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Contextualization of Animal Metaphors in Igbo Semantics

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Abstract
Contextualization of animal metaphor in Igbo semantics as a research is geared towards solving the problem of mixing semantic references when animals with more than one metaphorical reference is used in a discussion. The researcher intends to find out how Igbo animal metaphor is used in different contexts. The study was guided by Conceptual metaphor theory of Lakoff and Johnson (1980). The researcher adopted qualitative-ethnographic methodology. Twelve animals were selected for analysis. The findings show that the usage of animal metaphor in Igbo semantics depends on the context. This is because each of the animals projects more than one metaphorical image. Example, Shrew (*nkakwụ*) stands for unpreparedness and spelling of pungent ordour; dog (*nkịta*) stands for fast running skill, slight provocation, and high sexual urge; millipede (*esu*) is for slow movement, presumed blindness, and rejection by humanity; Snail (ejule) is known for slow movement, emission of saliva, and softness of body. Igbo speakers have to take into consideration the settings and occasions for the usage of each metaphor, otherwise the meaning may be lost.
Keywords: Contextualization, conceptualisation, cognitive mapping, animal metaphor, and Igbo semantics

Introduction
In linguistics, contextualization means giving words meaning according to context in which they are used. It comes to mean that the same word can have different meanings depending on the context each one is used. On the other hand, metaphor is a figure

of speech where one thing is described as if it were another thing to show they share the same quality. Metaphor varies according to social and cultural mind-set. So, different social and cultural settings have different metaphorical view about different things.

Animal metaphor has to do with perceptions of different characters of different animals. It is a conceptual mappings where animal as the source domain is used to conceptualize human being as the target domain based on the perceived folk knowledge about the animal. It differs greatly among different cultures of the world. This means that what one animal stands for in metaphorical view of one culture may differ from what the same animal stands for in a different culture. As such, different cultural/social settings have different metaphorical mind-sets.

In Igbo cosmology, it is generally believed that the world is divided into three. The world of human (physical world), the land of the spirits (the spiritual world), and the animal world. As such, Igbo legend holds strongly that the animals operate in their own world as humans. They take to wives, build their families and have their own social and cultural settings. They have their kings and constitutions governing their environment. It is in this believe that the Igbo animal metaphor took its root. In Igbo animal metaphor, different animals stand for what they are known with in animal world. However, some animals are known with the actual character they exhibit in the real world. This makes it possible for some animals to have two or more metaphorical references, making it confusing some times when such metaphor is used.

Some researchers have made frantic effort in the past to research and write different things about metaphor in general, and animal metaphor in particular. However, there is no recorded evidence of a research on how to differentiate which character of the animal each metaphorical usage stands for. As such, there is a big gap in knowledge which needed to be filled. That calls for this research.

By the end of this research, it will be easy to determine the metaphorical character of the animal and the usage in each context.

Literature Review

In order to do justice to this research, the researcher reviewed some previous literatures that are related the topic of discussion. The review is based on the conceptual studies and the empirical studies.

Conceptual Studies

Here, the researcher sets out to look into different concepts that run at the surface of this research. Such concepts are contextualization, conceptualization, cognitive mapping, animal metaphor, and Igbo semantics

Contextualization

Gumperz (1982) sees contextualization as the process by which speakers signal and listeners interpret what the literal meaning of an utterance is, and what kind of social and cultural activity is being engaged in. This shows that Gumperz is of the opinion that words alone cannot make meaning of utterance clear to the audience. There is need to consider the context where such statement is made. Based on this, Gumperz (1992) says that contextualization refers to speakers' and hearers' use of verbal and non-verbal indices to relate what is said to when, where, and how it is said. This shows that the same statement can mean different things in different settings. A statement can be a request, suggestion, a command, depending on the relationship surrounding the utterance.

