

The conceptual framing of time in Mfantse

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ABSTRACT: *The notion of time is common and duly recognized by all people and all languages in the world. However, our perception and conceptualization of time, as evidenced in recent disputing arguments, is not the same across all human languages and cultures. This is probably because time is neither a tangible nor a visible phenomenon. The main objective of this study is to examine the qualities or properties of source domains highlighted by the linguistic expressions used to talk about time in Mfantse, a dialect of the Akan language. (Akan is a Kwa language spoken by a large group of people called Akans and generally mutually intelligible among its widely varied dialects.) I investigate the conceptualizations underlying the concept of time in the Mfantse dialect of Akan by drawing linguistic expressions from texts (the Mfantse Bible), songs, a radio programme broadcast in Mfantse. The study confirms the recognition and acknowledgement of the notion of time in Mfantse and reveals some interesting kinds of metaphors underlying the conceptualization of time within the language, some of which include **TIME IS FOOD** and **TIME IS AN ENEMY**.*

KEYWORDS: Akan, metaphor, CMT, time, conceptualization

INTRODUCTION

This paper investigates the conceptualizations of time in Mfantse through Lakoff and Johnsons' Cognitive Metaphor Theory (CMT). The study draws linguistic expressions from Mfantse, one of the major dialects of Akan, as evidence of metaphoric underpinnings for the understanding of the concept of time. I examine the qualities or properties of source domains highlighted by the linguistic expressions used to talk about time in the Mfantse culture.

Whilst people in all cultures experience time in our day-to-day endeavours, our conception of time may not exactly be the same even as our conceptualization of the larger world. It is evident that our conceptualization of time varies from culture to culture and individual people's conceptualizations of phenomena may differ from person to person. This results from the fact that our perceptions of the world are shaped by our culture through language.

Time, known is an essential commodity common and available to all humanity and the universe as a whole. While several aspects of our concept of time are not physically observable in the world,

they are specified in our language through metaphors as evidenced by specific linguistic elements within our languages.

The conceptualization of time has been studied in languages and cultures across the world, e.g., English, Mandarin Chinese and Toba an Indian language (e.g., Radden 2003, 2006, 2011; Piata 2019 and Gu 2019a). Rinaldi *et al* (2018) and Gu *et al* (2019b) have stretched the study of metaphor and time to study the language of the blind and the deaf, respectively. However, the attention that the concept of time in Akan has received so far has been to describe Akan time generally. To the best of my knowledge, the arena of metaphor in the conceptualization of time in Akan and Mfantse specifically has received little attention. In fact, as with even Western languages, studies on time have mainly focused on time's axis of movement in terms of horizontal-vertical, forward-backwards, left-right, up-down, etc. But I observed that the underlying conceptualizations of time in Mfantse have certain variations within the information in the existing literature. These would be interesting information to share to add to the literature both of CMT and Time and serve further as a means to appreciate and maintain a language that is gradually losing its hold on the natives. The main purpose of this study is, thus, to help strengthen and expand the debate on the apparent universalities of the conceptualization of time and reveal some points of divergence from an African (Akan) point of view.

The paper is organized in nine sections as follows: introduction, the conceptualization of time, time in Akan, theoretical framework, time and metaphor. These are followed by the data and methodology, results and analysis, a brief discussion and summary.

The conceptualization of time

Over time, the focus of investigations into the conceptualization of time in the literature has been to ascertain whether time moves horizontally or vertically, forward or backward, left or right, up or down. Considerations have also been in terms of whether time moves past us, or that we move through it; in other words, the movement and direction of time across space (Huang, 2016; Cheng, 2014; Huang and Hsieh, 2007). However, we do not ascertain these conceptualizations physically or by our direct specified experience with the world except through some metaphorical considerations. For example, when we say 'Times fly', we are not dealing with the concept of time physically bearing wings like, say, a bird and flapping them to propel it in movement, or even that time physically occupies in an aeroplane to be flown around: rather we are comparing the fast flow of the passing of time with the speed of a flying object. The correspondences between space and time in language may thus afford us insight into how the domain of time is structured and reasoned about. Such insights, however, do not occur at random. They are typically, intrinsically found to occur among linguistic groups and cultures and the language they use. Sharifian (2017) points out the significant importance of language itself to our understanding of cultural conceptualization and subsequent broader cultural cognitions associated with languages and their varieties. The author emphasizes the dual role that language plays in cultural conceptualization, i.e.,

