to field research conducted in the 1980s by the British anthropologist Peter Alford Andrews, roughly 5,000 Afro-Turks may have resided in Anatolia at that time (1989: 108).

[8] Mümtaz's view differed significantly from that of Boratav. As Boratav stated, the Afro-Turkish celebration was held annually in July and August and it continued for four weeks. Each week commenced on a Thursday night and concluded on Friday evening. At the end of the fourth week, cooked veal was shared among those in attendance (Boratav 1951: 88).

nomenon, as Afro-Turks carried out their celebrations simultaneously in various parts of İstanbul. This was due to the considerable distances between their places of residence and limitations in transport. Journalist Sermet Muhtar Alus identified additional ritual sites, such as the meadows of Çırpıcı and areas near Kağıthane (2023: 66), a claim corroborated by the chronicler Ahmet Rasim, which lends them greater credibility. Afro-Turkish rites, often described as "possession rituals", combined elements of voodoo and indigenous beliefs that persisted even after conversion to Islam (Güntekin 1946: 61). The state of "possession" was induced by *mayanka*, an herbal mixture known locally as 'Arab water' (*Arap suyu*), intended to provide spiritual purification and relief from worries (Aksel 1971: 170). These cultural practices served not only religious functions but also social purposes, such as healing, welcoming spring, and reinforcing the communal identity of Afro-Turks.

The rituals exhibited parallels with the Hausa *bori* practices from Nigeria and Niger. Particularly close to the Afro-Turks' festival was the Tunisian "Stambali"[9] ceremony – a syncretic cult blending Hausa spirit possession with Islamic, primarily Sufi, elements (Montana 2012: 155). This transculturation, influenced by the Ḥusaynid dynasty,[10] appears to have proceeded in a similar fashion within Afro-Turkish culture. From a linguistic perspective, certain similarities can also be found in Yoruba traditions. The primary deity worshipped by Afro-Turks, Yavroubé, was adapted under Turkish language influence into variants such as Yavru Bey or Yaver Bey (Toledano 2012: 190-191). The thesis on the syncretic nature of Afro-Turkish rites merits consideration, as they never constituted a homogeneous ethnic group. The Afro-Turkish activist Mustafa Olpak (1953-2016) enumerated as many as nineteen African ethnic groups inhabiting Late Ottoman Anatolia (2005: 12). Among them, Yorubas or their descendants likely formed a significant segment.[11]

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[9] "Stambali", besides being the name of the cultural practices of the Black population in Tunisia, was also a brotherhood that united the local minority. The brotherhood was founded by a former slave, Sidi Saad, who, despite his Sudanese origin, arrived in Tunisia from İstanbul. This, in turn, raises an additional research question: was Sidi Saad one of the African slaves brought to Anatolia?

[10] Ḥusaynid dynasty, the ruling dynasty of Tunisia from 1705 until the establishment of the Republic of Tunisia in 1957.

[11] For example, a missionary stationed in the coastal region of West Africa at the end of the nineteenth century reportedly encountered a freed Afro-Turkish woman who had returned to her homeland from İstanbul and identified herself as a representative of the Yoruba people (Fisher and Fisher 1971: 64).

The 'Çilehane festival' (*Çilehane bayramı*), provisionally named by Mümtaz, became known as the 'Arab wedding' (*Arap düğünü*) in İstanbul and as the 'Calf Festival' (*Dana Bayramı*) in İzmir and the Aegean region. According to Olpak, the celebrations were a movable feast, rather than a fixed date as Mümtaz suggested. The timing of the celebrations depended on weather conditions, as well as the direction and speed of the wind (Olpak 2013: 133). While the 'Arab wedding' in İstanbul lasted one day, in İzmir these rites continued for three or even four consecutive spring Fridays. This indicates a greater scale and popularity of the phenomenon in the Aegean region of Anatolia. At the beginning of the twentieth century, up to 15,000 residents might have participated in Afro-Turkish ceremonies in İzmir (Güneş 2020: 63). This possibility should not be dismissed, as Afro-Turks held these events on urban hills – Çamlıca in İstanbul and Kadifekale in İzmir – as well as on extensive meadows such as those at Çırpıcı, where large crowds could gather.

5. From servitude to belonging: Afro-Turks on the Princes' Islands

In light of the available sources, little is known about the condition of the Afro-Turkish diaspora on the Princes' Islands, an archipelago in the Sea of Marmara. A contribution to research in this area can be found in the autobiography of the family of (Mehmet) Şakir Pasha (1855-1914).[12] Şakir Pasha's family was one of the first Turkish families to settle on the Princes' Islands (İnan 2023: 188). From the memoirs of Pasha's granddaughter and the author of the autobiography, Şirin Devrim,[13] it emerges that in their mansion on Büyükada, the family was served by Lala, a Black eunuch brought as a young boy from Sudan. Besides Lala, the mansion also included Seyfettin (Selahattin?), originally from Abyssinia, whose role was to entertain Şakir Pasha's children.

In many Islamic societies – similarly to the Ottoman Empire – slaves were employed more often in domestic work and less frequently in agriculture, which facilitated their integration into the dominant society, including the upper class.

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[12] Şakir Pasha – governor of the province of Crete in the Ottoman Empire, military attaché in Rome, ambassador to Athens, hotel owner in Thessaloniki, and advisor to his brother (Ahmet) Cevat Pasha, who served as grand vizier between 1891 and 1895. Following his brother's death in 1900, he settled on Büyükada. In retirement, he served as an honorary history teacher at Galatasaray High School, for which he received no remuneration.

[13] For more on the history of the Kabaağaçlı family and on the biography of Şirin Devrim, see Zając 2022, 91-110.

The reason for this situation is that a considerable part of the demand for slaves was generated by the urban strata. The residences of wealthy citizens of the Empire were places where the demand for slaves was greatest (Toledano 2000: 12). Muslim families could employ both Black and White slaves, whereas non-Muslims were restricted to freedmen (Özbay 2015: 115).

The persistence of slavery in nineteenth-century Ottoman society and politics reflects Islam's deep-rooted theological and historical ties to the institution, shaping both its justification and regulation (Kotil 2023: 64). The Quran permitted slave ownership while also establishing provisions to ensure dignified living conditions. Thus, although Islam approved the enslavement of non-Muslims, it granted slaves fundamental rights. It was customary to free a slave after seven to nine years of service (Olpak 2013: 124). According to Erdem, some slaves regained their freedom after only one or two years, with servitude not exceeding ten years (Erdem 2023: 170). In Islamic thought, granting freedom to a non-Muslim constituted a form of atonement for some of the Muslim's sins. Şirin Devrim linked the liberation of the Sudanese Lala to the phenomenon of retirement.

> [...] in retirement [Lala] married a white woman and, with the help of [our] family, opened a grocery in Kadıköy. Lala would come to us every weekend, especially on special occasions and in difficult times; he didn't leave us alone. Each time, he would bring sweets, and we children would immediately run up to him and kiss his hand. Everyone in the family loved Lala very much, and his devotion was unquestionable (Devrim 1998: 27).

The cited text highlights several key issues relevant to this article. First, interethnic marriages were permitted in the Ottoman Empire. In some families, unions occurred between (former) slaves and members of the household (Ortaylı 2009: 173). Second, emancipation did not sever ties between slaves and the families they had served. The emotional attachment of Afro-Turks to household heads often led them to remain until death. Third, the respect accorded to elderly slaves resembled the respect shown towards venerable members of the family (Zając 2013: 30). Support for this thesis can be found in the custom of hand-kissing (*el öpme*) as an expression of respect, esteem, and a request for blessing.

Apart from Şakir Pasha's granddaughter, Mustafa Olpak – born in Ayvalık and a representative of the Afro-Turkish diaspora – also confirmed the presence of an African-descended community on the Princes' Islands. In his family biography, Olpak noted that two of his African-descended aunts, Nuriye and Zeynep, lived in elite households on Büyükada (Prinkipo), the largest of the Princes' Islands. At one banquet, a gathering of influential families, Olpak's

aunts discovered after many years that they were sisters separated in childhood (Olpak 2005: 45-47).

The scope of research on the Afro-Turkish cultural and ethnic minority can be extended to include historical photographs, treating them as individual and fragmentary testimonies of past urban spaces. Ara Güler (1928-2018), a leading figure in Turkish photojournalism, captured in his 1955 photograph "Ada Vapuru" ("Ferry to the Island"), the silhouette of an Afro-Turkish youth reading a newspaper aboard a ferry from İstanbul to the Princes' Islands (Güler 2023: 30).[14]

The recounted stories may serve as a basis for further research into the Afro-Turkish diaspora on this archipelago, particularly concerning their presence in the estates of wealthy families. Certainly, the narratives recorded by Devrim and Olpak, together with Güler's photographic documentation, do not represent isolated cases. The Princes' Islands were a favoured retreat of urban elites who, seeking respite from the metropolis, spent time in their summer mansions. According to the chronicler Reşat Ekrem Koçu, "the islands satisfy the greatest enthusiasts of snobbery", supported by his observation that the population, just under 17,000 in 1935, swelled by 45,000 to 50,000 during the influx of summer visitors (Koçu 1958, 206-207). Meanwhile, as Devrim noted, "at the beginning of the [20th] century, many Ottoman families still employed black servants" (Devrim 1998: 27). Despite the formal abolition of slavery in 1857 and the granting of settlement freedom to people of African descent in Anatolia, Afro-Turks continued to serve in elite households until the 1960s. Only then was this practice replaced by new legal regulations requiring domestic help to be paid (*ücretli hizmetçi*).

6. Akaretler: between Afro-Turkish identity and Republican elites

Afro-Turks, particularly those serving as eunuchs and chief harem eunuchs (*kızlar ağası*), formed an integral part of the Ottoman palace entourage and were likely among the residents of Akaretler from 1875, when these row houses were constructed, until the abolition of the sultanate in November 1922, after which the last ruler, Mehmet VI (1918-1922), was exiled to Sanremo, Italy.

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[14] The original photograph "Ada Vapuru" was available to visitors at the Ara Güler Museum in the Bomonti district, as part of the temporary exhibition *İstanbul Uyanıyor* (İstanbul Awakens), held from 09 November 2024 to 31 August 2025.

The abolition of the sultanate directly entailed the recognition of the harem institution as unlawful.[15] At that time, the eunuchs, including those of African origin, established the "Mutual Aid Society of Eunuchs" (*Haremağaları Teavün Cemiyeti*), headquartered on Divanyolu Street in the Eminönü district. One form of their integration was the annual congress of 'old veterans' (*eski emektarlar*), as they referred to themselves (Güngör 1939: 7). With the proclamation of the Republic of Türkiye on 29 October 1923, the property qualification of the social strata in Akaretler changed. The district was transformed into a residential area and a site of elite social life, reflecting a process of gentrification (Broccato 2025: 263). For example, until 1980, Akaretler housed the offices of the Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*), which held a parliamentary majority from 1923 to 1950 (Kortun 2013: 17-18). This attests to the political significance of the area, which functioned for decades as the decision-making hub of Türkiye's emerging elite. Akaretler was one of the urban spaces where the political directions of the newly founded state were shaped.