Furthermore, Evans (2004) says that contextualization is the process of constructing an expression in a particular context by activating relevant frames, schemas, and background. It is a process by which linguistic units are assigned a specific interpretation through the activation and integration of

encyclopedic knowledge, conceptual structure, and contextual factors at the time of utterance. Evans makes it clear that a word can mean different things in different contexts because context activates different frames. This confirms earlier notion of Hymes (1972) who sees contextualization as placing an event, utterance, or artifact within its social and cultural setting to understand its meaning. In addition, Kraft (1979) sees contextualization as the process of placing something in its surrounding context – social, cultural, historical or linguistic – so that its meaning, purpose, and application can be properly understood. It follows that meaning of a thing can be lost if the thing is explained out of context.

As such, Kaplan (1989) sees contextualization as the process by which linguistic expressions receive a specific interpretation by being related to a context of utterance, including speaker, time, place, prior discourse, and word knowledge. As it concerns this work, the researcher sees contextualization as the process where situation determines the specific meaning, reference and truth condition of linguistic expressions.

Conceptualisation

Evans and Green (2006) see conceptualization as the way in which a particular scene, situation, or experience is mentally construed by a speaker. This is supported by Langacker (2008) who looks at conceptualization as the dynamic process by which people construe, structure, and make sense of their daily experiences through embodied and culturally shaped conceptual structure. This shows that conceptualization is culture oriented as Sharifian (2011) remarks that conceptualization is culturally specific. Different speech communities develop distinct conceptualizations of emotions, time, kinship, and morally based on their cultural models. Based on the above, the researcher sees conceptualization as the mental process of forming, and interpreting concepts through daily experiences guided by culture and belief system.

Cognitive Mapping

In the opinion of Lakoff (1993), cognitive mapping is a set of systematic correspondences between a source domain and a target domain, whereby the conceptual structure of the source is projected into the target. Evans and Green (2006) stand on this as they define cognitive mapping as a cognitive operation that establishes correspondences and projects image-schematic structure from one conceptual domain into another. Furthermore, Kövecses (2010) sees it as the process of carrying over properties, relations and inferential logic from the source domain to the target domain. This shows that cognitive mapping is a mental mechanism. Based on the above, the researcher defines cognitive mapping as the mental mechanism that lets people understand an abstract idea in terms of a concrete, bodily, or cultural experience.

Animal Metaphor

According to Lakoff and Jonhson (1980) metaphor is the understanding of one kind of thing in terms of another. It is the systematic conceptualization of one domain of experience in terms of another domain, evidenced in language through cross-domain mapping. As such, metaphor is explanation one thing with another because the second possesses the character of the first. They went further to see animal metaphor as a type of metaphor where animal is used to describe a human, object, idea, or situation by comparing their characteristics. This shows that the goal of animal metaphor is to transfer qualities of that animal to the target. Kövecses (2010) stands on this and sees animal metaphor as the type of conceptual metaphor where human traits, behaviour, or social roles are understood and express in terms of the characteristics and behaviours attributed to animals. This shows that in animal metaphor we talk about people as if they were animals to highlight specific qualities. Based on this, the researcher sees animal metaphor as the understanding of one domain of experience in terms of another domain, through a systematic set of conceptual mapping.

Igbo Semantics

Palmer (1981) says that semantics is the technical term used to refer to the study of meaning. This is supported by Hurford, Heasley & Smith (2007) who see semantics as the study of meaning in human language; and Saeed (2016) who sees it as how words, phrases, sentences, and texts get their meaning, and how they are understood and interpreted. In addition, Yule (2020) sees semantics as the study of the meaning of words, phrases and sentences. These opinions try to strike a clear difference between semantics and other branches of linguistics like phonology, morphology, syntax, and pragmatics; as semantics is purely in search of meaning of utterance in different contexts

Furthermore, Nwachukwu (1997) looks at Igbo semantics as the study of meaning as expressed through Igbo lexical items, grammatical structures, proverbs, idioms, and cultural concepts. Nwachukwu's opinion shows that Igbo semantics does not hang only on spoken words. In order, to ascertain the meaning of any utterance, other aspects of Igbo world views have to be put into consideration. It explains how Igbo speakers encode and interpret meaning using their worldviews. This view is supported by Eme (2008) who says that Igbo semantics is concerned with the systematic study of meaning as expressed in Igbo lexical items, grammatical structures, and discourse, with particular attention to the interaction between linguistic form and Igbo cultural context.

