

## The conceptualisation of Eye and Mouth Idioms in Bura

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### Abstract

This paper focuses on a comparison between Bura and English body part idioms. The objectives are to compare the meanings conveyed by Bura and English eye and mouth idioms and to examine which conceptual process motivates the Bura and English eye and mouth idioms. In total, 30 eyes and mouths related idioms were identified and included in the study. The idioms were extracted from Bura print material such as Holy Scripture and daily conversations of Bura people and English idiom from *Longman Idiom Dictionary* online (2022). The eye and mouth idiom were evaluated for meaning and cross-domain similarity based on the *Conceptual Metaphor Theory* (CMT). Analysis of the data showed that idioms are neither entirely same nor different for each language. Also, more similarities have been discovered, but the conceptualisation of the meaning of a specific mouth and eye idiom (Bura and English) involves a combination of two or more conceptual motivations. The results provide more evidence of the universality of idioms in all languages.

**Keywords:** Bura eye and mouth idioms, English eye and mouth idioms, conceptual process, cultural experience, convention knowledge

### Introduction

The research focuses on the cognitive analysis of the eye and mouth idioms in Bura and English language in order to examine the motivation and the cultural similarities. The Bura dialect is a Proto-Chadic language family consisting of the Pabur and Bura subgroup of southern Borno in northeast Nigeria (Blench, 2018; Newman, 2018). Cognitive semantics have shown through many languages that conceptualisation of idiom seems to be cross-cultural since idiomatic language represent our everyday knowledge and cultural experience. Cognitive semantics is considered as a sub-section of linguistics that study the relationship between mind, concepts, and language features found in a linguistic conceptualisation of figurative language. The emphasis of these cognitive linguists is how mental thoughts can be described in detail as visuals. Cognitive semantics focused on the relationship between language, thoughts, and cultural experiences. Therefore, the present paper used past cognitive semantics investigations documented with CMT which highlight the motivation of language through the conceptual process across the domain. One way of expressing our thoughts is by using word(s). The word

processing occurs when we think, when we feel, and when we do things every day. Because words are processed similar to how we use our mind for thought and action, language, therefore, is a vital source of motivation for what idiom conception is. In conceptual perspective, the human language process is a metaphoric process Kövecses (2010). According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980) the motivation of idiom is a metaphor system of how we think, feel, and do things every day. That indicates language as an active source of motivation for what idiom conception is, thus gave the explanation of idioms as an abstract thought which can be figuratively modified. In that account, Kövecses and Szabó, (1996) describe an idiom based on metaphor because that provides figurative motivation for the occurrences of idiomatic meaning.

In recent researches a number of descriptions have been related to the cross-domain analysis of body part idioms (Gehrke & McNally, 2019), other on cross-cultural similarities (Ritt-Benmimoun et al., 2017), some on foreign or second language acquisition (Bardovi-Harlig, 2019), production and use of idiomatic meaning (Colston, 2020), among that, idiom conceptualisation based on conceptual processes

and cultural interpretation has been one of the main components for the motivation of idiomatic meaning. The questions this paper seeks to answer include what conceptual domain motives the idiomatic meaning and cultural implication are required to conceptualise idioms in the Bura compared to English body part idioms based on CMT.

Currently, there are insufficient cross-cultural studies in Nigeria and that presents a fundamental problem for indigenous languages like Bura. The fact that so many languages have not examined their idioms, should be given attention in cognitive studies. The Bura idioms still exist in the oral form, thus this present study attempts to examine body part idioms cognitively in Bura and compare that to English. Available research in Bura did not study idiom cognitively, but rather examined language rules or literature, for example, phonology, adage, stories and sayings (such as Balami & Muazu, 2011 and numerous others). Reviewed studies focuses on grammar and linguistics on Bura idioms, in that way, this study attempt to make available the meaning and cultural interpretation of Bura eye and mouth idioms and compare these idioms to English.

As a result, the definition of idioms in cognitive semantics it is known as a fixed-unit of expressions or semantic change is a descriptive viewpoint. As Kövecses (2017) define an idiom as a metaphor system from a cognitive perspective. An illustration by Lakoff & Johnson (1980), made from linguistic view distinction between idiom and conception that thinking is connected to the level of how people understand the environment. The thought is metaphor and idiom is understood through metaphor. The metaphor, metonymy, and conventional knowledge are mental processes by which people understand figurative language (idiom) and experience the everyday conversation. The conceptual process links to a thinking level without us checking that structure.