7. Informal institutions of Afro-Turks: the case of *godya* in Kasap İlyas

The Afro-Turkish presence in Kasap İlyas – İstanbul's oldest (now defunct) neighbourhood (1494-2008) – reflects the legacy of slavery and subsequent efforts of Black communities to build local forms of solidarity and informal governance. The 1885 general census recorded 38 Black residents, most of them women (Behar 2003: 143-145). This demographic composition highlights the gendered dimensions of post-slavery settlement, suggesting that Afro-Turkish women played a central role in maintaining community structures and household economies. Although officially recorded as "Arabs", the residents' birthplaces – Sudan and Abyssinia – indicate Sub-Saharan origins. Considering the census was conducted only thirty years after the abolition of slavery, it can be inferred that these residents were either emancipated slaves or their descendants. Kasap İlyas, historically peripheral and economically marginal, offered relatively affordable living conditions, attracting diverse immigrant populations, including Afro-Turks, Circassians, and settlers from the village of Arapkir in eastern Anatolia (Behar 2003: 13). This mosaic and syncretic character made Kasap İlyas not

[15] The term "harem" is polysemous. In this context, it should be understood as the separated part of the palace inhabited by the sultan's wives, concubines, and children, where their private lives took place. In another sense, the harem contrasted with the *selamlık* and referred to the section of a traditional Ottoman house reserved for women.

only a distinctive urban microcosm that mirrored İstanbul's broader diversity, but also a favourable ground for bottom-up institution building within marginalised communities.

A central figure in Afro-Turkish communal life was the *godya* – typically an elderly woman with recognised moral authority.[16] Beyond organising key life events such as births, weddings, and funerals, *godyas* presided over ceremonies like the "Calf Festival" and acted as custodians of communal welfare. They mediated disputes, petitioned the Muslim judge (*kadı*) in cases of abuse – particularly concerning adopted Afro-Turkish children – and offered shelter, employment guidance, often transforming their homes into hubs of informal support networks (Olpak 2013: 131). The term *kolbaşı* – group leader – used by Afro-Turks to describe them highlights their organisational role within the community. The figure of the *godya* resembles African spiritual leaders, especially the Hausa *goodìyaa*, from whom the term may derive (Erlmann 1982: 49; Spyropoulos 2017: 193). Their structural function – blending moral authority, dispute resolution, and social coordination – aligns closely with traditional African governance systems. Comparative examples, such as Tunisia's 'Stambali' brotherhood, further illuminate this continuity of African institutional logic in diasporic settings (Lewis 1989: 103).

Inside this informal Afro-Turkish association, references to traditional forms of governance in Africa are clearly discernible. Turkish journalist Ahmet Rasim noted in 1940: *The godya is a leader to whom we attach no importance, yet he holds as much authority as the tribal chiefs of Central Africa. Nearly all black people in İstanbul are under their spiritual control* (Rasim 1940: 3). Traditional institutions, operating under conditions of dysfunction, maintained the local identity of ethnic groups and fulfilled essential functions which the state could not provide. *Godyas*, like African chiefs, were perceived as guardians of law, values, and cultural practices. Thus, while for Afro-Turks endogenous governance complemented the state public sphere, Ottoman officials regarded it as an institutional dichotomy linked to tribalism.

[16] A contrasting view was presented by Boratav, who argued that the position of *godya* was mainly held by men. Boratav used the terms *godya* and *sheikh* interchangeably (Boratav 1951: 88).

8. Paternalistic networks and identity of Afro-Turks in Anatolia

It was common for African-origin domestic servants to claim kinship with the families they served – a practice called 'adoption' (*evlatlık*). This phenomenon emerged following the legal prohibition of slavery in 1857. Although regulations forbidding the trade in African people reduced slavery, they did not address the status of domestic workers living in elite mansions. The practice of 'adoption' began in 1864 and continued for a century, until slavery was definitively abolished in Türkiye. However, 'adoption' did not carry the same meaning in the Ottoman Empire as in the Western hemisphere. Islam forbade formal adoption to protect family privacy and bloodline integrity. In Anatolia, this term corresponded both to the foster family system (*koruyucu aile*) and to a form of labour performed in exchange for being taken under the roof of a host family (Bay 2013: 213). The *evlatlık* institution was particularly prevalent among the urban elite in İstanbul and İzmir, because adopting an Afro-Turk reduced domestic responsibilities. The elite viewed adoption as an act of charity, associated with spreading – or even teaching – "civilization" to former slaves. Orphans and girls from impoverished rural families were brought into elite households in the name of benevolence and care for their safety (Özbay 2015: 115). Afro-Turks integrated into these networks of relations performed domestic tasks and looked after the children of the members of the mansion. This phenomenon was so widespread that Afro-Turks were also present in middle-class households (Tanpınar 2017: 123; Ortaylı 2009: 172).

A closely related and equally widespread practice to Ottoman 'adoption' was 'sonhood' (*oğulluk*). In western Anatolia, 'sonhood' gained importance towards the end of the 19th century alongside the commercialisation of agriculture and the demand for 'sons' to work on large estates. Approximately 80% of the population of the Ottoman Empire at the time lived in rural areas, relying primarily on agriculture (Pamuk 2023: 145). The province of Çeşme, west of İzmir, was distinctive in that 'sonhood' did not take firm root there (Bay 2013: 209). Instead, large local farms employed Black *gulâm*, a term defined in the lexicon of Islam as *young men loyal to their master* (Terzi 2022: 178-180). On this basis, Bay drew the bold conclusion that almost every family in the Çeşme had its own slave (Bay 2013: 209). Formally, the practices of 'adoption', 'sonhood', and the *gulâm* system were declared unlawful with the *Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery* on 6 January 1964. This decision significantly impacted the established way of life of Afro-Turks, contributing to their increased presence in urban public spaces (Broccato 2025: 264).

Relationships between Afro-Turks and urban elites were structured around paternalism, reflected in the Turkish verb *kapılanmak*, meaning 'being part of a gate'. The metaphor of the door – or gate, in the context of the sultan's palace – delineated the responsibilities of the head of the mansion arising from the duty to care for those weaker individuals who turned to such a home for support. It also underscored the importance of the family as a social institution. Within these mansions, a form of paternalism emerged, through which […] *the head of the household distributed justice through compassion and fear* (Kotil 2023: 65). This system was derived from the paternalistic relationship bond between the sultan and his subjects. Importantly, these households were spaces in which multiculturalism found its practical application. This form of paternalism differed in character from that found in the Western hemisphere. The attitude of the owner towards the slave more closely resembled the dependency between a parent and an underage family member (Zając 2013: 30).

From a literary perspective, despite certain prejudices, Afro-Turks were represented as enjoying sympathy and respect within society. In this context, the autobiographical memories of Ahmet Emin Yalman (1888-1972), a distinguished journalist of the Republic of Türkiye, acquire significance: he spent his childhood in Thessaloniki,[17] raised by a beloved nanny of African origin. Yalman recalled:

> Ebru Kalfa[18] […] was a person whose fairy tales I very much enjoyed listening to. I called her Mama Ebru. I felt towards her such respect and love as one feels for one's own grandmother. Mama Ebru is one of those people who occupy the largest space in my childhood memories (Yalman 1997: 13).

Years later, during the Second World War, while flying over Central Africa, he once again nostalgically remembered Ebru Kalfa.

Similarly, in the modest household of Halide Edip Adıvar's (1884-1964) grandmother, slaves were treated with dignity and sympathy, reflecting the importance she attached to Ottoman traditions. Servants received emancipation documents after years of service. Although they were married off, they did not lose contact with the family. As Halide Edip emphasised, her grandmother always remembered to give gifts to the children of her former African-origin domestic helpers on festive occasions.

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[17] The Ottoman Empire lost Thessaloniki to the Kingdom of Greece on 08 November 1912, during the First Balkan War.

[18] Kalfa – a title referring to a woman who was in charge of the household servants in palaces and mansions.

Ah, child, I cannot even give presents to the children of friends and acquaintances. If I do not bring at least a small joy to the children of my former emancipated slaves on festive occasions, I shall leave this world with a restless heart. After all, I do not buy anything for myself… My days are already numbered (Adıvar 2000: 54).

Such intercultural dialogue within Ottoman families contributed to the consolidation of interactive pluralism among the Afro-Turkish community. Their cultural representation demonstrates, first, that interactive pluralism facilitated peaceful coexistence and, second, that a microculture may emerge wherever the encounter between multiple cultures forms part of everyday practice.

9. Conclusion

[Afro-Turks] "were people who, for centuries, brought colour to our nation" (Topuz 2018: 199). This observation by Hıfzı Topuz, a Turkish press correspondent reporting on African affairs since the Cold War, is difficult to contest. Afro-Turks have managed to preserve a distinct sense of identity, evident in everyday practices within Anatolian urban spaces. A qualitative analysis of Turkish autobiography and memoir literature indicates that Afro-Turk cultural practices comprised, first, the preservation of folk songs and dances characteristic of the Horn of Africa; second, women wrapping children in long shawls and carrying them on their backs; third, the annual celebrations of the "Arab wedding" and the "Calf Festival", which function as collective rites to welcome spring, manifest prosperity, and dispel worries, including illness; and fourth, the selection of local community leaders – the *godya* or *kolbaşı*. These practices referenced the customs of African peoples, particularly the Hausa and Yoruba. Although the ancestors of this minority originated from diverse regions of Africa and did not constitute a homogeneous ethnic group, they preserved shared patterns. This indicates a strong sense of community cohesion. The "Mutual Aid Society of Eunuchs" exemplifies Afro-Turkish support networks. The geographical distribution of Afro-Turks extended beyond İzmir, İstanbul, and their surrounding provinces, underscoring the need for further ethnographic research in this area. Their representation was heavily influenced by majority narratives; however, in literature, it did not assume an exclusionary character. Afro-Turks were generally perceived as trustworthy individuals, closely connected to the families in whose households they lived and worked. The relations between them were based on mutual respect and affection.

Enslaved Africans in Anatolian cities were not only considered a productive labour force, but also employed as domestic servants in Ottoman elite mansions and

middle-class households. Their ties to the household were not only functional through duties but also emotional, often resembling familial relationships. Sharing the same domestic space with Ottoman families, on the one hand, contributed to the partial assimilation of Afro-Turks and, on the other, prepared them for everyday life in an initially foreign society. For many Afro-Turks, learning the Ottoman-Turkish language coincided with a gradual loss of their mother tongue (Adıvar 2000: 112). The Ottoman Empire was home to a multicultural, multiethnic society, a feature frequently highlighted in Turkish-language literature as evidence of its humanitarian governance. This multicultural ethos and the close relationships among citizens of diverse ethnic backgrounds are captured in the Turkish saying: 'There are 72 and a half nations in Türkiye' (*Türkiye'de yetmiş iki buçuk millet var*). Today, although Afro-Turks constitute only a small community of several thousand, they remain conscious of their unconditional right to reside in Anatolia.

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The impact of colonization and political paradigm shift on *Omu* institution in the Anioma Region of Delta State, Nigeria

Abstract

This article examines the British colonization of indigenous Nigerian people, focusing on the economic and political motives that displaced traditional cultures and values. It highlights the Anioma region, a part of the Igbo ethnic group, detailing how colonizers imposed governance systems that distorted the sociopolitical fabric of traditional societies. It explores the resilience of *Omu* Institution in maintaining conventional roles while adapting to the realities of colonization. Adopting an ethnographic approach, incorporating oral testimonies and supplemented with secondary sources, it applies postcolonial and feminist theories as analytical frameworks. These perspectives capture inter-sectional coloniality in the *Omu* institution's political paradigm shifts.

Keywords: British colonization, *Omu* Institution, paradigm shift, Anioma region, Delta State, Nigeria

1. Introduction

During precolonial times, traditional institutions in Nigeria were either centralized or decentralized authorities, representing indigenous political systems. Northern Nigeria was known for its centralized governing systems, famed for their bureaucratic, administrative, and judicial institutions (Maiangwa et al. 2018). The Sokoto Caliphate, established through the reforms of Usman dan Fodio, exemplified

this centralized governmental structure before the advent of British colonial rule, which the British later adopted in the form of an indirect rule system (Falola 2011). In southern Nigeria, there were few decentralized political structures, mostly in the Igbo-speaking regions. To enhance effective structure, the British colonizers instituted authorities in the form of warrant chiefs (Afigbo 1972). They used local authorities (intermediaries) as agents to collect taxes, enforce laws, and mobilize labour for colonial projects, a characteristic of their direct rule system (Falola 2009, as cited in Maiangwa et al. 2018). Yet local resistance occurred in various forms and magnitudes during colonial rule, forcing the colonizers to replace British colonial laws with customary laws (Ohadike 1994).

