

A SOCIOLINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF SELECTED BODY PARTS METAPHORS IN YORÙBÁ: THE EYE METAPHOR

By

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Abstract

This study investigates the linguistic and sociocultural significance of body part metaphors in the Yorùbá language, with a specific focus on the eye (*ojú*) metaphor. Metaphors in Yorùbá are not merely decorative but serve as essential cognitive tools for conceptualizing abstract ideas, social values, and cultural philosophies. Drawing on a qualitative research design, the study utilizes a dataset of sixty-eight metaphors recorded in a researcher's diary through participant observation and ethnographic techniques. The research is grounded in the Ethnography of Communication, specifically Dell Hymes' 'SPEAKING T' model, and the theory of Linguistic Relativity, which posits that language shapes thought and perception. The analysis critically examines ten specific instances of the eye metaphor, illustrating its role in communicating complex concepts such as perception, awareness, social hierarchy, and emotional states. For instance, metaphors like *ojú ni ọba ara* (the eye is the king of the body) highlight the eye's role in leadership and direction, while expressions such as *ojú pón ọn* (red eyes) symbolize physical or emotional suffering. The findings demonstrate that these metaphors are deeply embedded in Yorùbá oral traditions, proverbs, and everyday discourse, reflecting the community's collective responsibility and moral instructions. The study concludes that understanding these metaphorical structures is vital

for enhancing translation accuracy, supporting Yorùbá language education, and gaining insights into how language reflects cultural identity and social bonds.

Keywords: Yorùbá metaphors, Sociolinguistics, Eye metaphor (*ojú*), Ethnography of Communication, Cultural linguistics.

1.0. Introduction

Metaphors are a vital part of human communication, offering a way for people to understand abstract ideas, feelings, and relationships by referencing familiar, concrete experiences (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008). They act as mental tools that help speakers present complex thoughts in simpler, more concrete terms.

The Yorùbá language, primarily spoken in southwestern Nigeria and parts of West Africa, is especially rich in metaphors involving body parts. These metaphors are not just decorative language but play a vital role in everyday communication, oral traditions, and folklore (Odebunmi, 2008). Yorùbá body part metaphors are frequently used to convey wisdom, emotions, and social values, making them an essential part of the language. For example, the phrase *ojú la rí, inú la mò* (“the eye sees, but the heart understands”) emphasizes the difference between external perception and internal understanding (Akinyemi, 2022). Likewise, *orí burúkú* (“bad head”) is often used to denote misfortune or an unlucky fate, reflecting the cultural belief that a person’s *orí* (head) influences their fortune in life (Babatunde, 2021).

The use of body part metaphors in Yorùbá goes beyond individual character portrayal to describe broader social interactions and cultural philosophies. Expressions like *etí gbó, etí kò gbó* (“one ear hears, the other does not”) suggest selective listening, which is a common conversational tactic in Yorùbá-speaking communities (Ajiboye, 2021). Likewise, *ọwọ kan kò gbé ẹ̀rù d’órí* (“one hand cannot lift a load to the head”) emphasizes the importance of communal support and teamwork (Adetunji, 2021). These metaphors reflect Yorùbá cultural views on human relationships and collective responsibility. While body part metaphors are common in many languages, their specific meanings and uses differ because of cultural differences. For example, in both English and Yorùbá, the head is linked to intelligence and decision-making.

The English phrase "level-headed" is similar to the Yorùbá phrase "orí rere" ("good head"), which means wisdom and good judgment (Gibbs, 2017).

However, Yorùbá has unique body part metaphors such as *ìkúnlẹ̀ abíyámọ̀* ("a mother's crouching posture"), which symbolize maternal sacrifice—a concept that may not be directly expressed through body part metaphors in English (Fakoya, 2020). These differences highlight how cultural perspectives influence metaphorical expressions across languages (Sharifian, 2017). Beyond their communicative function, Yorùbá body part metaphors play a key role in shaping social norms, moral lessons, and philosophical ideas. Many of these metaphors are embedded in proverbs, folktales, and religious discourse. Yorùbá oral traditions extensively use body part metaphors to convey moral lessons and reinforce societal values (Odebunmi, 2008).

Studies show that older speakers and people in rural communities tend to use more metaphorical expressions, especially in formal and traditional settings, while younger speakers in urban areas might prefer more direct communication styles (Bamgbose, 2022). Additionally, some metaphors are more common in specific Yorùbá dialects, meaning that an expression widely understood in one region could be unfamiliar to speakers from another area (Adeyemi, & Ojo, 2020).

Additionally, the study will explore why Yorùbá speakers use these expressions and how they affect social interaction and perception. Understanding body part metaphors in Yorùbá is key to appreciating the language's depth and the cultural knowledge it carries. These insights will help deepen the overall understanding of metaphor use in languages worldwide, improve translation accuracy, and support teaching Yorùbá as a second language. By studying these metaphors, researchers can gain important insights into how language reflects cultural identity, social bonds, and mental processes.