Similarly, Kövecses (2018) shows metonymy as a conceptual process by which people conceptualised idioms. In line with that Kovecses & Szabco (1996), added that the cognition and motivation system of several hand idioms involve conventional knowledge linked with metonymy and culture. Kövecses & Benczes

(2010) and Nagy (2006) study all the body part idioms and found out 12,000 idioms are metonymy. This implies that an unending animation rises out of our body, culture, and daily experiences based on our metonymic understanding. Also stressed by Casasanto & de Bruin (2019) that metonymy is a part and a whole relationship, which suggests taking a part of something and making it represent the whole thing. For instance, the "eye" is associated with 'eyesight or vision' and the "mouth" with "power or wisdom". The human body is a predictable source domain that facilitates the metonymic conceptualisation of mental thoughts since the body part is physical (Casasanto, 2016). Also, Kövecses (2018) proposes that the body parts interact with the mental process in association to the metonymic and metaphoric conception not only in "European" context, but in many other languages and cultures around the world.

#### **Related Studies**

Studies conducted on body part idioms by (Al-Mohizea, 2017; Cai-li, 2002; Casasanto, 2016; Kraska-Szlenk, 2020) examine body part idioms in various languages and established that there are more than 2000 idioms that relate to the human body. Hence, the effort to analyse idioms in many languages and cultures are still ongoing. Studies that focus on cross-culture, such as Xu & Sharifian (2018) recognised culture as an important factor in conceptualising language features (idioms). While, the attempt to analyse idioms through the metaphor with studies like (Casasanto & de Bruin, 2019; Charteris-Black, 2003; Gibbs, 2016) found similar results, that idiom is metaphorical and body part idioms are metonymies. However, other research based on cross-culture perception includes (Ansah, 2017; Díaz Vera, 2015; Dobrovol'skij & Piirainen, 2018) they perceive idiom as a culture. Corpus-based research view idioms (Charteris-Black, 2004; Corver et al., 2019; Degand, 2003) as the conception of language in context, culture specific, and convention motivated. Other studies observe a shift in the use of two or more theories to analyse idioms (Ciprianová & Vrabelová, 2015; Liu & Hwa, 2017; Shekhovskaya, 2020) which use several theories such as cognitive-discourse, socio-cognitive, cognitive-pragmatics, and many more.

Furthermore, Kraska-Szlenk (2020) studied the conception of idioms in many languages and found that culture is central to the motivation of body parts idioms. In the same way, Shehu (2020) examines the role of idiomatic language in Hausa thoughts and reports that thinking is metaphorical. As Miller (2020) explores the idiomatic meaning of interrelationship among students and found new idioms evolving daily in the education sector. In Africa, limited research is obtained on idioms such as Agyekum (2015). The focus of these studies was on the grammatical features of idioms. However, the evidence in these studies such as (Gąsiorowski, 2017; Michl, 2019; Türker, 2019; Will, 2019) had some similarities with those results reported in Nigeria (for example, Almajir, 2013; Ritt-Benmimoun et al., 2017; Teilanyo, 2014). The idiom is considered as a compound formation that goes through semantic change and contains more than one domain motivation to conceptualise the idiomatic meaning.

What past studies found in relation to body part idiom according to Lakoff & Johnson (2008) is that similarities and differences in idiomatic meaning are motivated and cross-culturally. Metaphor is primarily conceptual in people's thoughts; figurative language is secondary. Metaphor motivation is based on our daily knowledge. Abstract ideas are, generally, though not completely, metaphor. Cognition is inevitable, universal, and unconscious. The abstract concept has a literal root, but is drawn-out by metaphorical language, on a regular basis by some unstable metaphors. The abstract concept is not comprehended in the absence of metaphor. This study will fill a gap by complementing other previous studies on the bodily part idioms across the globe (Almajir, 2013; Shehu, 2020; Will, 2019). The method used to collect data follows.