- i) that linguistic interactions are crucial to the development of cultural conceptualizations, as they provide a space for speakers to construct and co-construct meanings about their experiences, and that
- ii) many aspects of both language structure and language use, draw on, and reflect cultural conceptualizations. (p 2)

Although some aspects of the concept of time cannot be observed physically (Boroditsky 2000), the conceptualization of time, as with other aspects of our existence is deeply rooted in our world view or cultural experience. Language plays a key role in this experience. Language is integrated with and not separable from a culture in that human beings think and operate within the culture of a specific language and vice versa. Sharifian's (2011a) position of language being a subsystem of culture and various language features reflecting and embodying culture (Sharifian) cannot be overemphasized. Language actually influences and reflects the culture of a people by both constructing and preserving their historical as well as other relevant cultural backgrounds, which together culminate into their general perspectives and cultural experience. It is important to note that researchers, notable among them Kövecses (2000, 2005, 2015), have proven without a doubt that cognition and culture, including metaphorical thought and expression, are strongly correlated.

Time in Akan

Akan is the language spoken by a predominant group of very closely related and mutually intelligible dialects located in the southern half of Ghana, West Africa (Osam 2004). Most widely spoken among all the languages of Ghana, the dialects of Akan include Agona, Akuapim, Akwamu, Asante, Mfantse/Mfantse, Akyem, Assin, Bono/Brong, Kwahu and Wassa. The people who use this language are collectively known as Akans and occupy a greater part of the southern sector of Ghana. According to the 2010 national population census, 47.5% of the Ghanaian population is Akan while about 44% of the population speaks Akan as non-native speakers (see Agyekum 2013). Until recently in 2018, Ghana had 10 regions out of which the Akans alone occupied six, which stretched about halfway across the nation's map from the southern part to the middle belt. With the creation of an additional six new regions, which brings the number of regions for the nation to 16, the Akans currently occupy nine but essentially within the same land space, still the largest for any ethnic group in the country.

In the Akan culture, time is deciphered through happenings (events and activities) rather than 'the clock'. Izu (2010) records that the African used to schedule things with the cockcrow, high noon and sundown and programme schedules with human activities such as commencement or end of market session, the morning, the midday, or evening harvesting of palm wine, etc., before the arrival of the mechanical clock. Kanu (2015) reviewing Mbiti's (1969) reveals that the African think of time as moving backward rather than forward, a view which means that Africans set their minds on things that have passed rather than on the future. This view further means that the African understands time as consisting of a long past and a present with virtually no future (because it has not yet been realized) (p 129). However, while this view of the African perception may be true for the particular languages studied by Mbiti, its veracity for the specific case of Akan (with its

dialects) has been disproved by Gyekye cited in Nnaji (2016, p. 264). Nnaji cites concrete linguistic evidences such as 'Da bi' (someday, an unspecified day, a day as yet unknown, some time to come) and 'Daakye' (future or in the future), to show the infinite future in Akan. In the meantime, Kanu further continues in the following words about the African concept of time in Mbiti's perspective:

The African concept of time is also concrete and substantive. It is epochal, as it is wrapped around events and activities. According to Mbiti (1969), Africans reckon time for a concrete and specific purpose and not just for the sake of mathematics or in a vacuum. The African time is either time for or time-to or time-of; whether designated, opportunistic or emergency. (Kanu 2015, p 129).

The fact that the African concept of time is epochal is enough proof that the African have their own unique way of dealing with time in contrast with the Western concept of time which is linear, consisting of an indefinite past, the present and infinite future' (p 129). Izu (2010) deals with the untruth of the Mbiti's African concept of time as leading to tardiness, etc., which is claimed as characteristic of all Africans and challenges the relevance or even the existence of Mbiti's metaphor of 'African time', which has become somehow synonymous with tardiness. In fact, Izu vehemently rejects this metaphor of African time, stating that the people understood what was meant by their cockcrow, high noon and sundown and other event-related time system and complied, with those who failed to adhere to the schedules facing negative sanctions through fines and other types of penalty (p. 19). While this is an interesting debate, the focus of this study is different.