2.0. Review of Related Literature

Metaphor is a significant linguistic and cognitive tool that enables speakers to conceptualise abstract ideas through concrete and familiar experiences. The study of metaphor in linguistics has gained substantial attention over the years, as scholars seek to understand its role in shaping human thought and communication. Traditionally, metaphors were regarded as mere rhetorical

devices used for embellishment in literature and poetry. However, modern linguistic research, particularly within cognitive linguistics, has demonstrated that metaphor is not only a feature of poetic language but an essential part of everyday communication (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008).

Language users across cultures rely on metaphors to express complex emotions, ideas, and experiences in ways that are more accessible and relatable. The frequent use of body part metaphors in various languages further underscores the importance of metaphor in linguistic expression and meaning construction. The linguistic study of metaphor has evolved significantly, with researchers exploring its cognitive and socio-cultural dimensions. Cognitive linguists argue that metaphors are central to human cognition, as they shape the way individuals perceive and interact with the world.

According to Kövecses (2020), metaphors influence thought processes by allowing individuals to understand abstract concepts through tangible bodily experiences. This perspective aligns with the broader view that human cognition is embodied, meaning that conceptual structures are rooted in sensory and motor experiences. As a result, body part metaphors are not arbitrary but are deeply connected to human perception and physical interactions with the world.

Research in sociolinguistics further reveals that metaphor usage varies based on social factors such as age, gender, occupation, and regional dialects. For instance, elders in Yorùbá-speaking communities often use metaphor-laden proverbs in traditional discourse, while younger speakers may employ more contemporary metaphorical expressions influenced by urbanisation and globalisation (Bamgbose, 2022). This variation suggests that metaphors not only serve communicative functions but also indicate social identity and group membership. Metaphorical expressions are passed down through generations, reinforcing cultural norms and societal expectations. The study of metaphor within sociolinguistics, therefore, provides valuable insights into how language evolves alongside social changes.

Metaphor has been a subject of linguistic inquiry for centuries, with various scholars defining and analysing its role in communication, thought, and cultural representation. The term "metaphor" originates from the Greek word

metaphora, meaning "to transfer" or "to carry across." This etymology reflects the fundamental function of metaphor in language, the transfer of meaning from one domain to another. While early perspectives primarily viewed metaphor as a rhetorical device used for artistic embellishment, modern linguistic research has established that metaphor is a fundamental cognitive and communicative mechanism (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008).

Metaphors are deeply embedded in human cognition, allowing speakers to conceptualise complex and abstract ideas through more concrete and familiar experiences. Aristotle was among the first scholars to systematically study metaphor. One of the most influential perspectives on metaphor in contemporary linguistics is provided by Lakoff and Johnson (2008) in their Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). They argue that metaphor is not merely a linguistic phenomenon but a cognitive process that structures human understanding of the world. According to their theory, people use metaphorical mappings to comprehend abstract concepts in terms of concrete experiences. For example, metaphors such as *time is money* and *argument is war* illustrate how abstract domains (time, argument) are understood through more tangible domains (money, war). This cognitive approach to metaphor has been widely accepted in linguistic research, as it explains how metaphors influence not only language but also perception and reasoning (Kövecses, 2020).

Other scholars have examined metaphor from a pragmatic and discourse-oriented perspective. Grice (1975), in his theory of implicature, suggests that metaphors function as conversational implicatures, where the intended meaning is inferred rather than explicitly stated. This aligns with pragmatic theories of meaning, which emphasise the role of context in interpretation.

Research suggests that learners who understand metaphorical expressions have a stronger grasp of figurative language and idioms (Littlemore, 2019). In Yorùbá language education, teaching body part metaphors helps students appreciate cultural meanings and improve their ability to interpret figurative speech. Without exposure to these metaphors, learners may struggle with comprehension, as many expressions in Yorùbá rely on metaphorical meaning rather than direct interpretation.

Metaphors are deeply embedded in human language and thought, shaping the way individuals communicate, conceptualise abstract ideas, and interact with the world. Scholars argue that metaphors are not merely decorative or rhetorical devices but fundamental cognitive tools that structure perception and reasoning (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008). Everyday speech is filled with metaphorical expressions that allow speakers to describe complex emotions, relationships, and experiences using familiar concepts. This is particularly evident in body part metaphors, which serve as a universal means of expressing psychological and social states through physical references (Kövecses, 2020). One of the key characteristics of metaphor in everyday language is its pervasiveness. Metaphors are found in casual conversations, literature, political discourse, and even scientific explanations.

Deignan (2016) asserts that people often use metaphors unconsciously, as they provide a natural way to bridge the gap between abstract concepts and tangible experiences. For instance, English expressions such as *cold feet* (hesitation or fear), *lending a hand* (helping), or *a sharp tongue* (harsh speech) illustrate how body parts are metaphorically mapped onto emotions and behaviours. In Yorùbá, similar expressions exist, such as *ojú rẹ̀ ti* ("his eye is ashamed," meaning embarrassment) and *orí gbó* ("his head is dry," meaning wisdom or maturity). These examples highlight the universal nature of metaphorical thinking across languages.