This system enabled the British to minimize the financial, logistical, and administrative challenges of direct colonial rule (Falola 2009). However, Nigeria was created as a colonial project and governed as a corporate entity (Maiangwa et al. 2018). The British granted charter rights to various overseas companies, such as the Royal Niger Company (RNC) located in Asaba, the African Timber and Plywood Company (ATP) located in Sapele, the United African Company (UAC), Paterson Zochonis (PZ) and John Holt (JH), all located in Lagos. These charter rights reinforced the industrial corporate governance model (Maiangwa et al. 2018: 2). The Royal Niger Company (RNC) was primarily situated in Asaba (Niger Delta region, Nigeria), driven by the extraction of raw materials such as palm oil, palm kernel, and other resources needed by industries in Britain.

2. Objectives, methodology and theoretical framework

This paper aims to examine how colonialism reshaped social institutions, women's political representation and participation, addressing the persistent knowledge gap on its long-term effects. Focusing on the *Omu* Institution in Aniomaland, the study investigates the impact of colonization on its structure and authority, and assesses its influence on Anioma's politics, governance, and identity. It further analyzes the resilience of the *Omu* Institution in sustaining its traditional roles while adapting to the changing realities of colonial rule, and explores the contemporary challenges and opportunities involved in preserving the *Omu* traditional institution in the 21st century.

This study adopts a postcolonial feminist theory to analyze the intersections of colonialism, governance, gender dynamics, and cultural resilience. The theory draws on concepts of otherness and resistance. Post-colonialism examines the

experience of colonialism, its past and present discursive and material effects on peoples, places, and societies (Quayson 2000). However, post-colonialism has been criticized for neglecting gender-differentiated discourses of colonialism and its effects. Feminist theory argues that there is a gendered nature of social processes and examines how gender, intersecting with other forms of social differentiation (e.g., age, race, ethnicity), shapes social processes and outcomes, including equity, fairness, and justice (Keenan et al. 2020). A postcolonial feminist approach bridges post-colonialism and feminist theories by interrogating societal experiences not only from a postcolonial patriarchal perspective but also from a feminist lens that examines the gendered nature of post-colonial experiences (Mishra 2013). This paper thus adopts a postcolonial feminist approach to examine how colonialism affected the *Omu* institution, its culture, and governance structures and how the *Omu* institution adapted and persisted to date.

This study employed qualitative research methods, including an ethnographic approach and secondary sources. It also utilized open-ended interviews, which highlighted the enduring significance of the *Omu* institution in the Anioma society. The data collection comprised oral testimonies and secondary sources such as reports. Oral interviews were conducted between 15 March and 5 April, 2024, with local research participants – community leaders and indigenes of Anioma-land who are particularly knowledgeable about Anioma history. The participants included two chiefs, two market women, two elders, two youths, and four *Omu* leaders: *Omu* Onicha-Ukwu, *Omu* Ogwashi-Ukwu, *Omu* Ugbodu and Iyase-Omu of Onicha-Olona. Interviews with scholars from Delta State University – Professor P. O. Opone and University of Benin – Professor O. A. Nwaokocha were conducted. An additional interview was conducted with a director of the Organization of the Advancement of Anioma Culture (OFAAC) to provide specialized knowledge on the evolution of traditional institutions.

3. Scope of the study

The study area is Aniomaland in South-South Nigeria. The time frame of this research covers the period when the *Omu* institution came into existence till post-independent Nigeria. Anioma people are an Igbo subgroup in Delta State, Nigeria, who reside near the west bank of the Niger River[1] (Opone 2012; Nwaokocha 2015).

[1] Nigeria has two major rivers: the Niger and Benue Rivers. The name "Nigeria" was derived from the Niger River, which runs through the country, naturally demarcating Delta State from Anambra State.

Nwaokocha (2015) posits that the term Anioma was first adopted as an identification tag for the Western Igbo (derived from the previous region: Mid-Western Region, 1963-1976). It was coined from the first letters of the names of four local government areas of this area, namely: 'A' for Aniocha, 'N' for Ndokwa, 'I' for Ika and 'O' for Oshimili. The syllable MA was later added to form a name – ANIOMA. The name can also be associated with the expression 'good land' because in the Igbo language, *ani* means 'land' while *oma* means 'good and beautiful' (Nwaokocha 2015: 30). The word Anioma was coined by one of the founding fathers of the Anioma movement – Chief Dennis Osadebey, and it has since remained the preferred Indigenous name (Opone 2012). Anioma people speak the Igbo language, which belongs to the Kwa, a subgroup of the Niger-Congo family (Childs 2003; Greenberg 1963), with three main subvariants – Enuani, Ika, and Ukwuani.

Anioma society has gender-balanced political positions of authority with hierarchical structures (Chuku 2009). *Obi* (king) is the highest male traditional title, and *Omu* (women leader) is the highest female traditional title in Aniomaland. Anioma people, like many other Igbo subgroups' political organizations, were based on a system of autonomous villages and towns, each governed by high chiefs – *Onotu,* a council of elders *Ikei-ani*, also called the *Ndi olinzele* (the term used in Asaba town for red cap chiefs), *Orinzele* (Aboh town) or *Ndi-nzere* (Agbor town). Another governing units are the oldest indigenous sons (*Okpala-Ukwu or Obunze*)*,* indigenous young men (*Umu-ikolobia*) and indigenous daughters (*Umu-ada*) in each village*. Onotu*,[2] is the highest male traditional institution in Anioma, consisting of *Iyase, Obunze, Onihe, Odogwu, Uwolo, Isama, Oza,* as institutional conventional titled chiefs (Engineer Emma Mordi, Personal Interview, 19 March 2024)*. Okpala-Ukwu* holds the *Obunze* title*,* and other important kingship units include the *Ikei-ani,* which is the second male ruling group, consisting of titled men, the *Omu,* and the nobles. Their forum *Izu-ani*, is an assembly of traditional rulers and elders in the community, which is spearheaded by an *Obi* (Chuku 2009). They are the custodians of oral history and cultural practices (Goody 2010). This system (a gendered gerontocracy) allowed for a high degree of local autonomy and participatory decision-making (Chuku 2009).

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[2] Anioma Council of Traditional Rulers' Forum *Onotu* is the first ruling house, comprises the *Obi* (king), his deputy – *Iyase, Uwolo, Odogwu, Oza, Isama, Okwulegwe, Obunze or Okpala-Ukwu* (indigenous oldest male in the village). They are high chiefs, each with a staff of office, *Ofo* (the supreme ancestral symbol of authority), and the forum is spearheaded by the *Obi* (king).

4. Two meanings of the term *Omu*

In various Igbo kingdoms or communities, *Omu* is an ordained leader of women (referred to in various terms such as queen, leader of the council of mothers, female-king, queen mother, merchant queen) who earned recognition (merit). She is chosen as the women's leader and representative of women who control the local market, having similar constitutional rights as men's traditional office holders (Ekejiuba 1967). An *Omu* also advised the king and helped in settling disputes, especially those involving women (Ndili 2016). The *Omu* is an esteemed title among the traditional ruling council of the Anioma people. According to Ndili (2016), Olasupo (2015), Afolabi and Olasupo (2008), the Anioma people view *Omu* as a mini-king presiding over the womenfolk in the community and the markets. Okonjo (1988) described *Omu* as a female chieftain title granted to post-menopausal women from specific patrilineal lineages or descent groups known as *Umu-Omu. Omu* institution is a female-dominated secret cult that safe-guarded Anioma society (Professor P. O. Opone, Personal interview, 26 March 2024). *Omu* institution is the oldest female chieftain institution, consisting of *Omu* members referred to as *Otu-Omu* and an *Omu* chief. It is reserved mostly for women who hold significant spiritual and leadership roles (*Omu* of Onicha-Ukwu town – *Omu* Theresa Uwadia: Personal Interview, 28 March 2024).

Pic. 1. *Omu as part of a young oil palm tree.* (Mokwunye, 2024)

Pic. 2. *Omu as an object for a barricade.* (Mokwunye, 2024)

Another meaning of *Omu* refers to a sacred object: a yellowish palm frond located at the apical bud of the oil palm tree *Elaeis guineensis* (see Pic. 1). It is often seen at traditional sacred shrines and groves, with special religious importance, especially to establish sacredness in veneration and inquiry. These leaves also serve as a totem, placed on vehicles transporting the deceased to the mortuary or burial site. In Igbo mythology, the palm tree is a female, and the frond connotes fertility (Late *Omu* Okpanam/Anioma, *Obi* Martha Dunkwu, Press Interview, Nnaa Mehn TV 2023).

Pic. 3. *Omu as an object of fetishism*. (Mokwunye, 2024)

Pic. 4. *Omu string as a barricade in a land dispute*. (Mokwunye, 2024)

In Pic. 2, the object placed on an anthill serves as a warning against intruding on a prohibited area. This object is often tied around a property by the Anioma ruling council when there is a land dispute until the case is properly resolved and the property given to the rightful owner. To be more specific, it is usually tied by members of the Onotu unit and the process is called ntachi (see Pic. 4). Once taken out of the tree, the Omu becomes an object of fetishism for veneration, a totem (see Pic. 3) or an object of barricade. This is where the traditional ruling council *Onotu* exercises its powers conscientiously, and nobody challenges their judgment. Palm strings can be seen, tied to stalls at the village market by an *Omu* chief as a barricade. It sanctions traders who have violated market rules, such as fighting, evading the levy, or committing an abomination.

5. The *Omu* institution and the Anioma identity

The *Omu* institution is established in four local government areas (two from Aniocha and two from Oshimili), out of the nine local government areas of the Anioma region in Delta State, Nigeria. The institution is a significant symbol of Anioma identity, incorporating their cultural heritage, values, and governance traditions (Engineer Emma Mordi, Personal Interview, 19 March 2024). As a traditional female leadership role, the *Omu* serves as a custodian of the Anioma tradition, keeping the community together and exercising her political and administrative authority (Esogbue 2016). The institution reflects Anioma's unique socio-political structure. This governance system promoted inclusivity, prevented the concentration of power, and encouraged communal responsibility and mutual respect. However, colonialism marginalized this institution, diminishing female political influence. Its sacred status and historical continuity form a central pillar of Anioma's collective identity and a distinctive marker of cultural practices within Nigeria.

The *Omu* stool is ascended to through various methods: by inheritance, rotation, or selection, which is sustained by oracular declarations made through divination *Igba-afa* (Engineer Emma Mordi, Personal Interview, 19 March 2024). It is elective in Asaba, Ibusa and Ogwashi-Ukwu towns respectively. It is by inheritance or rotational when an *Omu* chief is chosen from a specific patrilineal lineage or descendants known as *Umu-Omu* (Lineage of *Omu*) in Issele-Ukwu, Onicha-Ugbo, Onicha-Ukwu, Onicha Olona, and Ugbodu towns respectively. Initiation into the *Omu* society requires specific rituals performed at night, emphasizing the importance of secrecy. "It is a taboo for members to reveal their worship patterns or practices, as the power and value of secrecy are crucial for maintaining their integrity" (Nooter 1993: 62).