Theoretical framework

A conceptual metaphor is a cognitive endeavour that allows us to make inferences about things by marching underlying concepts from two different domains, i.e., target domain and source domain. According to Huang and Hsieh (2007), it is 'people's underlying cognitive level as the bridge between language and thought' (p. 174). A conceptual metaphor typically specifies a concrete idea into an abstract entity by the assimilation of two different domains – target and source domains. Huang and Hsieh (2007) say 'in general, conceptual metaphors refer to the surface structures, which make metaphors understandable' (p. 174). For example, as stated by Boroditsky (2000, p. 4) and echoed by Gentner, Imai and Boroditsky (2002, p. 538), when we use the expressions 'looking forward to a brighter tomorrow', 'falling behind schedule', or when we propose theories 'ahead of our time', we are relying on spatial terms to talk about time.

Lakoff and Johnson's CMT suggests that the metaphorical expressions we use in a language reflect the metaphorical understandings we have of different world experiences. Thibodeau and Boroditsky (2011) pointed out to earlier works that using different metaphors could lead to different ways of reasoning about notions like time, emotions, etc.

Everyday metaphor (i.e. metaphors that occur in everyday language) is explained to be characterized by a huge system of thousands of cross-domain mappings on which literary

metaphors also draw (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Lakoff 1993). Dwelling on and inspired by this new insight, metaphor in contemporary times has assumed the meaning of a cross-domain mapping in the conceptual system. The concept of metaphor as a cross-domain mapping implies that one conceptual domain is expressed via a different conceptual domain, meaning thus that the conceptual structure of one domain is exploited to indirectly characterize another domain (Steen, et al 2010). Conceptual structure refers to ideas represented in a text, not to the actual conceptualizations by people in real-time, which indirectness may or may not be explicitly marked through signals (Goatly 1997). For example, expressions from the vocabulary of money, e.g., *waste, save, spend, cost, budget* and *borrow* are used systematically in talking about time; however, the expression in which they may be used do not themselves constitute the conceptual metaphor TIME IS MONEY but rather the overall idea(s) they carry about money is mapped unto the concept of time. Conceptual metaphors, therefore, consist of systematic mappings between relatively concrete source domains and rather abstract target domains, which include ontological correspondences and their entailments (Langacker 2000).

A conceptual metaphor is thus a metaphor that reflects the underlying thought or concept of our reasoning. It is using the knowledge structure of a more concrete domain, which is the source domain of experience, to a less concrete but more abstract one, which is the target domain (Ansah, 2013). Thus, dwelling on the assertion that our everyday experiences reflect our metaphorical understanding of the world, CMT deals with the thoughts that underlie our conceptualization of the world. In fact, in the words of Khajeh and Abdullah (2012), ‘metaphor conceptualizations are projections of conceptual structure which reside in speakers’ cognition in a manner that enables them to comprehend certain abstract experiences in terms of more concrete ones’ (p.70). These words form an apt description of CMT principles given the cross-domain mapping feature of the CMT, which prescribes the ‘projection’ of underlying conceptions from one domain into another domain to understand the latter. The authors go further to express the fact that ‘this systematic nature of certain metaphoric projections ... allows people to think, act, reason, and speak about physical experiences’ (ibid); a statement that both endorses and corroborates the inseparability of a peoples’ language from their cultural conceptualizations as mentioned early on.

One of the main, long-standing criticisms levelled against the CMT had been the method of identifying what could pass as a metaphor. In 2007 however, the Pragglejas group (a group of 10 seasoned metaphor theorists) developed a four-step process for this purpose, which they nicknamed the metaphor identification procedure (MIP), which, since then has become an indispensable resource in many metaphor studies so far as a recognized method for identifying metaphors in discourse is concerned. I take note of the fact that the MIP does not by itself identify conceptual metaphors yet it is effective in identifying linguistic expressions based on which the conceptual metaphors may be derived in a bottom-up approach in CMT applications.