Metaphors also play a significant role in social interaction. Pragmatic studies suggest that speakers use metaphors to express politeness, reinforce social norms, and shape interpersonal relationships (Littlemore, 2019). In many cultures, metaphors soften direct statements and make communication more engaging. For instance, instead of bluntly stating that someone is untrustworthy, a speaker might say, *òwó rẹ̀ bàjé* ("his hand is bad"), conveying the message indirectly. This kind of figurative speech is especially common in Yorùbá discourse, where proverbs and metaphorical expressions are valued for their aesthetic and communicative effectiveness (Odebunmi, 2008).

In Yorùbá culture, metaphors about destiny, fate, and morality reflect deep-seated beliefs about human existence. Expressions like *orí ló ń gbéni* ("the head carries one") metaphorically describe fate and destiny, reinforcing the

Yorùbá worldview that a person's life path is influenced by their *orí* (spiritual head) (Akinyemi, 2022). Furthermore, research in psychology has shown that metaphorical language affects decision-making and behaviour. Studies by Boroditsky (2011) suggest that the metaphors people use shape their attitudes and actions. For example, describing crime as a *virus* leads individuals to support preventive measures, whereas describing it as a *beast* encourages punitive approaches. Similarly, Yorùbá body part metaphors can influence social behaviour and cultural perceptions. The expression *etí gbó, etí kò gbó* ("one ear hears, the other does not") implies selective listening, which can reflect attitudes toward authority and information processing within the Yorùbá-speaking community. Metaphors are also central to storytelling and traditional narratives. Yorùbá oral literature, including folktales, proverbs, and poetry, frequently employs metaphorical expressions to convey moral lessons and wisdom (Babatunde, 2021). In many cases, body part metaphors are used to illustrate character traits and social values. For instance, *ojú ñ rọ* ("the eye is dropping") may metaphorically describe someone who is tired or losing focus, reinforcing the importance of attentiveness. These metaphors contribute to the richness of Yorùbá linguistic traditions and help preserve cultural knowledge across generations. In addition to their role in spoken language, metaphors are widely used in written texts and formal discourse.

In Yorùbá political discourse, metaphors such as *esẹ wọn ti bàjẹ* ("their legs are bad") metaphorically suggest corruption or failure in leadership, illustrating how metaphors influence perceptions of authority and governance. Another important function of metaphor in everyday language is its adaptability. Metaphors evolve over time as languages and cultures change, adapting to new social realities (Gibbs, 2017). This is evident in modern Yorùbá, where traditional metaphorical expressions are now used in contemporary contexts, such as digital communication. For example, *enu rè fẹ ju* ("his mouth is too light") traditionally referred to someone who spoke too freely, but in modern usage, it can also apply to online discourse and social media interactions. This demonstrates how metaphor remains a dynamic aspect of language that reflects cultural and technological shifts.

Despite their widespread use, metaphors can also create challenges in cross-cultural communication and translation. Literal translations of metaphorical expressions often fail to convey their intended meaning in another language.

For example, translating *fì ẹ̀sẹ̀ rìn iná* ("walk with the feet in fire") directly into English may not make sense to an English speaker unfamiliar with Yorùbá metaphorical structures. As a result, translators must find culturally appropriate equivalents that maintain the intended meaning. Scholars like Adeyemi & Ojo (2020) emphasise the importance of cultural awareness in translation, particularly when dealing with metaphor-heavy languages like Yorùbá.

Body part metaphors hold significant value in Yorùbá society, serving as an essential aspect of communication, cultural identity, and social interaction. These metaphors are not merely linguistic devices but are embedded within the cultural and societal fabric of the Yorùbá people. As a language deeply rooted in oral tradition, Yorùbá employs body part metaphors to express emotions, social relationships, power dynamics, and moral teachings. Their usage is shaped by sociolinguistic factors such as age, social status, gender, and discourse context (Odebunmi, 2008).

One of the key sociolinguistic functions of body part metaphors in Yorùbá is their role in conveying respect and hierarchy. In Yorùbá culture, respect is paramount, particularly in communication between younger and older individuals. Body part metaphors are often used to soften statements, convey politeness, or show deference. For instance, the expression *fọ́ t'ẹ̀lù t'ọ̀dò* ('to press the lips together') is a metaphor for maintaining silence, especially in situations where one must not speak out of turn (Akinlabi, 2019). Similarly, *fì ọ̀wọ́ méjì bú ọ̀ba* ('to insult a king with both hands') metaphorically describes a grave act of disrespect, reflecting the Yorùbá worldview on power and social decorum (Ajiboye, 2021).

Another significant aspect of Yorùbá body part metaphors is their use in social classification and identity construction. Different social groups, including chiefs, elders, traders, and warriors, employ specific metaphors to assert their status, roles, and identities within society (Akinlabi, 2019). For instance, the metaphor *orí t'ó bá sìn rín* ('a head that walks crookedly') is used to describe a leader who lacks direction or wisdom, reinforcing the belief that the *head* (*orí*) symbolises destiny and leadership in Yorùbá cosmology (Odebunmi, 2020). Likewise, *ọ̀wọ́ tó bá fì d'ẹ̀hìn* ('a hand that turns backward') refers to an

untrustworthy individual, often used in political discourse to criticise dishonesty (Bamgbose, 2022).