Empirical Studies

Some researchers have researched on topics relating to this topic. Umezi (2018) Conducted a research on the topic, "*Echiche mbụrụ anụmanụ n'asụsụ Igbo na n'asụsụ Bekee*" (Meanings of Igbo and English animal metaphor). Here the researcher was able to establish the similarities and differences between Igbo animal metaphor and English animal metaphor. His research shows that metaphors differ according to culture. However, there are some similarities in metaphor across cultures. Umezi's research

resembles this research because both are looking into Igbo animal metaphor. However, they differ because Umezi's research set out to find out the similarities and differences between Igbo and English animal metaphor; whereas this study is on contextualization of animal metaphor in Igbo semantics.

Furthermore, Egenti, Chukwuogo and Okoye (2024) in their work, "The Conceptualization of *Azụ* 'Back' in Igbo", they examined the lexical item *azụ* 'back' in Igbo which has been confirmed to occur with several lexical items. They examined various groupings of *azụ* such as *azụ* as part of human body, *azụ* in terms of location in time, and *azụ* in terms of space. The findings of their study show that *azụ*, apart from its concrete and idiomatic meaning, *azụ* can also be conceptualized metaphorically in Igbo. Their work has helped a lot in Igbo lexical and cognitive semantics. It is related to this study, because both of them are studying conceptualization of meaning in Igbo. However, both studies differ from each other because, Egenti, Chukwuogo and Okoye's work concentrated on the conceptualization of *azụ* 'back' in Igbo; whereas this study is on contextualization of animal metaphor in Igbo semantics. As such, there is still gap between the two.

In addition, Nweya and Ejinwa (2024) carried out a research on the topic, "The eye as source of conceptual metaphors in Igbo". This work set out to examine how the eye (*anya*) body part in Igbo is variously conceptualized and used metaphorically to express abstract concepts. The findings of the study show that eye (*anya*) body part is a source domain or concrete concept used in mapping out or expressing abstract concepts in Igbo such as intelligence, love, hope, time/distance, greed, among others. It was also discovered that metaphor is a powerful cognitive tools used by the Igbo to express their worldviews. Nweya and Ejinwa's work helped in showing that eye is used in expressing abstract concepts in Igbo. It also showed how the Igbo use metaphor to express their worldviews. Their work resembles this work because the two are

examining conceptual metaphor in Igbo worldviews. However, they differ from each other, because Nweya and Ejinwa's work centers on the eye as source of conceptual metaphor in Igbo whereas this study is on contextualization of animal metaphor in Igbo semantics.

Theoretical Framework

The researcher adopted Conceptual metaphor theory. This theory was propounded by G. Lakoff and M. Johnson in 1980 in their book, "Metaphor we live by". The theory holds that animal metaphors are not just words. They are mental mappings between two domains. The structure of this theory is

Source domain: Animal + cultural knowledge

Target domain: Human character

Mapping: Projection of animal traits into human beings

Methodology

The researcher adopted qualitative-ethnographic approach of study. The reason for this method is because animal metaphor is cultural oriented. Twelve animals were selected for analysis. The choice of the animals was based on the fact that they are prominent animals among the Igbo. The researcher used cluster method of data collection. Awka town was used and people from different towns in Igbo land living in Awka were interviewed, and their responses showed similarities in the source domain, mapping and target domain. Data analysis was based on conceptual metaphor theory analysis.