Every *Omu* chief (see pic. 5) must possess certain qualities before being pronounced. She must be a woman of substance, with high moral values, with sound knowledge in marital affairs, to effectively govern the womenfolk. *Omu* is like Ahebi Ugbabe of Enugu-Ezike in southeastern Nigeria, who was a warrant chief during the colonial era (1900-1960), who later became a female king (Achebe 2011). The *Omu*'s leadership is based on both traditional and charismatic qualities. There are two methods of announcing to the people that the oracle has chosen an *Omu* chief: either by placing an earthen bowl filled with objects of divination at her doorstep or by rubbing her with the native white chalk powder *Ida-nzu,* unexpectedly, on a special market day. This ritual signifies the community's choice and the spiritual mandate for her to accept the role (*Omu* of Onicha-Ukwu town – *Omu* Theresa Uwadia, Personal Interview, 28 March 2024).

Pic. 5. Late *Obi* Martha Dunkwu (1956-2024)

Source: HRM Obi Dr. Martha Dunkwu, The *Omu* of Okpanam (Anioma) bags Global Icon of African Cultural Heritage Award 2023 – African Heritage Magazine

Both married and unmarried women can be pronounced *Omu*. However, once the title is given to the married woman, she must leave her marital home and return to her paternal home, where a palace will be built for her (*Omu* Anioma, *Obi* Martha Dunkwu, Media Interview, Nnaa Mehn TV 2023). She will never carry any load on her head. She will also not engage in any labour, as her welfare would be taken care of by her community (*Omu* of Onicha-Ukwu town, *Omu* Theresa Uwadia, Personal Interview, 28 March 2024). Henceforth, she will neither marry nor have any sexual relationship, as all titles and qualities of masculinity are conferred on her (Late *Omu* Okpanam & Anioma; *Obi* Martha Dunkwu 2021, Media Interview, BBC News, 05 October 2021). At her coronation, she would be crowned *Omu*-chief, a staff of office, a sacred tool *Ofo,* signifying purity and other items of veneration would be presented to her. A red chieftain cap with two feathers (*Ozo* title cap) would be worn over her head (see Pic. 5). However, a tip of one feather would be cut off, signifying allegiance[3] to the *Obi* (Engr. E. Mordi, Personal Interview, 19 March 2024). In modern times, after the traditional coronation,

[3] Cutting-off the tip of one of the feathers on an *Omu* chief's red cap signifies allegiance to the *Obi*. The feathers on *Obi's* cap remain intact, depicting supremacy, which is also the highest traditional title in Anioma.

a certificate would be presented to her by the Delta State Government. It is noteworthy to state here that as an *Omu* chief, she can marry wives/a wife who bear/s children in her name (*Omu* of Onicha – Ukwu town, *Omu* Theresa Uwadia Personal Interview, 28 March 2024). Normally, in other traditional settings, children possess their father's name, but *Omu*'s children bear her name.

The role of *Omu* institution in the socio-political landscape of Anioma, though predominant in Enuani group,[4] is an excellent example of the lasting impact of traditional structures on modern governance. An *Omu*-chief is the community's spiritual custodian and her domain is the market, where she controls all the activities (*Omu* Ogwashi – Ukwu town; *Omu* Edith Adafor Rufua, Personal Interview, 30 March 2024). She is like the spiritual mirror of a community that works assiduously with the *Obi* (king) in governing the society. An *Omu* is the only woman in the council of elders, *Ikei-ani*. Her duties are enormous: she appeases the deities, including the terrestrial gods, streams and springs in restoring harmony between the communities and their divine realms, under nocturnal ritual practices. According to Mordi, in a metaphysical realm of African traditional religion, night represents moments of intercession, and also the intersection of the night and the dawn (Engr. E. Mordi, Personal Interview, 19 March 2024). Some rituals performed by *Omu* are of an agricultural nature, to persuade the gods to deliver rain, bounty harvests, and to guarantee healthy livestock. Another of her practices is performed on the eve of each indigenous market day, *Eke, Orie, Afor, Nkwo* (reflecting the Igbo four-day week), to mediate with the deities for bounty sales (*Omu* of Ugbodu town, *Omu* Nwaeze, Personal Interview, 31 March 2024). Other rituals performed by *Omu* relate to the rites of passage, marking personal transitions in funeral rites. As mentioned by Chinua Achebe in his novel portraying a traditional style of Igbos' life, an *Omu* is like the priestess *Chielo* (Achebe 1958: 44), even in her chanting and mode of veneration (92-99).

6 The *Omu* institution in the precolonial era

According to Engineer Emma Mordi (Personal Interview, 19 March 2024), the evolution of *Omu* sprouted from the significant influence of the Benin (Edo, Binis in Nigeria) culture on Enuani/Anioma space. After the death of one of Benin's

[4] The Enuani (upland dwellers) subethnic group is an Igbo-speaking people located west of the Niger River. They are found presently in Aniocha (North/South) and Oshimili (North/South) local government areas of Delta State, Nigeria.

kings, *Oba* Ozolua's (1483 AD-1504 AD), a new title *Iye-Oba* "queen-mother" was created. According to Benin's tradition, once the title is bestowed, the Iye-*Oba* must leave her marital home for a far distance from *Oba*'s palace, where a separate palace is built for her. Her duties were to supernaturally protect the *Oba*, advise, and ensure that his reign was successful, hence many *Iye-Obas* reigned at different times. This title was adopted by Eze Chima's group and subsequent groups that fled the Benin kingdom during *Oba* Esigie's hostile reign (1504-1550). As Eze Chima's group settled into villages, aware of the importance and responsibilities of this title, they infused it into their inherent Igbo culture. However, the migrants[5] devoid of the primogenitor's structure, decided to have an *Iye-Oba* who would not necessarily be queen-mother but a woman who could possess the ability to protect the king and at the same time protect the community against external invaders. Thus, the *Omu* institution was born to perform all the similitude of the functions of the *Iye-Oba* and by extension keep the community in check.

Some *Omu* chiefs held significant political powers, such as *Omu* Nwaegboka of Onitsha town, who died in 1886. In 1912, Northcote Thomas photographed an unnamed *Omu* of Okpanam. Additionally, *Omu* Okwei (1872-1943) of Ossomari town was a merchant: an agent to Royal Niger Company[6] in 1904 (Ekejiuba 1967). They all worked alongside male leaders (kings). *Omu* traditional institutions came into existence around 800 years ago according to the late *Omu* Anioma Obi Martha Dunkwu. She asserts that Anioma's ancestors deemed it necessary to include women in the governing affairs of their society, hence the *Omu* institution was created to take care of women folks (Al Jazeera TV, 5 July 2023). Consequently, this allows the woman (*Omu* chief) to make decisions on specific economic, political, and religious matters related to women. Therefore, *Omu* was a queen who worked alongside the *Obi* (king) to ensure balanced governance (*Omu* Ogwashi-Ukwu town, *Omu* Edith Adafor Rufua, Personal Interview, 30 March 2024).

Some believe that *Omu* should be regarded as a queen, not a chief (Engineer Emma Mordi, Personal Interview, 19 March 2024). The term "chief", imposed by

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[5] A major migration occurred from Benin Kingdom to Anioma region between the 16th and 18th centuries due to wars propelled by Oba Esigie's reign. The famous Eze-chima group in this era founded Anioma towns like Obior (the oldest), Issele-ukwu, Onicha-ugbo, Onicha-Olona, Onicha-ukwu, and others.

[6] The Royal Niger Company was a British company, situated in Asaba (Aniomaland), and founded in 1886. It dominated economic activities along Nigeria's Niger and Benue Rivers: establishing a commercial monopoly through its colonial administrative powers.

colonial authorities, oversimplifies and misrepresents the *Omu*'s unique role in African governance, reducing female leadership to a male-dominated construct. Recognizing the *Omu* as a queen emphasizes her distinct cultural, spiritual, and political authority, challenging the colonial legacy that marginalized African socio-political systems. The leadership model reflected the Anioma people's belief which is gender-complementary, where men and women share governance roles for societal harmony. *Omu*'s power extended beyond economic and administrative functions to spiritual leadership, which is integral to the Anioma's religious and socio-political life. *Omu* was seen as a custodian of morality and a symbol of unity.

Trade was a significant aspect of Anioma's economy and *Omu*'s domain, with markets serving as hubs for the exchange of goods and services. Their activities in the market have also earned the *Omu* chief the title: *Omu bu eze afia* or *Eze ashia*, meaning '*Omu* is the king of the market' (Akinpelu-Ayodele, 2023. p. 6). It was *Omu*'s duty to inspect and ensure the quality of goods in the market. Anioma people follow a distinctive four-day week, with each day *Eke*, *Orie*, *Afor*, and *Nkwo* serving as the market day for each community (Opone 2012; Nwaokocha 2015). The local markets were organized without conflicts between two close communities: having different main market days (Ogbueshi A. N. Ndili, Personal Interview, 2 April 2024). This pattern, shared by other Igbo-speaking communities east of the Niger, contrasts with the modern standard seven-day week, which was disrupted during the Ekumeku war (see section 7).

7. Omu institution shortly before and during colonization

In the colonial era (1900-1960), the *Omu* traditional institution performed the duties in maintaining Anioma's cultural identity amid globalization, modernity and external influences. The institution faced many challenges amid cultural and political changes but survived alongside other traditional institutions in safeguarding Anioma communities. In the middle of colonial rule (ca. 1930s), *Omu* was deprived of some rights because colonial authorities never reckoned with matriarchy. The traditional laws guiding crop production to their harvest were disrupted and controlled by the colonizers. The *Omu* was left with safeguarding the local markets, and gradually inequality set in and heralded the dominance of patriarchy in Anioma and other parts of Igboland. The introduction of indirect rule disrupted the dual leadership model in the Anioma society. The British colonial administration replaced traditional governance structures with warrant

chiefs, primarily male rulers chosen for their willingness to collaborate with colonial authorities (Afigbo 1972). This shift marginalized the *Omu* institution, diminishing its influence and visibility. Traditionally, under the land tenure system of the Anioma people, both indigenes and non-indigenes were prohibited from beginning land preparation until a specific time designated by the community, typically after the celebration of the goddess of harvest; *Ifejioku*[7] – the guardian deity of yam or *Ilo ogwu* for some communities (Afigbo 1980; Korieh 2007). An *Omu* chief was traditionally responsible for performing rituals to appease the deities and ensure a successful farming season. Following the celebration, farmers were permitted to prepare their farmlands and plant crops or seedlings for the new farming season. However, under colonial rule, these rituals were often disregarded as they conflicted with the colonizers' timeline. Additionally, the cultivation of yam (Igbo king of crops) was reduced and other crops such as cassava and cash crops, e.g., groundnuts, were popularized to serve the economic interests of the colonizers (Korieh 2010; Korieh 2007). According to Ogunbade (2012), Western culture significantly impacted traditional African practices, especially in traditional religion, diluting unique cultural identities. The British colonizers introduced Western religion (Christianity) and education, thus suppressing the traditional Anioma religious practices: rituals and ceremonies upheld by the *Omu* institution.

The mistreatment of Anioma communities by British colonizers, through their corporate chartered company – the Royal Niger Company, to enforce colonial policies and collect taxes (Korieh 2010: 6-7), coupled with resistance, tensions and disputes, led to the Ekumeku war (Iweze 2016). "The word Ekumeku, has an indigenous meaning – onomatopoeic, conveying the idea of a whirlwind or something fast, devastating, invisible, and yet forcefully real, which grew out of secret societies of brave young men that most Anioma towns possessed, combined the functions of a secret police and a guerrilla army" (Isichei 1969). The movement consisted of a league of young men organized around prominent chiefs and kings. This group waged prolonged military campaigns from the late 19th to the early 20th centuries (Opone 2022). The war showcases the resilience and unity of the Western Igbo people in resisting first the growing power of the Royal Niger Company and later colonial rule (Chief Maduagwuna,

[7] According to Igbo mythology, *Ifejioku* (or *Ahianjoku*) is believed to be a farm deity/goddess worshiped by the Igbo people of Nigeria. She is responsible for crops, especially yams. The *Ifejioku* festival is celebrated during the full moon, usually in September, to mark the bountiful harvest.