#### **Method**

This current study is based on past related works of literature and adopts a qualitative approach to examine the Bura and English body part idioms (Muhammad et al., 2016). Aspects studied include culture conceptualisation and conceptual domains (source and target). The study limits the analysis to the body part idiom in Bura that consists of one to ten words, and the idiom

frequently in use by the Bura speech community. The analysis does not interpret further than culture and motivation. The Bura idioms as the primary data were collected manually. The collection of data involved an unstructured observation method based on the innate Bura ability to take notes. The selection of 30 idioms from the body part idiom in Bura used the MIP theoretical framework as an effective method similar to the method used by (Pragglejaz (Steen et al., 2010). The analysis adopted the CMT to review the cross-domain motivation and cultural conceptualisation of Bura body part idioms as indicated below:

The first step is the transcription, selection, and identification of Bura and English idioms by ascribing different cross-domain motivations. Then, the classification of body part idiom based on composition and non-composition structures, based on the formal basis to establish the existence of different types of idioms. This step is similar to the Pragglejaz (Steen et al., 2010) that suggests one on one reading of data, more than two times to get familiar with the variable to be analysed. Next, codification was carried out to find any possible motivation and the kind of the conception process involved in the conceptualisation of the body part idiom in Bura and English. To find out whether or not body part idioms contains culture, metaphor, metonymy, and conventional knowledge, further effort was used to identify the availability of similarities in figurative meaning and culture conceptualisation. The analysis then thematised the coded data. As Creswell (2014) describes coding as a process of segmenting data into readable analytical units. The relation of idiom and metaphor (themed as X is Y) and idiom with metonymy (themed as X is a kind of Y).

#### **Theoretical Framework**

The present study used the CMT (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). In the cognitive view, idiomatic thinking is a metaphor system (Han, 2019), and metaphor interacts with other tropes such as idioms to produce meaning in our thought and vary from one culture to another. The metaphor-based idiom contains two conceptual domains (source and target). According to Kövecses (2010a:235), idiomatic languages are 'motivated by metaphor in most instances' and that most idiomatic meanings are a conceptual metaphor system. However,

another conceptual trope such as metonymy takes part to represent the whole, especially in the body part idioms, for example 'mouth' stands for POWER, and 'head' presents the entire PERSON (Musolff, 2020a). Cognitive semantics view metaphor as the conceptualisation of one physical concept as far as another abstract concept. Metonymy as a relationship of one part of a concept to include another concept as a whole. Conventional knowledge is our everyday experiences and our understanding of the world we live in. The present analysis applied CMT to analysed eye and mouth idiom in Bura and English are shown in the result section below.

### **Result**

#### **The Cultural Interpretation of Eye Idioms**

Following the analysis, the eye represents the vision and knowledge in the current study and the value of this function is equivalent to that of the body that performs the function. We connect the eye with visual identification, the eye with life, the mental window and attention. Other cultural conceptualisations found in the target domain analysis include ignorance, ignore, verify, awake, life, presence, focus, wet, observation, lack experience, familiarity, disbelieve, evil, good reflection, support, close, open, fix gaze, remove, absence, seeing, presence, large, and clear vision. These are discussed through cognitive processes such as *THE EYES IS FOR ATTENTION*. The results confirmed that the word "eye or my eye" contains Bura notion of nca or nci, following an examination in relation with the conceptualisation includes *ATTENTION*, *AWARENESS*, *ENTITY*, *NATURAL FORCE*, *ACTION*, and *PERSON* for metonymy. The Metaphor conceptualisation of the eye contains, *CHARACTER*, *ENTITY*, *ACTION*, *PERSON*, *POSITION*, *SIZE*, and *VISION*. The following conceptualisations based on the motivation process were discovered after the analysis.

#### **Cultural Interpretation and Cognition of Mouth Idioms**

For this study, the mouth idioms of Bura and their English equivalents are compared. Similarities in language were prompted in the analysed data by cultural conceptualisation and conventional knowledge. The mouth has a metaphorical and a metonymic function in the

conceptualisation of Bura and English body part idioms. The mouth is perceived in all directions (*ACTION*) and also as an (*ENTITY*). These idioms connect to the common knowledge of the various body parts and motivate progressive ideas in the mind. The finding indicates that the mouth has the following target conceptions: clear, confused, no direction, lying, talkative, tie, unity, falsehood, concern, argument, caution, wisdom, pessimistic, nice, wicket, and power. These conceptions of mouth idioms were found after the analysis. These meanings discussed through the source conceptual domain, such as *THE MOUTH AS ACTION*, *ENTITY*, *INTENTION*, *NATURAL FORCE*, *NUMBER*, *MOVEMENT*, and *TALKING* metonymy and metaphor is presented below.

### **Findings**

In this section of the search, the focus is on culture and cognition. The metaphor and metonymy that underline the idioms are written in capital letters, and the explanations included in each analysis. The Bura and English idioms grouped into their various conceptual domains.