Data Analysis

The analysis was based on the Conceptual metaphor theory

1. **Shrew (*Nkakwụ*)**

Source: Shrew (*nkakwụ*) is a small nocturnal animal like a mouse with long mouth popularly known for its exhibition of pungent ordour and unpreparedness.

Target: 1) Obi exhibits pungent ordour

2) Obi is always unprepared

Mapping: *Obi bụ nkakwụ"* (Obi is shrew)

2. Dog (*Nkịta*)

Source: Dog (*Nkịta*) is an animal noted for its fast running skill, slight provocation and high sexual urge and lack of self-control.

Target: 1) Ada is a prostitute.

2) Ada is a fast runner.

3) Ada is easily provoked.

Mapping: *Ada bụ nkịta.* (Ada is a dog)

3. Millipede (*Esu*)

Source: Millipede (Esu) is an animal noted for its slow movement, presumed blindness, and rejection by humanity.

Target: 1) Ngọzi walks slowly

2) Ngọzi is blind

3) Ngọzi is rejected by people

Mapping: *Ngọzi bụ esu.* (Ngọzi is a millipede.)

4. Snail (*Ejule*)

Source: Snail (Ejule) is a legless shelled animal that moves at slow pace and it is equally noted for constant emission of saliva, and it has soft skin.

Target: 1) Nneka moves slowly

2) Nneka emits saliva

3) Nneka has soft skin

Mapping: *Nneka bụ ejule*" (Nneka is snail)

5. Fowl (*Ọkụkọ Igbo*)

Source: Fowl (*ọkụkọ Igbo*) is one of the free range domestic animals in Igbo cultural/social setting. It exhibits characters like being busy, waking up early and going to sleep very early.

Target: 1) Ngọzi wakes up very early.

2) Ngọzi goes to bed early.

3) Ngọzi is always busy.

Mapping: *Ngọzi bụ ọkụkọ Igbo.* (Ngọzi is a fowl)

6. Chameleon (*Ogwumagala*)

Source: Chameleon is one of the wild animals known with flexible colouration. The colour changes according to the environment. It is also known with slow movement.

Target: 1) Ekemma is flexible.
2) Ekemma moves slowly.

Mapping: *Ekemma bụ ogwumagala.* (Ekemma is chameleon)

7. *Squirrel (Ọsa)*

Source: Squirrel (*Ọsa*) is one of the well-known arboreal animals. It is popularly known with climbing from one tree to another, and eating palm nuts.

Target: 1) Ugonna is known with climbing of trees.
2) Ugonna eats palm nuts a lot.

Mapping: *Ugonna bụ ọsa.* (Ugonna is squirrel.)

8. Lizard's tail (*Ọdụ ngwere*)

Source: Lizard is one of the reptiles well known in Igbo worldview. Lizard's tail **(***Ọdụ ngwere***)** is the most fragile part of the body, in the sense that it breaks away at slightest hold. Secondly, it obstructs lizard from sitting.

Target: 1) Okeke is fragile.
2) Okekeis an obstacle.

Mapping: *Okeke bụ ọdụ ngwere.* (Okeke is lizard's tail.)

9. Wild bird (*Nnụnụ*)

Source: Wild bird (*nnụnụ*) is known for light in scale, sharp vision, and freedom of movement.

Target: 1) Chiamaka is too light.
2) Chiamaka has sharp vision.
3) Chiamaka is free

Mapping: *Chiamaka bụ nnụnụ.* (Chiamaka is wild bird.)

10. Bat (*Ụsụ*)

Source: Bat (*Ụsụ*) is one of the nocturnal and ugly birds known to the Igbo. It belongs both to terrestrial and arboreal group of animals.

Target: 1) Chinenye belongs to more than one group.
2) Chinenye likes moving in the night.

3) Chinenye is very ugly.

Mapping: *Chinenye bụ ụsụ.* (Chinenye is a bat.)

11. Toad (*Awọ*)

Source: **Toad (*Awọ*)** is both aquatic and terrestrial animal. In Igbo worldview, toad (*awọ*) is noted for stinginess, bad voice and adaptation ability.