Personal Interview, 24 March 2024). The Ekumeku warriors, bound by secrecy oaths, effectively employed guerrilla tactics against the British army, with the *Omu* institution playing a key supportive role. It was the duty of *Omu* chiefs to prepare warriors supernaturally against invaders. *Omu* institution (Enuani and Oshimili Local Government Area) fortified Anioma's warriors with charms and amulets. The institution's actions were very effective: the warriors prevailed against the colonial masters. Some historians and anthropologists documented the impact of warriors appearing suddenly and striking unexpectedly (Isichei 1969; Afigbo 1980; Ohadike 1994; Nwaokocha 2015; Iweze 2016; Opone 2022). The colonizers found the *Omu* institution culpable by turning the warriors into superhuman soldiers and devised means to frustrate the *Omu* institution, ushering in rigid patriarchy, thereby instilling greed and covetousness in the kings. The colonizers instigated that the *Omu* institution would have an overbearing influence on Anioma's sociopolitical structures. Notably, the British paid the kings and their male loyalists' stipends, while ignoring the *Omu* traditional institution. Before the advent of colonialism, the *Omu* was addressed not as a chief but as "Her Royal Highness". It was the patriarchal mentality imposed on the people by the colonial masters that diminished the status of the office of the *Omu* (Engr. E. Mordi, Personal Interview, 19 March 2024).

Despite these challenges, the *Omu* institution displayed remarkable resilience and adapted to its diminished roles. As colonial rule undermined traditional governance systems, the *Omu* shifted their emphasis to safeguarding Anioma cultural practices, values, and traditions, prioritizing cultural preservation and community organization, particularly among women. They became key custodians of cultural identity, overseeing rituals, festivals, and other communal activities to maintain social cohesion. They acted as advocates for women's interests, coordinated economic activities like market organization, and supported conflict resolution at the community level (BBC News, 3 July 2021). They maintained a low-key level of authority by leveraging their influence in markets and traditional religious spaces. These strategic adaptations ensured the survival of the *Omu* institution, albeit in a transformed capacity.

8. The *Omu* institution in the post-colonial era and its transformations

In the post-colonial era (since 1960), the *Omu* institution has experienced both continuity and transformation. While its political influence has not returned to precolonial times, the institution remains a significant cultural symbol in Anioma

society (Uchendu 2006). It is the duty of an *Omu*-chief to take care of security issues in the communities. According to the Asaba palace historian, the *Omu* is the representative of her community, and her mystical powers command respect based on the metaphysical destruction of evil by gods either directly or on invocation (Ogbueshi A. N. Ndili, Personal Interview, 02 April 2024). This also serves as a premise for analyzing the effectiveness of the peacemaking processes of the *Omu* institution (Mengisteab & Hagg 2017; Akinpelu-Ayodele 2023). A historic account during the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) was the prevention of massacres in Ibusa (Igbuzo) and Onicha-Olona towns, which averted the assassination of two Biafran Colonels by Nigerian soldiers (Mrs Onyewagwachie, Personal Interview, 28 March 2024).

The institution responsible for overseeing traditional governance in Nigeria is the State Council of Traditional Rulers and Chiefs. The councils have limited powers and are governed by laws, with only State governors holding veto power over council appointments. The *Omu* institution has sought inclusion in these councils, which raises the question of whether the *Omu* is a ruler or a custodian. Recently, the *Omu* has been sidelined, with the government controlling the markets and no financial support provided for the *Omu* chiefs, leading many to abandon their roles. The Nigerian government has questioned the legitimacy of the *Omu* institution in Anioma, according to a report from the visit of American researchers to the *Omu* institution (SouthernVoicenews 2021), thereby supporting inequality. The Delta State government's Local Council denies the *Omu* her rightful role in the local markets, specifically her right to collect levies and control the market. Anioma's custom requires a palace for each *Omu* chief, but none has been provided, leaving them as tenants.

The *Omu* institution, once revered, is in decline, with men controlling the process of selecting and crowning an *Omu* chief (Southern Voicenews 2021). These challenges have destabilized the sociopolitical structure of the Anioma people. Hence, the *Omu* chiefs have become advocates for women's rights and cultural heritage, using their platforms to address contemporary issues such as education, health, and economic development. To this effect, late *Omu* Anioma, Martha Dunkwu, registered the Obi Martha Dunkwu Foundation to give scholarships to indigent Anioma girls. Additionally, her dream resulted in the creation of the Centre for Omuship in Anioma, highlighting the *Omu* institution's vision. Both institutions: Obi Martha Dunkwu Foundation and the Omuship Installation in Anioma and Women Development Initiative were registered with the Nigerian Corporate Affairs Commission when their foundress passed on, on 16 February 2024. She worked very hard to bring this institution to the limelight.

The *Omu* institution has been an ardent promoter of Anioma cultural heritage through the annual celebration of OFAAC – Organization of the Advancement of Anioma Culture (a non-governmental organization) to provide knowledge on the evolution of traditional institutions and possible ways to revive them (Mr. Patrick Ugboh, Personal Interview, 31 March 2024). Their advocacy for cultural preservation and gender inclusivity has inspired efforts to revive traditional governance systems and bridge them with modern political frameworks. Modern *Omu* chiefs have embraced new roles as cultural ambassadors, bridging the gap between tradition and modernity.

10. Conclusion

This study analyzed the dynamics affecting the *Omu* institution from precolonial to postcolonial times, exploring how the institution survived colonialism in Nigeria. The impact of British colonization and the political paradigm shifts on the *Omu* institution in the Anioma region of Delta State, Nigeria, is significant and multifaceted. Traditionally, the *Omu* institution was a very important and recognized arm of governance in Aniomaland. It represented a strong autonomous form of female complementary leadership. With a profound influence on local politics, the *Omu* held substantial authority in sustaining governance, resolving land disputes, conflict resolution, and social regulation. Colonization drastically altered traditional systems by imposing a foreign structure of governance that sidelined indigenous institutions. British colonial administrators favoured patriarchy, undermining the authority of the *Omu* with the British system of indirect rule. As a result, the political paradigm in Anioma was dramatically shifted from a more participatory and decentralized indigenous system to a centralized and patriarchal foreign-led system. The *Omu*'s political influence diminished, and the community experienced a power tussle as the *Omu* struggled to regain its position against imposed leadership rather than naturally developed through indigenous practices. This shift led to the loss of cultural autonomy and political fragmentation, with lingering effects on the social and political fabric of the region. The consequences of this colonial disruption and post-colonial adaptations continue to affect the region's governance structures. Postcolonial efforts have sought to restore Indigenous practices and leadership systems, although the colonial legacy remains a significant barrier to the full revival of traditional political structures.

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The forest-road dialectic: Postcolonial counter-discourse in Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*

Abstract

This article examines the portrayal of the forest in relation to the road image presented in *The Famished Road*. Building on earlier analyses that read the forest as a site of ancestral memory, spiritual liminality, and indigenous epistemology, and the road as a trope of colonial intrusion, modernity, and existential passage, this article revises and extends these established paradigms. It also analyses the text as a postcolonial countertext to entrenched Eurocentric binary thinking. The study contends that Okri imaginatively deploys the forest metaphor and the road image in a dynamic relationship of interdependence, with the *abiku* motif as its narrative pivot. It concludes that by establishing this interconnected symbolic structure between the forest and the road, Okri articulates a vision of restoring the devalued past of Africa in his attempt to recover an African legacy and advance a fluid and balanced worldview.

Keywords: African epistemology, forest, road, interdependence, postcolonial

> I ran through the night forests, where all forms are mutable, where all things exchange their identities, and where everything dances in an exultation of flame and wisdom.[1]

[1] Okri, Ben. *The Famished Road.* Ibadan: Spectrum. 1991. 457.

1. Introduction

Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (hereafter *TFR*) embodies larger and deeper truths in African cosmology beyond the representation of the 'road' metaphor that many scholars have studied with profound erudition. In Okri's fusion of African oral tradition with Western epistemology, another striking metaphor that is inextricably intertwined with and illuminates the road image is the forest metaphor. Okri's forest and road have an interconnected existence, sharing a seamless but intricate, dynamic relationship of interdependence as essential elements of his representation of life as a journey. Okri conveys this message by means of a fluid plot in which the *abiku* motif is the narrative pivot. The road represents both the material journey from the 'super-sensible' spirit world to the world of the physical representation of reality and the 'journey' through life itself in this physical world. The forest, on the other hand, is the thin 'silver' line, the spatio-temporal agency of perpetual transformation from one state of being to another in the physical world: from life to death, discontent to satisfaction, equilibrium to disequilibrium, timidity to bravery, sadness to joy, and darkness to light, etc. Okri's representation of the forest is to the effect that it is the threshold between these states and the spiritual potentiator of the shift that results thereby. His deployment of the interconnectedness of the road image and the forest metaphor also serves as a postcolonial Afrocentric countertext, a sub-plot protesting the subordination of African cultures and values to Western ideals, and urging a return to African ideology.

This is a dominant underlying current in *TFR* that Ben Okri makes scant effort to disguise. Dad, whom Okri reconstructs into a moral agent and visionary:

> was redreaming the world as he slept. He saw the scheme of things and he didn't like it. He saw the world in which black people always suffered and he didn't like it. [...] He saw our people always preyed upon by other powers, manipulated by the Western world, our history and achievements rigged out of existence (*TFR* 492).

And this undercurrent is substantially acknowledged by Olatubosun Ogunsanwo who, while adjudging *TFR* a representation of the contextual juxtaposition of African myths, European realism and postmodernism, emphatically recalls Ben Okri himself saying "it is time that we started healing the human spirit by giving back to it its full, rich, hidden dimensions. And that is all I am trying to do in my fiction – to restore the kingdom, as I said" (1995: 40). This resonates against the background of Felicia Moh's argument that "on the attainment of political independence, there is a dislocation of ideals. The nation has already

lost its spirit (its traditional morality) to the white man" (2002: 96). And Okri's revelling in anthropomorphic supernaturalism – "the trees feeling that they were losing the argument with humans, had simply walked deeper into the forest" (*TFR* 104); and "The forest there had been conquered. There were stumps of trees, bleeding sap, all around" (*TFR* 277) – is both a restatement of the protest against the relegation of African values and a reinforcement of the intertwining coexistence of Africans and the forest, as I shall argue further in this article. But, essentially, it is in the relationship of interdependence, sometimes of opposing energies, between the road and the forest as two aspects of a transformative process in *TFR* that Okri's imperative of this rebirth of Africa's cultural heritage is established.

Beyond the Western conception of the forest as "a dense growth of trees and under-bush covering a large tract" (*Merriam Webster Dictionary*) or "a large area of land covered with trees and plants, usually larger than a wood, or the trees and plants themselves" (*Cambridge Advanced Learner's*), it possesses both a cultural and spiritual essence in African mythopoesis. On the strength of interviews with selected traditional rulers and chiefs, forest priests and other rural dwellers, Adesiji & Babalola (2012:1) affirm that at least a sacred forest exists in each of their respective villages (*Igbo Igunuko* and *Igbo Oro* in Ososun; *Igbo So'ro* in Balogun) and that there exist perceptions of the sacred forest being the foundation of the communities, the residence of the gods of the land, the ritual site for sacrifices for productivity, and a place that women and unauthorised persons must not enter.