Body part metaphors in Yorùbá also serve as tools for moral instruction and social control. They function as a means of reinforcing ethical values and societal expectations. Proverbs and everyday expressions built around body parts help shape social behaviour and encourage adherence to communal norms (Odebunmi, 2008). For example, *ojú l'ómọ tó bá máa ẹ́nù* ('the eyes of a child must first show signs of a good heart') suggests that a child's moral character is reflected in their outward behaviour, reinforcing the expectation of obedience and respect among young people (Fadare, & Adamu, 2022). Similarly, *ẹ̀sẹ̀ tí yóò ẹ̀n, kí í ẹ̀kàrà* ('the leg that will run must not stagger') metaphorically warns against recklessness and instability in personal conduct. In addition to moral instruction, Yorùbá body part metaphors are integral to gender discourse. Different expressions highlight societal expectations and cultural perceptions of masculinity and femininity. For instance, *obìnrin tó ní orí burúkú* ('a woman with a bad head') is used to describe an unfortunate woman, reflecting traditional views on destiny and female roles (Ajiboye, 2021).

Conversely, the metaphor *okùnrin tó ní ọwọ̀ méjì* ('a man with two hands') symbolises strength and responsibility, reinforcing the patriarchal expectation of men as providers and protectors (Akinyemi, 2022). Such metaphors illustrate how language conveys cultural ideologies associated with gender and social roles. The use of body part metaphors also plays an important role in Yorùbá political and leadership discourse. Leaders and public figures frequently employ these metaphors to persuade, inspire, or criticise (Adegbite, 2019). In political campaigns, expressions such as *orí rere* ('good head') are used to project an image of wisdom and capability. In contrast, *orí burúkú* ('bad head') is deployed to discredit opponents (Babatunde, 2021). Additionally, metaphors involving the *hand* (*ọwọ̀*) and *mouth* (*ẹ̀nu*) are common in leadership rhetoric. A leader who is described as *ọwọ̀ méjì tó kó gbogbo egbò* ('two hands that gather all wounds') is seen as a unifier and problem-solver, whereas *ẹ̀nu tí kò ní òótó* ('a mouth that lacks truth') is a metaphor for deceitful leadership (Ajayi, 2024).

Furthermore, body part metaphors in Yorùbá are crucial in religious and spiritual contexts. Many Yorùbá traditional beliefs revolve around the concept of *orí* (head), which represents a person's destiny. Expressions like *orí mi yóò dá* ('my head will be good') indicate optimism in one's fate, while *orí burúkú* ('bad head') signifies misfortune or spiritual misalignment (Odebunmi, 2020). Metaphors involving the *heart* (*òkàn*) are also common in religious teachings, with phrases like *òkàn mi balẹ̀* ('my heart is calm') symbolising inner peace and spiritual contentment. These metaphors not only express religious sentiments but also reinforce Yorùbá cosmological views on destiny, morality, and divine influence (Sharifian, 2017). Additionally, Yorùbá body part metaphors are deeply embedded in humour and satire. They are used in folktales, music, and everyday conversations to create witty expressions, ridicule, or entertain (Gibbs, 2017).

The Yorùbá language is filled with metaphorical expressions that utilise body parts to convey meanings beyond their literal interpretations. These metaphors appear in idioms, slang, cultural expressions, and traditional narratives, serving communicative, didactic, and sociocultural functions. Yorùbá body part metaphors are significant in describing human attributes, emotions, social relationships, and cultural ideologies. They reflect how Yorùbá speakers conceptualise the world, using bodily experiences to represent abstract ideas. These expressions are deeply embedded in everyday communication, literature, and oral traditions, shaping the way Yorùbá people understand personal identity, relationships, and morality. This section provides an extensive discussion of different categories of body part metaphors in Yorùbá, drawing from proverbs, idioms, colloquial expressions, and contemporary usage.

In Yorùbá thought, the *head* (*orí*) is regarded as more than just a physical structure; it symbolises destiny, wisdom, success, and personal fortune. In traditional belief systems, an individual's *orí* determines their fate, making it one of the most important metaphors in the language (Ajayi, 2024). Expressions involving the head often relate to intelligence, leadership, character, and the outcome of one's life.

7. *Orí rere* – *Good head*; signifies wisdom, intelligence, or good destiny. It is used to describe someone with foresight, rational thinking, or divine favour.
8. *Orí burúkú* – *Bad head*; represents misfortune, poor judgement, or negative fate. It is often used to refer to individuals who frequently encounter setbacks.

These metaphors highlight Yorùbá perceptions of personal destiny and intellectual attributes, highlighting how individuals evaluate themselves and others based on wisdom, decision-making, and fate.