#### **Culture and Cognition of Bura and English Eye Idioms**

##### *EYE IS ATTENTION*

The conceptualisation reveal the motivation process found from English idiom *fail to see*. The metonymy of (cause and effect) motivate the conception of, *EYE AS VISION* and the metaphor of *EYE IS ATTENTION* remain the mental process of the conceptualisation of the English idiom as well as the Bura idiom *ncá awùtá wa (eye cannot see)*. Cultural interpretation is related to the idiomatic meaning, 'to overlook something or deliberately or chose not to notice something'. The source is people's vision or eyesight, and the target is the act of negligence.

##### *EYE AS AWARENESS*

In another example, the findings reveal that the metonymy of cause and effect contain *SEEING IS KNOWING*, metaphor *EYE IS AWARENESS* is the motivation of the English idiom *seeing is believing*, in relation to the Bura idiom *wuta ka nca (see for eye/yourself)*. The cultural conceptualisation of these idioms is physical validation. The source is the visualisation or acknowledgement, and the target is the confirmation of details or circumstances.

### *EYE AS PERSON*

The similarity in the English idiom *seeing eye to eye* shows that metonymy of (content in a container) involving *SEEING AS PRESENCE* and the metaphor *SEEING IS A PERSON* as the mental motivation that is comparable to the Bura idiom *wul ncá ka nca* (see eye to eye). The cultural conceptualisation has a negative connotation that means mysterious or encountering someone (your enemy) personally. The source is eyesight, and the target is meeting someone or a terrible experience.

### *EYE AS A NATURAL FORCE*

The findings gathered that the English idiom *Eyehole* have the metonymy of (content in a container), with the conception of *EYE AS EYESIGHT* and the metaphor *EYE IS LIFE* as the motivating process that can be equated to the idiomatic meaning in the Bura idiom *dza tá wula* (*sitting and looking*). Cultural conceptualisation relates to terminal illness or survival. The eye substituted with the act of looking, where sitting connects to life that serves as a container of either breathing or waiting for death. No English equivalent has been found. However, the English idiom *eyehole* means the centre of something. The source is the vision, and the target is the existence of someone.

### **The Culture and Conception of Bura and English Mouth Idioms**

#### *MOUTH IS FOR TALKING*

The finding gathers that the English idiom *hearsay* indicates a person whose speech lacks evidence. The metaphor underlying the motivation of these idioms seems to be found in *MOUTH IS A PERSON* and our world experience of what is deceitful. The Bura idiom *mnya pala-pala* (*mouth says*) reveals the 'mouth' based on the verb */pala-pala/ say-say*. The metonymy of (cause and effect) substituted 'mouth' for 'word' shown in *MOUTH AS WORD* or *SAYINGS*. The source is the function of the mouth to talk, and the target is the lack of authenticity.

#### *MOUTH AS A NATURAL FORCE*

In this example, mouth function shows a positive conception, the English idiom *sweet words* and Bura idiom *mnya smira* (*sweet mouth*) reflect a condition where a person manipulates others with attractive language. The metonymy underlying the idioms seems to include *WORD AS*

*WEAPON* to resolve issues, metaphor *MOUTH AS A PERSON*, as well as the common knowledge of sweet, bitter, or sour taste in the mouth, motivates the idioms. The mouth explains based on the function of the adjective */smira/ sweet* words. The metonymy of cause and effect abstracted with the mouth as coursing sweet feelings in the idioms. The source is the word and a person, and the target is the act of pleasing people with kind words.

#### *MOUTH AS AN ACTION*

The English idiom *puts a foot in one's mouth* include a metonymy of cause and effect, including *MOUTH AS A PERSON/ MOUTH AS A CONTAINER*, metaphor *MOUTH IS FOR TALKING* and the conventional knowledge of misplacing things as the motivating process that aid the idiomatic conceptualisation as an act of assigning cultural meaning to the mouth. The Bura idiom *pwu mnya* (*pour mouth*) alone puts a foot in one's mouth and encompasses action in the mouth. The English idiomatic meaning involves keeping mute and the mouth is connected to the leg to indicate how people should stop talking. The source is the act of talking, and the target is the communication that has to be stopped because it lacks evidence.