The sacral characterisation of the forest in Yoruba mythology is also evident in several Igbo-centric novels like *Things Fall Apart* (Achebe 2001). It is instructive, for example, that the metamorphosis of masquerades (*egwugwu*) into ancestral spirits occurs in the forest. When the *egwugwu* appear, the generally held belief is that "they emerge from the earth" and it is similarly understood at their emergence that "the ancestral spirits of the clan were abroad" (Achebe 2001: 88). More noteworthy perhaps is the fact that "the house into which they emerged faced the forest" (Achebe 2001: 88). The forest is thus as much a place of transfiguration in Igbo folklore as it is "a magical 'nowhere land', where things change form, as in dreams" in Yoruba mythology (Brazzelli 2017: 155).

The perception of the forest as a realm of transformative and regenerative significance is not limited to the West African sub-region. The East African theologian and philosopher, Harvey Sindima, remarks that humans share a common destiny with nature and that all creation is interconnected, emphasizing that *umunthu*, the fullness of life, is attained in the communion of man with other people, other

creatures – [plants, trees, rock, water] – and with the earth itself (1990: 137-147). Of Central Africa, Owen Burnham notes that plants are the "most spiritual and mysterious of all life forms" (2000:35), while Luis Devin (2012) points out that:

> It holds you close, it protects you. Slithering over your feet, flying into you, scratching your skin. Swimming around you when you step into water. Wherever you are, you hear its voice. Its smell. Its breath. Even if you wanted to, you cannot hide, because it has eyes everywhere. Little by little it transforms you. It swallows you up and begins to absorb you - it digests you. The forest. (2012: 3)

Although Ben Okri's forest is etched in the consciousness of Yoruba epistemologies, the belief in the spiritual and regenerative force of the forest extends to other African cultures, albeit in varying degrees or dimensions.

The explication of this conception of the forest as it relates to the forest-road dynamic in this article is framed by postcolonial criticism in its very general sense as "the critical analysis of the history, culture, literature, and modes of discourse that are specific to the former colonies of England, Spain, France, and other European imperial powers" (Abram & Harpham 2012: 306). It seeks to bear out Okri's fusion of the relegation of African values into a sub-plot in which he advocates a restoration of Africa's devalued past in *TFR*, deploying the road and the forest, along with the *abiku* motif, as narrative pivots.

1.1 Related scholarship

The need to situate this article within the existing body of scholarship necessitates a review of relevant studies on the forest and the road in Ben Okri's fiction. Chengyi Wu studied Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Ben Okri's *TFR* as novels sharing environmental concerns centered around their representation of the forest. She argues that the forest is "an important element in both novels that can connect the crisis of cultural hybridization to that of ecological degradation in the Nigerian history" (2012: 94), stating in the process that the crisis of cultural hybridization engineered by Christian missionaries in Achebe's (2001) *Things Fall Apart* threatens the foundations of Ibo cultural heritage and does, in fact, also foreshadow the crises of ecological degradation in Okri's *TFR*. While Wu tenuously makes a case for a postcolonial ecocritical reading of the forest in Achebe and Okri on the basis of the intertextual relation between cultural hybridization and ecological degradation in *Things Fall Apart* and *TFR*, she does emphasize that Okri's presentation of the degradation of the forest echoes Nigerians' forgetfulness about their history for which Okri, in her view, critiques

European colonisation and the resultant cultural hybridization. This idea that there is a close relationship between the forest and Nigerians' cultural history is sustained in this article, in which I argue, however, that beyond reflecting the bond between Nigerians and their cultural traditions, the forest actually exists alongside the road within a shared symbolic framework.

While acknowledging the ancestral links of the forest with West African folklore and imagination in *TFR*, Vanessa Guignery affirms that it is "the realm of the supernatural and the fantastic, [...] of imagination, of dreams and visions, [...] a place of ontological uncertainty and metamorphosis", even if it only belonged to Azaro's imagination (2014: 2). The forest in Yoruba culture, she adds, "is commonly associated with the numinous world and with supernatural manifestations, the place where the spirits dwell" (2014: 2). She equally remarks that "the evocation of the forest in Okri's trilogy reveals that the writer is still attached to the West African tradition that views the forest as a mythological and supernatural place" (2014: 8). Nicoletta Brazzelli similarly notes "the ancestral links of the forest with Yoruba folklore and imagination" (2017: 151), and recounts Quayson's assertion that the bush in Tutuola's narratives is the "abode of spirits, a liminal zone that embodies the chaotic and mysterious forces of nature" (2017: 152).

Then also, as he evokes 'Ogun' (the god who cleared the road from *Irumale* to the world of the living), 'Ifa' (the flexible and progressive Yoruba belief system), and 'Ajantala' (king of the *abiku*) as features which demonstrate the echo of Yoruba literary tradition in Ben Okri's *TFR* (2001: 73-81), Bode Sowande (2001) celebrates "the allegory of the road and the forests of life" (2001: 76), proclaiming that "[a]ll of these co-travellers are on the road to their respective destinies, passing through their respective forests to understand and master their individual or collective human fate" (2001: 76-77). This proclamation is an evocation of the perception of the road as a metaphor for the journey of life, which I uphold in this article. It also hints at the interconnectedness of the forces of the road and the forest, the actual nature and dynamic of which I shall interrogate, and echoes the transformative potential of the forest stated by Guignery and Brazzelli.

In Ikenna Kamalu's reading of Ben Okri's fiction, the forest is interpreted as a conceptual metaphor for pre-colonial Africa. He views it as representing the cultural and spiritual totality of African life before colonial intrusion – a benign space associated with ancestral presence, a repository of knowledge and inspiration, and communal existence. Within his conceptual metaphor framework, the forest is also imagined as a human community, with trees standing metaphorically for its inhabitants. The road, by contrast, is read across both physical and metaphysical levels. On the material plane, it is the ordinary path people travel, but it also

signifies colonial infrastructure created to facilitate the economic exploitation of Africa, marking the intrusion of colonial modernity into the earlier forested world; while on the metaphysical plane, it is "the road of primordial existence – the passage from birth to death and vice versa" (2008: 26-46).

For Gillian Gane, the name of the village – Umuofia – (meaning 'people of the forest') in which *Things Fall Apart* is set, and the fact that the most revered Igbo masquerade is called 'Evil Forest' in the novel are evidence of a timeless interaction of African societies with the forest (2007: 48). Beyond that passionate point, however, 'Umuofia' in reality means 'children of the forest'. This presents the forest as their actual source of life and accounts for the reverence accorded to the forest in many traditional African communities. Of the road, Gane remarks that Ben Okri presents it as a richly symbolic and multivalent image. He adds that although it often appears in opposition to the forest – suggesting the advance of human construction into the natural world – the novel also intimates a continuity between them as the expanding city seems to merge with the forest and paths and rivers assume the form of roads. While also observing that the construction of roads entails the destruction of trees and the disruption of the natural environment, Gane crucially underlines Azaro's "persistence in seeing a connection" between the forest and the road (2007: 52). It is the nature and dynamics of this connection that this article further explores.

While earlier scholarship on *TFR* has productively examined the forest and the road as contrasting symbolic spaces – variously aligned with myth and history, tradition and modernity, indigenous and colonial, stasis and motion – this article departs from those dualistic paradigms. Rather than treating the forest and the road as oppositional metaphors, it conceptualises them as a unified symbolic system whose meanings are generated through structural interdependence. In this view, neither space functions independently; each derives ontological, political, and narrative significance from its relational entanglement with the other. The novel's imaginative architecture, therefore, is not built upon contrast but upon recursive co-implication.

In addition, Gillian Gane had noted that in *Things Fall Apart,* nature is frequently framed within a utilitarian logic, while in *TFR,* the forest registers the disruptive effects of colonisation, class inequality, and developmental expansion. Such readings reflect a strand of Western modernity that approaches nature instrumentally. Yet this orientation does not define Western literary traditions as a whole, which have also imagined the forest as symbolic and spiritually resonant. Likewise, African conceptions of the forest extend beyond a purely spiritual paradigm, encompassing ecological practice, historical experience, and social

organisation. So, Harvey Sindima's appeal to an 'ethics of community' grounded in humanity's shared destiny with nature articulates an important current within African humanistic thought, but not a singular or fixed worldview. Thus, rather than sustaining a simple opposition between a mechanistic "Western" forest or a spiritual "African" one, *TFR* reconfigures the forest-road dynamic to unsettle such binaries and foreground relational interdependence.

2. Forest of transformations

The interrelation of the forest and the road within a unified symbolic order derives largely from the forest's liminal and transformative potential. Quite early in the narrative, we are led into the forest where we are presented with a view of it from the viewpoint of our liminal focalizer, Azaro, as we see and experience the fictional world of *TFR* through his eyes. Because he is an *abiku* spirit-child who bestrides both the physical and spiritual realms of existence, he is by this interstitiality granted the authorial capacity of an omniscient narrator. As a result, Azaro visually apprehends phenomena that are invisible to the human optical senses. He says, "the forest swarmed with unearthly beings, they were so numerous that they interpenetrated one another, and the women ran through these beings without fear" (*TFR* 12). Azaro's view is a fitting intertextual evocation of Fagunwa's (1982) *Forest of a Thousand Daemons*. Fagunwa's narrator, Akaraogun, however, adds an ominous 'evil' dimension to the description of the forest when he says "a most evil forest is a forest of a thousand daemons" (Fagunwa 1982: 11), aligning it with the head and most vicious of the Igbo masquerades (*egwugwu*) in *Things Fall Apart* called 'Evil Forest'.

Ato Quayson (1997: 44-64) expounds Akaraogun's 'most evil forest' as a liminal zone that embodies the chaotic and mysterious forces of nature, and this also crucially aligns with Chinua Achebe's (2001) literal "evil forest" that is also both the abode of transgressors and a place to which the rituals and beliefs of the people of Umuofia are inseparably connected. The more generative notion of the forest is thus not a significant departure from the notion of a 'most evil forest', as the diversity of beliefs across cultures emplaces a variation in the perception and degree of spiritual attachment that a particular cultural community may have with the forest. This directly correlates with the potency or otherwise of the energies, positive or opposing, residing within and felt in the collective consciousness of each community. So just as the road is an expression of the binary creative and destructive energies embodied by Ogun (Bode Sowande 2001: 78), the forest is as much a place of flow and flux: the site of cosmic energies that enable the mutually constitutive symbolic system it shares with the road.

One of the earliest indications of the forest's transformative potency occurs during the fire incident at the landlord's compound. The narrator-focalizer situates the event at a moment when the "forest lacked all definitions" (*TFR* 10). The indeterminate and spiritually charged state of the forest functions as a symbolic prelude to the chaos that soon erupts in the community. As the narrator recounts:

> When [...] the forest lacked all definition, the landlord turned up and immediately started ranting.[...] He screamed that we had deliberately set his house on fire to avoid paying the recently increased rent (*TFR* 10).

Shortly afterwards, the landlord, aided by state security personnel, unleashes violence on the tenants and the situation degenerates into a riot. The riot thus appears less as an isolated social disturbance than as a manifestation of a prior metaphysical disorder already registered in the forest.

The forest also mediates moments of personal transition. After being attacked by political thugs, the photographer flees into the forest, where he undergoes a period of isolation and trial:

> 'I fought them and ran into the forest. I stayed there. The mosquitoes bit me. The two-legged dog began to whine in the darkness [...]. I became hungry and I heard voices in the trees and then I decided it was time to come home and face the music' (*TFR* 190).

Within the forest's liminal space, his suffering – mosquito bites, hunger, darkness, and the eerie presence of the two-legged dog – assumes the structure of an initiatory ordeal. The "voices in the trees" evoke ancestral presences that embolden him to return and confront the danger he had fled. The courage he displays on returning is therefore the outward manifestation of a psychological and spiritual transformation first effected within the forest.

A similar pattern of transformation occurs in the experience of Dad. Before the celebration of Azaro's rescue from the house of ghosts, Azaro's father, Dad, enters the forest on a hunting expedition. He eventually captures a wild boar, though only after a fierce struggle:

> 'What did you catch?' I asked.
> 'A wild boar.'
> 'Why are you bleeding?'
> 'The trap caught the boar but it didn't die. It was still struggling when I got there. I had to kill it with my hands. It kicked my head' (*TFR* 39-40).