The *eye* (*ojú*) in Yorùbá metaphors symbolises perception, awareness, emotions, and social interactions. Many expressions related to the eye highlight observation, deception, jealousy, intelligence, or vigilance. Yorùbá people consider the eyes a reflection of inner emotions and cognitive awareness, making them a central feature of metaphorical language (Akinyemi, 2022).

- *Ojú lórò wà* – *The matter is in the eye*; signifies that the truth is obvious.
- *Ojú bàjé* – *The eye has spoiled*; expresses disgrace, disappointment, or lost confidence.

These metaphors reveal how Yorùbá speakers use references to the eye to communicate concepts of intelligence, deceit, emotions, and perception in both social and personal contexts.

The *hand* (*ọwọ*) in Yorùbá is closely associated with power, action, work, generosity, and control. Yorùbá expressions involving the hand highlight themes of cooperation, responsibility, influence, and authority (Ajiboye, 2021).

1. *Ọwọ kan kò gbé'ru d'órí* – *One hand cannot lift a load to the head*; signifies the necessity of teamwork.
2. *Fì ọwọ méjì gbà á* – *Receive it with both hands*; means accepting something wholeheartedly.

The *heart* (*okàn*) and *stomach* (*inú*) are metaphorically significant in Yorùbá, often relating to emotions, thoughts, and personal temperament (Fakoya, 2020).

1. *Inú rírùn* – *Bitter stomach*; represents resentment or grudges.
2. *Inú tutu* – *Cool stomach*; means patience, calmness, or kindness.

The legs (*ẹ̀sẹ̀*) play a fundamental role in human movement and stability, making them a powerful source of metaphorical expressions in the Yorùbá language. In Yorùbá thought, the legs symbolise mobility, support, direction, and progress. Many expressions that incorporate *ẹ̀sẹ̀* are used to describe human behaviour, resilience, and one's journey in life. For instance, the phrase *ẹ̀sẹ̀ rọ̀* (weak legs) metaphorically signifies an individual who is unreliable or lacks determination. Just as weak legs cannot support a person's weight effectively, someone described with this metaphor is perceived as unable to carry responsibilities or remain steadfast in their decisions.

Another common metaphor is *ẹ̀sẹ̀ rẹ̀ gbóná* (his legs are hot), which describes a restless or hardworking person. In a literal sense, hot legs suggest constant movement, and this metaphor extends to individuals who are always active, moving from one place to another in pursuit of success. This phrase is frequently used to praise individuals who are industrious and ambitious. Similarly, *fi ẹ̀sẹ̀ rin iná* (walk on fire) is an expression that signifies taking significant risks or facing extreme challenges. Fire represents danger and pain, so to walk on it suggests enduring hardship, making sacrifices, or demonstrating courage in difficult situations.

Leg metaphors also convey stability and resilience. The phrase *ẹ̀sẹ̀ dúró* (firm legs) is used to describe a person who is unwavering and stands their ground in tough situations. This expression is particularly relevant in discussions about leadership, determination, and perseverance. On the contrary, *ẹ̀sẹ̀ tẹ̀* (the foot is firm) implies someone who has established themselves in a particular position or situation, suggesting authority, security, or acceptance. A similar expression, *ẹ̀sẹ̀ tán* (the foot is finished), describes a situation where someone has lost their influence or support.

Metaphors involving legs are also linked to destiny and fortune in Yorùbá culture. The phrase *ẹ̀sẹ̀ àyànmọ̀* (destined legs) is used to describe someone

who is predestined for greatness. In contrast, *ẹsẹ ò tàn* (the feet have not ended) suggests that a person's journey is not yet complete, reinforcing the belief in continuous progress and the potential for change. Additionally, Yorùbá people say *ẹsẹ tó bá ń tó tìrẹ, kíí sá fún ọdẹ* (the legs that follow their path do not run from a hunter), meaning that someone who remains true to their purpose will not be derailed by obstacles.

Furthermore, leg metaphors extend to social relationships. *Ẹsẹ méjì kìì gbóná l'ékún* (two legs cannot be hot in a valley) is a metaphor that highlights the importance of balance and caution in life. It suggests that a person should not be too hasty or reckless in uncertain situations. Likewise, *ẹsẹ s'ókè* (lift your leg) is an instruction that means to leave a place immediately, often used when advising someone to flee from trouble.

The concept of *ẹsẹ* in Yorùbá also applies to decision-making and personal choices. *Fi ẹsẹ sàbẹwò* (visit with the legs) suggests testing a situation or person before making a commitment. Yorùbá speakers also use *ẹsẹ kì í sémi, ẹni tó bá fẹ gbà á, kó gbà á* (the leg does not belong to me; whoever wants it should take it) to indicate resignation or detachment from a conflict or obligation.

In contemporary Yorùbá expressions and slang, leg metaphors have taken on new meanings. Young people frequently use *ẹsẹ rẹ tó sí ibẹ* (his legs reached there) to mean someone successfully gained access to a place or opportunity. Conversely, *ẹsẹ rẹ kọ* (his legs refused) is used to imply failure or rejection. The adaptability of leg metaphors in modern Yorùbá further demonstrates their relevance in communication and their deep connection to human experience.