Target: 1) Ugochi is very stingy.

2) Ugochi has bad voice.

3) Ugochi can easily adapt to every environment

Mapping: *Ugochi bụ awọ.* (Ugochi is a toad.)

12. Eagle (*Ugo*)

Source: Eagle is one of the birds well known among the Igbo. It is regarded as extra ordinary, the most beautiful of all birds, and scarcely seen.

Target: 1) Nneọma is very beautiful.

2) Nneọma is scarcely seen.

3) Nneọma is extra ordinary

Mapping: *Nneọma bụ ugo.* (Nneọma is eagle.)

Findings

From the analysis above, findings of this study indicate that meanings in Igbo animal metaphor is contextual. The meaning of each metaphor is influenced by the context, situation in which the speaker uses the metaphor.

1. Shrew (*Nkakwụ*)

From the analysis, shrew stands for two major things in Igbo metaphor, namely: emission of pungent ordour and unpreparedness (hasty preparation). Thus, "*Obi bụ nkakwụ"* (Obi is shrew) can mean any of the following: 1) Obi emits pungent ordour

2) Obi is always unprepared

So, for proper usage of shrew *(nkakwụ*) in Igbo metaphor, the context has to be properly considered for clear meaning to manifest. This will help people to understand the metaphor in use; whether as emission of pungent smell or hasty preparation.

2. Dog (*Nkịta*)

In Igbo metaphorical usage, dog stands for fast running skill, slight provocation, high sexual urge and lack of self-control. So, "*Ada bụ nkịta"* (Ada is a dog) can mean any of this:

1) Ada is a prostitute
2) Ada is a fast runner
3) Ada is easily provoked

Based on the above inferences, for correct application of dog (*nkịta*) in Igbo metaphorical usage, one needs to be at home with the varieties and the appropriate context to use each, otherwise the meaning may be lost.

3. Millipede (*Esu*)

Millipede (*esu*) projects characters as slow movement, presumed blindness, and rejection by humanity. As such, *"Ngọzi bụ esu.* (Ngọzi is a millipede) can mean any of these:

1) Ngọzi walks slowly
2) Ngọzi is blind
3) Ngọzi is rejected by people

In sum, for proper application of millipede in Igbo metaphor, there is need to consider the background of the event that brings about the application. This will help in the proper usage of the metaphor.

4. Snail (*Ejule*)

Snail is known for slow movement, emission of saliva, and softness of body. "*Nneka bụ ejule.*" (Nneka is snail) can mean any of the following:

1) Nneka moves slowly
2) Nneka emits saliva
3) Nneka has soft skin

From the above Igbo metaphoric images of snail, it shows that for one to use any of the images properly, there is the need to consider the context of the narrative; otherwise the meaning may be lost.

5. Fowl (*Ọkụkọ*)

From the analysis above, Fowl (*ọkụkọ Igbo*) exhibits metaphoric images of being busy, waking up early and going to sleep very. As

such, "*Ngọzi bụ ọkụkọ Igbo.* (Ngọzi is fowl) can mean any of the following:

1) Ngọzi wakes up very early.
2) Ngọzi goes to bed early.
3) Ngọzi is always busy.

Based on the above varieties of metaphor coined on the same source, *ọkụkụ Igbo,* for a better application of the metaphor, there is serious need to be at home with different contexts to apply them.

6. Chameleon (*Ogwumagala*)

Chameleon has the image of flexibility and slow movement in Igbo metaphorical worldview, their usage depends on the context. Thus, *"Ekemma bụ ogwumagala* (Ekemma is chameleon) can mean:

1) Ekemma is flexible.
2) Ekemma moves slowly.

From the above metaphors of chameleon, it shows that for one to apply chameleon in any metaphorical statement, such a person has to consider context in a special way. Otherwise, there may be wrong application which is likely to effect the meaning.