Dad's bleeding, together with the spilled blood of the boar, functions symbolically as a sacrificial passage into renewal. And although his family's material circumstances do not dramatically improve, later developments in *TFR* suggest that Dad's violent struggle with the boar in the forest does function as a moment of symbolic initiation that releases a latent strength subsequently expressed in progressively widening spheres along the road. Emerging from this ordeal, the narrative first registers a renewed sense of purpose in his declaration, "I will be a great boxer" (*TFR* 69), an aspiration that converts the bodily endurance forged in the forest into disciplined ambition within the social world. This recovered vitality soon manifests as direct resistance to oppression when he confronts the Party thugs terrorizing the neighbourhood, repelling them with Madame Koto's fallen signboard and instructing Azaro that when attacked, one must "toughen up, study them, wait for the right time, and then fight them back. [...] Then they will respect you" (*TFR* 305). What begins as personal courage gradually expands into a wider social consciousness. Addressing the beggars and dispossessed of the ghetto, he urges them to awaken their collective potential: "Think differently [...] and you will change the world. [...] Remember how free you are [...] and you will transform your hunger into power" (*TFR* 419). By the close of the narrative, this awakening crystallises into explicit political awareness, as he insists that "we must take an interest in politics. We must become spies on behalf of justice" (*TFR* 498). These episodes mark a clear departure from the earlier image of Dad as a man subdued by exhaustion and deprivation. Read in this light, the violent encounter with the boar in the forest becomes a symbolic initiation through which Dad recovers an inner vitality that later manifests in his defiance of oppression, his rhetoric of struggle, and his expanding consciousness of social transformation.

All the events highlighted above establish the forest as a threshold realm where social upheavals are prefigured and individual transformations are forged. It is within this liminal space that characters undergo ordeals, purification, and renewal before re-entering the 'human' world in altered states of consciousness and courage.

Read in relation to the novel's forest-road symbolic structure, these moments chart the translation of a transformation first initiated in the liminal space of the forest into increasingly conscious forms of agency within the historical space of the road.

3. The forest and the road

The interdependent relationship between the forest and the road is revealed through a number of events in the fictional world of *TFR*. One of these occurs when Azaro wanders into the forest with some spirits. By his supernatural ability, Azaro blazes a particularly significant perspective on the perception of the forest within the context of the African worldview. This perspective stimulates some insight into the nexus between the road and the forest in African cosmology already mentioned above. Azaro was at the market and, by his liminal abilities, discovered that "it wasn't just humans who came to the marketplaces of the world. Spirits and other beings come there too" (*TFR* 16). He follows some of them into the forest until they come to a clearing in the forest from where he chooses to follow a baby spirit to a gash in the earth. As he stared into the gash, he is frightened, shuts his eyes in horror and inexplicably finds himself in a totally different part of the forest that is referred to as "the under-road" and "the stomach of the road" (*TFR* 16-17).

This reference to the forest as the stomach of the road reflects a complex relationship of interconnectedness and interfusion between the road and the forest in which the borders between both spaces are blurred. It embodies the theme of consumption and suggests that the road, as a metaphor for life and existence in the material world, has consumed a portion of the sacred forest, thereby transforming it into a deformed, unnatural reality, and underscores the tension and conflict of existence that arises from the synergy of the natural and the mundane or the spiritual and the material. The reference equally reinforces symbiosis and mutual dependence between the forest and the road and suggests that although the road distorts the surreal dynamic of the forest in its stomach, where metabolism occurs, the forest persists within the framework of the same road with all the fullness of its essence. It is in doing so that the forest that once existed independently but is now subordinated to the road remains relevant as part of a larger network of human society.

This narrative equally portrays a connectedness between the forest and the road in which both entities are mutually interdependent. The forest is the 'soul' of the road, as the road derives its existence from the land, wood and power provided by the forest and the other elements existing within its cosmic space. The road thus owes its existence to the forest. Yet the forest depends on the road for access to its rich spiritual and natural resources, without which it would become isolated, pale in significance and be erased from the memory and consciousness of humanity. Okri's *TFR* is full of instances where the road serves the function of

connection and accessibility to the forest – "After they had made their offering at the crossroad they bounded on through the streets, [...] and into the forest" (*TFR* 18); "So I made for the forest; I passed Madame Koto's sacrifice to the road" (*TFR* 80); "She bounded after the thugs and their friends, [...] pursuing them up the road towards the forest" (*TFR* 106); "Like someone trying to escape from a nightmare, he fled out of the room and was seen tearing down the road towards the forest" (*TFR* 221). The existential relevance of the forest is thus tied to the existence of the road that provides the enablement for individuals and communities to access and experience the energies of the former in their relationship of mutual interdependence.

The complex interdependence of the road and the forest is also inherently paradoxical and, in many ways, adversarial, as we see in the metaphor of the road consuming the forest. Elsewhere in *TFR* as well, the King of the Road is at the centre of the allegory of the mutually malicious and paradoxically self-destructive energies that the road and the forest give off:

> He began to eat himself. He ate his legs, and his hands, and his shoulders, and his back, and his neck, and he ate his head. He ate himself until only his stomach remained (*TFR* 212).

The imagery of the road's stomach (a metaphor used as an elegant variation of the forest (*TFR* 15-16)), hurting him, reflects both the coalescence of the road and the forest as well as the forest's resistance and defiance despite existing within the sphere of influence and formidable configuration of the road. The hunger that the forest precipitates paradoxically becomes the harbinger of its own doom as the road descends on the trees and the bushes of the forest and devours all of them. Paradoxically, and in a sense ironically, the road devours all of its own self but its stomach (the forest). This underscores the harm that society sometimes brings upon itself in its desire for development and sometimes unattainable utopian objectives, while the forces of nature and tradition symbolized by the forest endure, resisting obliteration by the material forces of existence on the physical plane, including capitalism and modernization. In this sense, it projects the forest's symbolism of ancestral memory, African communalism, spirituality in harmony with nature, being at odds with the wild and insatiable wants of man and his submission to modernity, capitalism, and exploitation on the road of life.

This mirrors the complexity of the coexistence of spiritual and material realms, where the sacred and the profane, life and death, growth and destruction, survival

and degradation are woven into an intertwining and timeless cycle of life. It is a dualism that invokes a rigorous critique of the commitment and duty of man towards the preservation of nature and spiritual essence on his life's journey. Meanwhile, if it underlines the intermingling and cyclic metamorphosis of the road and the forest, albeit hostile in this particular instance, it does also simultaneously reflect ephemerality and transmutation that are dominant themes in *TFR*.

Consistent with postcolonial literature, the interface of tradition and modernity is a prominent theme in *TFR*, and the pursuit of social change and infrastructural development eventually gain momentum in the community. Much of the forest is sacrificed and destroyed for the erection of buildings and the construction of roads and other social infrastructure. While the major actors in these projects purport to have a positive impact on the community, it comes at a huge cost, as it progressively fractures the spiritual ties and bond of intimacy between the people and the forest. And Azaro, the narrator-focalizer, captures the prevailing mood in succinct terms – "The trees I got to know so well were cut down and only their stumps, dripping sap, remained" (*TFR* 143).

Another moment signalling the interdependent relationship between the forest and the road is Azaro's personal realization of the reality of co-construction between both elements. He discovers that the destruction of the forest directly impacts his sojourn on the road: that as the forest is progressively desecrated by developers, churches and sorcerers, the road evolves "a cruel and infinite imagination" (*TFR* 114), a correlation affirming the intricate relationship of co-implication between the road and the forest. He remarks that it now took longer to get far into the forest and emphasizes the point that it seemed that the trees walked deeper into the forest, seeing that they were losing the battle against human beings (*TFR* 104). This experience reinforces the symbolic function of the forest as the harbinger of change, and reenacts the fact that the changing conditions of the forest characteristically preceded the change in the world around it. Shattered by the loss suffered by the forest, Azaro finds himself mourning aloud that as the forest lost its essence, "the road became my torment, my aimless pilgrimage, and I found myself merely walking to discover where all the roads lead to, where they end (*TFR* 114-115).

This recursive co-implication of the forest and the road is again forcefully invoked in a conversation that Azaro has with Madame Koto. In that conversation, Madame Koto threatens that "The forest will swallow you", and Azaro responds saying "Then I will become a tree". When she persists and further threatens that "Then they will cut you down because of a road", Azaro calls her bluff and says "Then I will turn into the road" [...] "And I will cry at night. And then people

will remember the forest" (*TFR* 219). This conversation can be interpreted as a metaphor for the cycle of destruction and regeneration in which both the forest and the road operate together as an integrated symbolic structure; the forest representing a divine, eternal world, while the road is a symbol of the profane and ephemeral. But Azaro's willingness to imagine his reconfiguration from a tree to a road does reflect an acknowledgement of impermanence and transcendence; of the tension between the preservation of the natural and primal world of indigenous cultures and the commodification of nature that attends modernization and Western imperialism. The road crying out so that people remember the forest is then suggestive of the pain of cultural dislocation and the philosophical resilience that it engenders for humanity on life's journey. It is also a passionate reminder of the suffering that modernity inflicts on those who depend on nature, as well as a poetic reflection of a longing for a return to a lost heritage whose essence can only, for the time being, be preserved in memory. It is also an enthusiastic reiteration of the seamless symmetry of the road and the forest, of their inseparability, and of their paradoxical, and sometimes antagonistic, relationship of interdependence. Madame Koto's threat that "They will cut you down because of a road" and Azaro's stoic and defiant response that "Then I will turn into the road" while underscoring the fluidity and blurring of the boundaries between the road and the forest – the physical and the supernatural – are symbolic of the forest's paradoxical sacrifice of its divine quintessence to the existence of the road. This is suggestive of the reasoning that life and progress will sometimes exact even personality-altering concessions.

This fluidity in the interconnectedness and interdependence of the road and the forest, in which the road invades the forest and the forest re-frames the road, thus emphasizes the interconnectedness of all matter and serves to subvert Eurocentric binary thinking founded on the rigid categorization of primitivity versus modernity, materiality versus spirituality, and the natural versus the artificial. In its stead, this fluidity projects a duality, advocating interconnectedness, fluidity, and interdependence, which are integral to African cosmologies underlying the worldview of the *TFR*.

But traditional African spirituality and belief in ancestral wisdom, here symbolized by the forest, must be resilient and revived to have any place in the future scheme of duality that dismantles binary dichotomies, combines pristine communality and civilization (symbolized by the road) and urges the constant interaction of both. This is because, as foretold by the spirit child narrator, "we were in the divide between past and future. A new cycle had begun, an old one was being brought to a pitch, prosperity and tragedy rang out from what I saw, and I knew that the

bar would never be the same again" (*TFR* 220). He envisions a new culture of fashion, society, materialism, westernization, and the abandonment of traditional values. Before this time as well, as Azaro sat in front of Madame Koto's bar, he fittingly saw darkness drift slowly over the forest, and watched the darkness flow from the forest and gradually engulf the rest of the world" (*TFR* 208).

It is, therefore, unsurprising when we observe the reign of colonial intrusion in full bloom; recorded for emphasis in pictorial form through the instrumentality of the photographer, whose art in itself is a representation of the indigenous people's surrender to Westernization and modernization. He appeared in Azaro's home one night with pictures of a fishing festival, of men with whips lashing at one another, of a great riot in which students and wild men and angry women were throwing stones at vans, of market women running, of white people sitting on an expanse of luxurious beaches, under big umbrellas, with black men serving them drinks, of a funeral, of a party with people dancing and women's skirts lifted, baring lovely thighs, and of a black man hanged by some white people, with a white bird in the process of settling on his head (*TFR* 263).