3.0. Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework provides the foundation for analysing body part metaphors by offering a structured approach to understanding their linguistic, cognitive, and cultural significance. This study draws upon relevant linguistic theories, including the Ethnography of Communication and Linguistic Relativity to examine how Yorùbá body part metaphors function within the language and broader socio-cultural context.

3.1. Ethnography of Communication

Ethnography of Communication was developed by Dell Hymes in 1972 as a sociolinguistic theory that examines how language use is shaped by cultural and social contexts. Hymes introduced the SPEAKING model, which identifies key components of communication, including setting, participants, ends, act sequence, key, instrumentalities, norms, and genre. This framework is particularly relevant to the study of body part metaphors in Yorùbá, as it provides a systematic way of analysing how these metaphors function in different social settings, such as everyday conversation, proverbs, and traditional folklore.

In Yorùbá society, body part metaphors often convey respect, social hierarchy, and moral instruction. For example, metaphors involving the eye (*oju*) may signify respect and dignity, while those involving the head (*ori*) may represent destiny or wisdom. By applying the Ethnography of Communication, it is possible to analyse how these metaphors vary depending on the participants, purpose, and context of communication. Scholars such as Gumperz and Saville-Troike have expanded on Hymes' work, demonstrating the importance of contextual factors in meaning-making. Their insights support the argument that Yorùbá body part metaphors cannot be fully understood outside of their cultural and communicative environment.

3.2. Linguistic Relativity and Linguistic Determinism

The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, formulated by Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf, posits that language influences thought and perception. Linguistic determinism suggests that language dictates cognitive processes, while linguistic relativity argues that language shapes, but does not entirely determine, how individuals perceive the world. This theory is instrumental in understanding Yorùbá body part metaphors, as it highlights how linguistic structures influence conceptualisation.

Yorùbá body part metaphors often reflect cultural perceptions of human attributes and social relationships. For instance, the metaphor *ori buruku* (bad destiny) signifies misfortune and is rooted in the cultural belief that the head (*ori*) determines an individual's fate. Whorf (1956) argued that language shapes habitual thought, which can be observed in the way Yorùbá speakers use body part metaphors to construct and convey abstract meanings. Scholars

such as Lucy and Levinson have provided empirical evidence supporting the effects of language on cognition, reinforcing the applicability of linguistic relativity to this study.

3.3. Empirical Review

Scholarly investigations into the use of body part metaphors in the Yorùbá language have been extensive, contributing significantly to the understanding of their linguistic, cultural, and cognitive dimensions. Researchers have explored the various ways in which these metaphors shape communication, encode social values, and influence perceptions of identity within the Yorùbá-speaking community. Previous studies have provided diverse perspectives on how body part metaphors function in Yorùbá, demonstrating their relevance in different aspects of discourse, from proverbs and idiomatic expressions to social interaction and cognitive conceptualisation. This section reviews the major findings and contributions of scholars who have examined body part metaphors in Yorùbá, drawing attention to their theoretical and empirical significance.

One of the most extensive studies in recent years is that of Opoola and Faniran in 2020, who conducted a detailed examination of idiomatic expressions related to human body parts in Yorùbá. They identified thirty body-related idioms and classified them into three primary domains, corresponding to the major divisions of the human body: the head, the torso, and the lower limbs. Their findings demonstrate that these idioms are deeply embedded in the Yorùbá linguistic tradition, often conveying social values and cultural norms in an indirect yet powerful manner. The study further illustrated that the heart (*òkàn*) is frequently associated with emotions and moral character, reflecting the cultural significance attributed to this organ in Yorùbá thought. For instance, the phrase *òkàn ayé* (the heart of the world) is used metaphorically to describe an individual who plays a central role in society. Their work provided a structured approach to understanding how body part metaphors function as cognitive and communicative tools in Yorùbá discourse.

A related study by Adeyemi and Ojo in 2020 explored the challenges associated with translating Yorùbá body part metaphors into English. Their research highlighted the difficulties that arise when direct translation is applied to idiomatic expressions, as many of these metaphors are deeply

rooted in the cultural worldview of the Yorùbá people. The authors provided multiple examples of body part metaphors that lose their intended meanings when translated literally. For example, the phrase *ojú lórò wà*, which literally translates as "the eye is where the word resides," conveys the idea that some matters are best discussed face-to-face, emphasising the role of non-verbal communication and physical presence in dialogue. They argued that the failure to capture such expressions in translation not only distorts meaning but also diminishes the cultural significance of the metaphorical language. Their findings underscored the importance of contextual knowledge in linguistic translation and interpretation.

Fadare and Adamu in 2022 conducted an insightful study on the evolution of traditional Yorùbá proverbs containing body part metaphors, particularly focusing on the emergence of modern expressions in digital communication, which they termed "postproverbials." Their research found that while traditional proverbs often rely on body part metaphors to impart moral lessons and societal values, contemporary variations tend to be more explicit and direct. For instance, whereas a traditional proverb might use the phrase *òṅà ìrìn tí ọkàn* (the path that leads to the heart) to describe emotional connections and deep trust, modern adaptations may replace it with more direct, less figurative expressions. The study revealed that the shift in metaphorical usage reflects broader social changes, including the influence of technology and digital culture on the ways Yorùbá speakers use language to communicate abstract ideas.