#### *MOUTH AS AN ENTITY*

In another example, the mouth as an object that is curved or straightens, can be found in the English idiom *talk out of both sides of the mouth*. The idiom refers to a circumstance that is unreliable. The motivation process includes the adjective *mnya pira-pira* (*mouth zig-zag*) in Bura. The conceptualisation involves *WORDS IS PIERCING THAN SWORD* metaphor, conventional knowledge and the metonymy of *MOUTH IS FOR TALKING*. The cultural conceptualisation reflects and shows how vague or deviant the words are expressed. The source is the function or shape of the mouth and the target is the worthless words. **Discussion**

The present paper identifies the source with the target domain conceptualisation within the body parts idioms in Bura and compare to English idiom. The findings reveal the domains of *TALKING, VISION, WISDOM, SOLUTION, and DECEPTION*. The other external domains includes a container, natural force, character, person, and number. In this section, the findings

show that Bura and English eye and mouth idioms are motivated by all the three conceptual process that combine general knowledge from our daily activities or cultural experiences, metonymy, and metaphor. The finding also indicated that the *MOUTH IS FOR TALKING*. The principal functions of the mouth are talking and eating; therefore, several idioms in Bura and English are fixed in that function, while the eye is for *WISDOM* and *VISION*. This capacity is used metaphorically to show abstract thoughts.

The cultural conceptions found in the analysis reflect Bura culture in 4 customary ways, such as vision, knowledge, interpersonal interactions, and daily activities. In eyesight, it is reflected in the idiom *wuta ka nca* (see for eye/yourself) and *seeing is believing*. Which means to have conscious interest or attention on something that reflects Bura and English culture in the use of eyesight as a person's consciousness and awareness of our environment. The salient cultural conceptualisation is found in the communication aspect. The evidence that language and culture are intertwined. The communication idiom appears the most (such as *mnya smira* (sweet mouth). Followed by knowledge (such as *mnya pala-pala* (hearsay). Then finally, daily activities which include resolving conflict, unity, and presence or absence of someone. In the case of solution/manipulation (such as *mnya pira-pira* (mouth zig-zag), *ka mnya ka mnya* (with mouth and mouth) and *mnya kuriwa* (mouth cannot finish it) the idea of using the mouth for the wrong or right reasons. As for oneness and unity (for example, *mnya bdukku* (oneness mouth) and *mpikar mnya* (joint mouth) to have a common goal. For presence (such as *vàngkàr ncá* (to put an eye over) and *wul ncá ka nca* (see eye to eye). The negative and positive use of the eye and mouth are the two sides of life and it reflects the Bura and English view of the bodily knowledge embodied in the salient cultural conception in this finding. As (Sharifian & Sadeghpour, 2020) emphasis that cultural conceptualisation starts with the group then to the individuals which are known as a cultural category. In these findings, the Bura and English cultural categories are reflected in the body parts idioms analysed.

The findings compared with past related

studies in Nigeria (such as Okoye & Mmadike, 2016; Shehu, 2020; Will, 2019) confirm that metaphor, culture, metonymy, and general knowledge are the conceptual process that motivates most of the conception found in the analysis. Around the world, (see also Wongthai, 2015) body part idioms in Thai shows an interplay of metaphor and metonymy. Similarly, Michl (2019) examines body part idioms in Germany and reports that metonymy is more productive than a metaphor. The eye and mouth idioms contain a combination of two or more conceptual processes, and there is no single motivation which is in support of CMT and is culture-specific (Bruening, 2020; Gehrke & McNally, 2019; Kecskes, 2015; Kessler et al., 2020). CMT has applied to these idioms, and as requirements that work for the cultural interpretation of body part idioms.

### Conclusion

The objective of the present paper was to analyse the selected eye and mouth body part idioms, including its motivation and cultural conception in Bura compared to English. In investigating these body part idioms, the current study offers these conclusions. The analysis of the data show an interplay between metaphor metonymy, and conventional knowledge was conceptualised through the cultural experiences, based on the conceptual processes in connection with the cross-domain. The salient cultural features are indicated in the cultural difference in word choices. These structures in idiomatic language show the difference, but increase the level of similarity in the idiomatic meaning across the two domains. The similarity for conventional knowledge and cultural experience also show that Bura and English body part idioms are more concerned about the bodily interpretation of ideas. Thus, in the present study, the concept of language universality was reported, which is shared from one language and culture to another. Moreover, it implies the use of the body part idioms in Bura is equivalent to the English idioms. This present finding support CMT that idiomatic meaning is cross-cultural which interacts with our conventional knowledge and cultural experiences to enable the transfer of previously acquired idiomatic knowledge of one language to another in instances of intercultural communication. In other

words, the Bura and English speakers have the innate ability to establish norms of communication in order to maintain shared knowledge and

accomplish communicative goals despite the differences in many body parts idioms.

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