These pictures serve as a stinging critique of the folly of the people as much as they are a reflection of the discontent, cultural depravity, and dehumanization of the local population at the twilight of imperialist colonial rule. So Okri juxtaposes this cultural malfeasance with the simple controlled life of the people prior to the advent of colonialism as a means of urging a restoration of traditional African communality.

So, the forests are desecrated and ravaged in pursuit of Westernization and modernization, and the meaning of the road – life itself – pales and diminishes. The narrator-focalizer ensconces this tragic fate of his fellow Africans in the reader's mind when he says, "I saw the forests die [...] I saw the death of their many roads and ways and philosophies. Their precious stones and rocks of atomic energies were drawn from the depths of their ancestral memories" (*TFR* 457).

It is perhaps with this foreboding of the clairvoyant Azaro that Ben Okri crystalizes his belief in the destructive relegation of African tradition and constructs the road and the forest into elements functioning in tandem as a single symbolic system by which he makes a forceful call for the revival of Africa's relegated cultural heritage: offering a future in which Africa's spiritual roots and ethics of community are restored to serve as the pedestal for a balanced and rewarding future for Africa and the wider world in place of Azaro's bleak vision.

4. Conclusion

This article has argued that the forest and the road in *TFR* are best understood not as antagonistic or mutually exclusive symbols but as interdependent elements of a single symbolic structure. It has shown that Okri's symbolic imagination resists oppositional logic. The forest and the road operate within a dynamic relationship of reciprocity in which each continually informs, transforms, and sustains the other.

Reading the two images as a unified symbolic system reveals the philosophical depth of Okri's narrative vision. The forest embodies ancestral memory, spiritual continuity, and primordial knowledge, while the road signifies movement, historical change, and the unfolding trajectory of human experience. Yet neither exists in isolation; the road emerges from the forest and continually returns to it, just as the forest persists within the transformation symbolised by the road. Their relationship, therefore, reflects a worldview grounded in interconnectedness rather than division.

By foregrounding this symbolic interdependence, Okri's narrative is positioned as a postcolonial counter-discourse to the binary epistemologies often associated with Eurocentric thought. In place of rigid oppositions, *TFR* proposes a more relational understanding of reality that resonates with African cosmological perspectives in which the spiritual and material, the past and the present, and nature and human history coexist within a continuous field of interaction. The forest-road dynamic thus becomes a metaphor for the recovery of an African epistemic heritage that colonial modernity attempted to fragment.

Ultimately, Okri's symbolic configuration gestures towards the possibility of cultural renewal. By reimagining the relationship between the forest and the road as a creative continuum rather than a conflict of opposites, *TFR* recuperates the philosophical resources of African tradition while simultaneously accommodating historical movement and change. In doing so, the novel – and the forest-road dynamic at its core – articulates a vision of Africa's future that draws strength from the restoration of its suppressed legacy while remaining open to the transformations of an evolving world.

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REVIEW

The Standard Tiv-English Dictionary. An Enduring and Contemporary Tiv Vocabulary for Learners and Professionals, edited by D. T. Karshima, I. M. Varem, A. I. Akase, J. A. Adeiyongo, R. D. Karshima. Fr. Adasu University Consultancy Services Makurdi & Tiv Area Traditional Council, Makurdi (Nigeria), 2025, 412 pp.

This dictionary is the newest contribution to the studies on one of the major languages of Nigeria. Tiv is a language of the Niger-Kongo family spoken predominantly by the agricultural Christian people inhabiting Benue State, as well as, to a lesser extent, Plateau, Taraba, Nasarawa, Cross River, Adamawa, Kaduna and Federal Capital states of Territory Abuja. It falls into the Tivoid branch of Southern Bantoid languages, as the major representative of this group, which comprises a total of 15 languages spoken in Nigeria and Cameroon. Tiv is the only one, among Tivoid languages, used by millions of speakers (ca. 4.5 million) while the other related languages have a few to a few thousand speakers each (Blench 2016). The author of *The Standard Tiv-English Dictionary* D. T. Karshima sets the Tiv population number as high as 15 million (p. xviii).

Up to now, a number of lexicographic works on Tiv have been published (Abraham 1940; Gyanggyang 1993; Karshima 2013; Malherbe 1934; Terpstra 1968). *The Standard Tiv-English Dictionary*, according to its authors, builds on the previous works (especially: Abraham 1940; Gyanggyang 1993; Karshima 2013) while significantly extending the stock of the vocabulary (according to the authors, it includes 11201 headwords and 22185 words in total).

Of great value for this work is that the authors are not only linguists but also Tiv culture activists. This fact impacted the content of the dictionary, which includes many headwords referring to traditional and cultural objects, concepts, etc. (e.g., *abaji* 'a Tiv tribal facial mark'; *Aôndo* '1. the almighty God worshipped by

Christians, [2.] the general concept of God, [3.] idol, [4.] firmament'; *hwānbua* 'a hoe with rectangular shape, not very wide'; *gbánge* 'a xylophone made of wood bars mounted on a frame. Each bar produces a different note when hit with a small stick called *ishav*') and thanks to this, it gives the reader an insight into the Tiv (ethno)linguistic view of the world, as well as contributes to the preservation of the culture manifested in the language. In that context, the significant additions to the main contents of the book are three annexes: "Tiv Personal Names", "Towns and Villages in Tiv Land", as well as "Names of the Months and Their Translation in Tiv". Those lists are a testimony of Tivs' linguo-cultural presence in Nigeria. The first list covers personal names with an indication of the gender of an individual who can bear them (male/female or both), along with English translations of those native Tiv names. This list consists of a valuable stock of data for Tiv native speakers as well as researchers in linguistics and cultural studies, as naming habits are considered a vital exponent of traditional culture expressed by means of language. The second list gives a geographical overview of what is considered to be "Tiv Land". It enumerates names of towns and villages in Nigeria (and the names of Local Government Areas in which they are located) inhabited by the Tiv people. The third list presents native names of the months of the year. Interestingly, among those names, only two lack native equivalents and are derived from English loanwords (*Jula* 'July' and *Deseembe* 'December').

The structure of the dictionary is overall well arranged, although a change of the order of the introductory sections of the book could be considered in the next edition to further improve the quality of this excellent publication. It opens with the "Note from the Publishers", then we see the table of contents that is clear and not overloaded. Next comes the usual "Foreword", a short "Review" (this one could be printed on the back cover or as the last section of the book). Finally, we have "Acknowledgments" (both in English and Tiv), which is followed by the "List of Contributors" (this one would fit better on the very first page). Next, we have "Yeke (Grammar)", which is in fact a list of abbreviations. Unfortunately, the title of this section is confusing and the work lacks an actual grammatical overview of Tiv. For a better and easier use of the dictionary, it is recommended to include a brief section containing rudimentary information on Tiv morphology, i.e., morphological types of nouns and verbs; personal pronouns, etc. Then we reach the section titled "The Tiv of Nigeria" – a very brief (quasi-)history of the Tiv people, which includes some doubtful theories about their origin without citing any sources of this information – this could be improved. The next section is "Preface" (which might have been placed much earlier). At last, we land at "How to Use the Dictionary" in both English and Tiv-language versions. This section is essential for the users of the dictionary. It is sufficiently detailed as

to guide on the entries' structure as well as the reading of phonetic symbols used in the dictionary.

The dictionary's entries are well structured with attention to detail. Each headword is spelled using standardized orthography, marking tones and vowel length, has its phonetic transcription and indication of the category of part of speech (both in Tiv and English) it falls into. The authors decided not to use the category of *ideophones,* which is a standard part of speech in African languages, recognised in almost all contemporary dictionaries. It would be recommended to introduce it since many words included in the dictionary are certainly of ideophonic nature (this can be recognised based on their morphological structure, use of reduplication and syntactic properties) while being classified here as belonging to other parts of speech due to their contextual use, e.g., adjectives: *gbur-gbur* '1. looking fat, smooth and tender skin, 2. soft' (p. 88); *kaŕkaŕ* '(of a passage) narrow, esp. one linking another end' (p. 191); *ṁkulém-ṁkulém* 'oily, creamy' (p. 243) [these are in fact ideophones with adjectival use, describing specific qualities of objects] or adverbs: *gbungúr-gbu-gbungúr* 'the free, side to side movement of the penis when one is naked' (p. 88); *geeng-geeng* 'go in a mood that indicates lack of wisdom or as if one is annoyed' (p. 89); *shisha* 'stand in an upright position' (p. 330) [these are in fact ideophones with adverbial use, describing specific manner of a specific action].

Meanings of Tiv words are explained in clear English, followed by examples of the word use in Tiv, along with English translation. Occasionally, entries are illustrated by small black-and-white photos or pictures, although it is not clear what set of rules was used by the authors to decide which entries should have a picture attached, e.g., headword *abéén* 'clouds' (p. 2) is followed by a depiction of clouds – this is seemingly unnecessary because it is difficult to imagine that a user of the dictionary would have a problem to comprehend the meaning referring to a common, culture-neutral, weather phenomenon. It would be recommended to attach pictures to entries that are culture-specific and thus, their comprehension might be difficult for those not familiar with traditional Tiv culture, such as the aforementioned *gbánge* 'a xylophone made of wood bars mounted on a frame. Each bar produces a different note when hit with a small stick called *ishav'* (p. 80), which lacks illustration. In some relevant cases though, illustrations are provided, e.g., *anyisôhô* 'cowries' (p. 33) and *kankan* 'a small bag woven with spear grass or guinea corn leaves' (p. 190) have both pictures attached.

In case of loanwords, entries indicate their origin. This is an important feature of the dictionary, as the influence of other languages on Tiv may be of interest for comparative linguists as well as those who speak the source language. Ideally,

however, the entries should not be limited to merely indicating the source language of loanwords but should quote the etymons to provide the information needed for a user to search for it in a dictionary of the respective source language, e.g., Hausa or Yoruba.

The Standard Tiv-English Dictionary is an excellently written collection of Tiv vocabulary. Some minor improvements, which I mentioned, might be implemented in the second edition of the book. The abovementioned changes, in particular adding a brief grammar supplement, would further improve the academic value of the dictionary.

The text of the lexicon is copyedited with attention to detail and proper use of reference apparatus. However, the work is not free from minor typos, such as unnecessary and inconsistent use of capital letters, e.g., "Short Forms Of Words" (p. xi), "Figurative" (p. xiii), while the lowercase is mistakenly used for a surname in the bibliography "morton, J. K." (p. 403). On pages 402-4, we can see unnecessary bolding of " (" in dozen of entries and unnecessary italics on page 404 in regard to the same symbol. There are also some technical mistakes of another type present – a number of bracketed in-text references cannot be found in full in the bibliography, e.g., Gun (1991), Gbor (1990), Makar (1978), Avav (1992) or Karshima (2013) cited on page xiv are missing in the references list on pages 402-4. Nevertheless, these are merely copyediting technicalities with no significance to the contents of the book.

The Standard Tiv-English Dictionary contributes to the studies on the Tiv language, particularly in regard to its cultural aspect. It can be considered an achievement in standardization and development of the Tiv language, as well as a step towards preservation and cultivation of the Tiv culture. This was the intention of the authors as D. T. Karshima wrote in the "Preface" (p. xviii): "I believe this book will serve as a starting point for our sons and daughters who are interested in the Tiv language... It will also aid our children who have become disconnected from reading and writing the Tiv language due to their inclination towards city life...". Moreover, from the scholarly perspective, it must be stressed that the dictionary is written with due diligence and with regard to academic standards. It is a valuable source for linguists and other researchers interested in the Tiv language and culture, even if they are not of Tiv origin. I recommend all those interested in the Tiv language and culture to use this excellently written dictionary.

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