In a broader linguistic study, Ameka in 2023 examined how body part metaphors are used across multiple African languages, including Yorùbá, to conceptualise emotions and mental states. The research revealed that body-related lexemes play a central role in articulating emotional experiences, with particular emphasis on the heart and intestines as primary references. In Yorùbá, the heart (*ọkàn*) is metaphorically linked to feelings of courage, compassion, and integrity, illustrating the deep connection between physiological concepts and emotional expression. This aligns with earlier research that has shown that many African languages employ similar metaphorical mappings between body parts and psychological states. The study's findings reinforced the argument that body part metaphors serve as

fundamental cognitive tools through which speakers conceptualise abstract ideas.

Adeoye (2020) approached the study of body part metaphors from a different angle by focusing on anatomical terminology in Yorùbá and its implications for scientific discourse. He observed that the lack of standardised anatomical terms in Yorùbá poses significant challenges in medical and academic communication. His research suggested that the terminology used by traditional Yorùbá butchers and herbalists could serve as a foundational basis for developing a standardised lexicon. This proposal aligns with broader efforts to incorporate indigenous linguistic structures into formal education and professional fields. By linking anatomical terms with culturally familiar body part metaphors, the study provided a framework for enhancing the clarity and precision of Yorùbá medical discourse. This study aims to provide a detailed analysis of Yorùbá body part metaphors relating to the eye, examining their linguistic structures, communicative functions, and cross-linguistic implications.

4.0. Methodology

This study adopts qualitative research. The study area for this research work is Yoruba land. The researcher investigates and analyzes body part metaphors in Yorùbá that are commonly used among speakers of the Yoruba language. The unit of analysis of the study consists of the ten-part metaphors in Yorùbá that are commonly used among speakers of the Yoruba language. This is achieved through the researcher's observation and intuitive understanding of sociolinguistic analysis and body part metaphors in Yorùbá.

The main data source for this research consists of sixty-eight Yorùbá body part metaphors recorded in the researcher's diary, along with their literal meanings and direct interpretations during data collection. The researcher focuses on commonly used Yorùbá body part metaphors for the analysis. Additionally, the writer consults library documents and online e-books (in PDF format) to gain further insights into the research topic.

Observing the linguistic situation in a specific area is a common technique used in sociolinguistic surveys. It was one of the data collection methods employed in this research. The use of ethnographic techniques in these surveys included directly observing speakers' use of body part metaphors in

Yorùbá. All observations about body part metaphors in Yorùbá were documented in the researchers' diaries throughout the data collection process. The diary allowed the researcher to reflect on the data collection process. The information in the diary was helpful during the writing of this research.

The data gathered through participant observation and interviews were presented and analyzed accordingly. The researcher discusses the data one by one, using the Ethnography of Communication theory and Linguistic Relativity. These methods were adopted because the Ethnography of Communication allows for an examination of the cultural and social functions of these metaphors. At the same time, Linguistic Relativity provides insights into how language influences conceptual thought.

5.0. Data Presentation and Analysis of Eye Metaphors in Yorùbá

The fundamental nature of human language is symbolically metaphorical. Metaphors are inherent in everyday communication. The study places metaphor within a context to highlight symbolic elements, figurative expressions, and other metaphorical items in Yorùbá.

Human Part: Ojú 'eye'

Datum 1: *F'ojú olóore gún'gi*

Connotative Meaning: hit the eyes of the benefactor with a tree

Denotative Meaning: ungrateful or to act foolishly or fight someone who has been helping us in all spheres of life. The metaphor means acting foolishly or ungratefully towards someone who has been a source of support or protection, just as it would be foolish to fight or harm a tree that provides shade and shelter. It emphasizes how senseless it is to attack or harm someone who has been a benefactor in one's life. It speaks to the importance of recognizing and valuing the support we receive rather than turning against those who help us.

Datum 2: *Ojú ni ọba ara*

Connotative Meaning: eyes are a part of the whole body

Denotative Meaning: Metaphorically, the eyes are the "king" or "chief" of the whole body.

This highlights the crucial role the eyes play in guiding and influencing the actions of the entire body. Just as a king leads a kingdom, the eyes lead the body by providing direction, perception, and awareness. It underscores the idea that without vision or insight, the body would be lost or directionless, symbolizing the importance of clear perception and wisdom in life.

Datum 3: *Ó f'ojú nàá*

Connotative Meaning: he beat him with his eyes

Denotative Meaning: to roll eyeballs as a sign of disrespect or disregard for someone.

In this context, it represents a non-verbal gesture of contempt or defiance, where the eyes serve as a tool to convey dissatisfaction, annoyance, or disrespect without words. The metaphor highlights how powerful body language, especially the eyes, can be in communicating feelings of disrespect or disregard. It suggests that instead of engaging in a confrontation or argument, the person uses their eyes to silently express negative emotions toward someone.