7. Squirrel (ọsa)

Squirrel (*Ọsa*) is one of the well-known arboreal animals. In Igbo metaphor, it stands for tree climbing and eating palm nuts. "So,*Ugonna bụ ọsa"*. (Ugonna is squirrel) means any of the following:

1) Ugonna is known with climbing of trees.
2) Ugonna eats palm nuts a lot.

So, for proper application of squirrel (*ọsa*) in Igbo metaphorical usage, one has to consider the context in which each one is used, in order to make a suitable application.

8. Lizard's tail (*Ọdụ ngwere*)

In Igbo metaphorical setting, lizard tail (*ọdụ ngwere*) stands for fragility and obstruction. So to say, "*Okeke bụ ọdụ ngwere"* (Okeke is lizard's tail) can mean any of the following:

1) Okeke is fragile.
2) Okeke is an obstacle to us.

Based on the above, the meaning depends on the context of the usage, otherwise the meaning may be lost.

9. Wild bird (*Nnụnụ*)

In Igbo metaphor, Wild bird (*nnụnụ*) represents being light in scale, sharp vision and freedom of movement. In this sense, *"Chiamaka bụ nnụnụ"* (Chiamaka is wild bird) can mean any of these:

1) Chiamaka is too light.
2) Chiamaka has sharp vision.
3) Chiamaka is free

All things considered, the above images of wild bird in Igbo metaphor are used according to the context each them falls. As such, users must be conscious of the context in order to retain the meanings.

10. Bat (*Ụsụ*)

Bat (*Ụsụ*) stands for three images. They are: Not belonging to a particular group, being ugly and moving in the night. So to say, "*Chinenye bụ ụsụ"* (Chinenye is a bat) can mean any of the following:

1) Chinenye belongs to more than one group.
2) Chinenye likes moving in the night.
3) Chinenye is very ugly.

So, for proper application of bat in Igbo metaphorical usage, one has to make proper consideration of the context of the usage, otherwise the meaning may be lost.

11. Toad (*Awọ*)

Igbo metaphorical worldview, toad (*awọ*) stands for stinginess, bad voice and adaptation ability. So the statement, "*Ugochi bụ awọ*" (Ugochi is a toad) can mean any of these:

1) Ugochi is very stingy.
2) Ugochi has bad voice.
3) Ugochi can easily adapt to any environment.

So for proper usage of these metaphors, there is the need to consider the context.

12. Eagle (*Ugo*)

In Igbo metaphor, eagle (*ugo*) represents beauty, scarce and extra ordinary object. So, "*Nneọma bụ ugo"* (Nneọma is eagle) can mean any of the following:

1) Nneọma is very beautiful.
2) Nneọma is scarcely seen.
3) Nneọma is extra ordinary

Based on the above, for proper application of eagle (*ugo*) as a metaphor, there is need to examine the context in order not to lose the meaning.

Conclusion

At the end of this study on 'Contextualization of animal metaphor in Igbo semantics', the researcher succeeded in fulfilling his intention. The study was guided by Conceptual metaphor theory of Lakoff and Johnson (1980). The researcher adopted qualitative-ethnographic methodology. The study shows that some animals have more than one metaphorical image in Igbo cognitive semantic. The findings and analysis show that the usage of animal metaphors in Igbo semantics depends on the context and topic of discussion. The following metaphorical animals stood as source domain to prove contextualization of animal metaphors in Igbo semantics: shrew (*nkakwụ*), dog (*nkịta*), millipede (*esu*), snail (*ejule*), fowl (*ọkụkọ*), chameleon (*ogwumagala*), squirrel (*ọsa*), lizard's tail (*ọdụ ngwere*), wild bird (*nnụnụ*), bat (*ụsụ*), toad (*awọ*), and eagle (*ugo*). Users of the metaphor have to take into consideration the settings and occasions for their usage, otherwise the meaning will be lost.

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