Datum 4: *O fi ojú j'ẹran sùgbón kò le p'ẹran*

Or

Ó n l'ojú láti ẹ̀ ẹ̀ranko, sùgbón kò lẹ̀ pa ẹ̀ranko

Connotative Meaning: He uses his eyes to resemble an animal, but he cannot kill the animal. Or he uses eyes to resemble an animal, but he cannot kill animals

Denotative Meaning: impotent

This means that the man may look strong, capable, or virile on the outside, but in reality, he is impotent or unable to perform as expected. The phrase "eyes resembling an animal" suggests that he might display outward signs of strength or masculinity, but his inability to "kill the animal" signifies impotence or a lack of ability to fulfill his role in a sexual or productive way. It is a figurative way of showing the gap between appearance and true ability, especially regarding masculinity or sexual performance.

Datum 5: *Ojú ogun le*

Connotative Meaning: the eyes of war is hard

Denotative Meaning: the battle is serious or the task/matter is difficult.

This means that the battle is serious or the task at hand is difficult. The "eyes of war" refer to the intensity and seriousness of a conflict, and saying that they are "hard" emphasizes the challenges and the high stakes involved. It implies that the situation or task is not easy, and it requires great effort, determination, or resilience to overcome.

Datum 6: *Fi ojú kéré ẹni*

Connotative Meaning: using the eyes to make someone small

Denotative Meaning: belittle someone.

This refers to belittling, insulting, or demeaning someone through a look or stare. The "eyes" in this context represent non-verbal communication, and the act of making someone "small" symbolizes reducing their significance, worth, or dignity. It reflects the idea of using one's gaze, often a look of contempt or disdain, to make another person feel inferior or less important. This metaphor highlights the power of body language and how it can be used to undermine or disrespect someone without the need for words.

Datum 7: *Ojú pón ọn*

Connotative Meaning: his eyes is red or ripe

Denotative Meaning: suffering.

This indicates that the person is experiencing suffering, usually from emotional or physical pain, fatigue, or distress. The redness in the eyes often signals strain, sleepless nights, or crying, all of which point to suffering or hardship. It represents the emotional or mental burden a person is carrying, reflecting their overwhelmed or distressed state.

Datum 8: *K'orò ojú sí*

Connotative Meaning: have sour eyes against

Denotative Meaning: dislike someone or something.

This phrase means to dislike or hold negative feelings toward someone or something. The "sour eyes" represent a look of disdain, contempt, or dislike,

where the person visibly shows disapproval or resentment. It suggests that the individual has a strong aversion or hostility, often expressed through their gaze or attitude, toward the subject of their dislike.

Datum 9: *Rí pípón ojú*

Connotative Meaning: to see the redness in the eye

Denotative Meaning: to see the second part of someone when the person is angry.

Metaphorically, this means witnessing someone's anger or seeing the more aggressive or intense side of a person when they are enraged. The "redness of the eye" usually refers to the physical sign of anger, where a person's eyes may look bloodshot or intense due to strong emotions. It represents encountering a person's fierce or hostile side, often revealing their true nature when they are upset or provoked.

Datum 10: *L'ójú l'ágbárí*

Connotative Meaning: have eyes at the forehead

Denotative Meaning: to be on alert always or to detect things easily.

This phrase means to stay constantly alert and aware of your surroundings, or to notice things easily, even predicting what others might say about you when you're not there. The "eyes at the forehead" symbolize heightened awareness or intuition, suggesting that someone is vigilant and perceptive, able to sense situations or conversations before they fully happen. It shows a sharp sense of observation and the ability to notice subtle details, even without direct information.

6.1. Conclusion

This study investigated a detailed analysis of body part (eye) metaphors in Yorùbá by examining their structure, meanings, and communicative functions. Yorùbá is a widely spoken language with various dialectal differences that influence the usage and interpretation of body part metaphors. While certain metaphors are universally understood across Yorùbá-speaking communities, others exhibit regional variations. The sociolinguistic variations of body part metaphors illustrate the dynamic nature of language and its responsiveness to cultural and historical changes. The findings revealed that Yorùbá metaphors

evolve with societal transformations while maintaining their core functions in communication and identity construction. This adaptability underscores the enduring relevance of body part metaphors in Yorùbá linguistic and cultural practices.

6.2. Recommendation

Metaphor is linguistically, communicatively and socially significant in language for it shows that one object can be used to represent the other and yet the meaning potential is not lost. These outstanding traits of metaphor could have motivated some scholars to make efforts in order to examine it in several spheres and aspects. Body parts are metaphorically used to describe personal traits, emotional states, and social relationships.

Tradition etiquettes do not only dominate but also dictate the practice of the Yorùbá language. These procedures have in one way or another install the stir that regulates the discourse of some of the language concepts and adopted the use of metaphor to describe some contexts. This study is limited to the sociolinguistic analysis of body part metaphors in Yorùbá.

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