Time and Metaphor

Although time is neither visible nor tangible, people all over the world seem to have certain means provided by and lying within different specific linguistic cultures by which to express the concept

of time. These means are evidenced by particular linguistic expressions of a particular language within the linguistic culture. The means are not a haphazard selection and organization of lexemes but a reflection of a systematic structuring along with certain phenomenal patterns, which are common within the linguistic culture of the particular language. For example, it appears that most of the world's languages tend to structure time in terms of motion as people invariably make use of expressions of motion such as time *passes, flows, goes by*, etc, when asked to explain the notion of time (Radden, 2003). Time is irreversible, in other words unidirectional. This may explain our common understanding that 'Time lost is never regained'. Generally, across languages, time has been noted to involve two basic models of conceptualization as motion, i.e. the moving-time model where time is in motion and the moving-ego model where ego (the observer) is in motion and time is by implication stationary. Lakoff (1993) respectively described the two metaphor models as TIME PASSING IS MOTION OF AN OBJECT and TIME PASSING IS MOTION OVER A LANDSCAPE.

In terms of orientation, Radden (ibid) dwells on the examples *the weeks ahead of us* and *the worst behind us* to explain the English preference for the longitudinal axis which tenders a front-back orientation of time as opposed to the vertical axis, up-down orientation commonly preferred in Chinese conceptualization of time. The two axes pertain to earlier and later times respectively, with the examples *up.month* for 'last month' and *down.month* for 'next month'. It is explained from the same source that the English preference for the longitudinal axis may be due to their 'spatial experience of motion, which is almost invariably directed to the front' whereas the vertical axis reflects 'the widespread view of time as flowing or the "river model" of time' (p 228). The argument of longitudinal versus vertical axes conceptualizations may confirm the stand may be a contribution to the debate against time as a universal concept. However, Radden further notes that English and the Western culture also views certain aspects of time (not the entire concept though) by the up-down orientation. The following examples were cited to prove this although over here the analogy is concerned with the family tree as noted by Yu (1998: 112 cited in Radden ibid) instead of the river. Yu's claim is put by Radden thus 'The older generations are at the top and described as ascendants, while the younger generation is at the bottom and described as descendants' (p 228). Radden further reports the notion of cyclic time in Toba, an Indian language, in respect of future time. The Akans basically use the longitudinal (horizontal) orientation of time whereas there is a minute yet a very significantly unique element of time in cyclic motion as dealt with under the analysis of 17a and 17b below. There appears to be greater reliance on the moving time concept in Akan, where time is on a constant move, rather than that of moving ego.

Aside from motion, time may be conceptualized using other metaphors including money. For example, English is a very typical case where the TIME IS MONEY metaphor is operational. This is evident in the following selected linguistic expressions from Lakoff and Johnson (1980 p 456): *You're wasting my time; This gadget will save you hours; How do you spend your time these days?* and *You need to budget your time*. The vehicle terms or lexical items, which carry the metaphorical meanings and upon which the interpretations of the expressions are made (i.e. wasting, save, spend and budget) are usually used to talk about money. Talking about time in such terms, therefore,

point to the conceptual underpinnings of the metaphor TIME IS MONEY.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative study with content analysis. The data, in terms of linguistic expressions, were gathered mainly by purposive sampling from texts (the Mfantse Bible – *Ecclesiastes 7:14, Ephesians 5: 16*), a song (*Afe akɔ aprɔw abɔto hen bio*, a popular Mfantse song in commemoration of ‘the year’ which is *afe*, usually sung in Christian circles during the Christmas season), a morning call-in radio programme (*Anapa hyewbɔ*) on social issues broadcast in Mfantse on Radio Peace, a local radio station based in Winneba. Most of the data were self-provided from everyday expressions which were picked by observation of everyday occurrences within the language. The data were independently scrutinized and cross-checked by three persons: two Mfantse linguists from the Department of Akan-Nzema, at the University of Education, Winneba; and one clergy who is well seasoned in Mfantse and is involved in Mfantse translation at the top hierarchy of the Methodist Church, Ghana. The purpose of their scrutiny was to ensure the authenticity of the data as existent, acceptable and provable expressions of Mfantse as well as assess the metaphorical potency of each expression.

The agreed-on data were then analyzed by the Cognitive Metaphor Theory (CMT) explained in section. The CMT was deemed appropriate for this study based on the fact that Mfantse relies heavily on metaphor for expressions of time. In CMT, linguistic expressions refer to the actual, specific linguistic manifestations or utterances a speaker makes, from which a metaphor may be deduced. For example, the utterances *He’s **wasting** time; I have to **budget** my time; This will **save** you time, and I’ve **invested** a lot of time in that*’ from Lakoff are linguistic expressions that manifest the conceptual metaphor TIME IS MONEY. Once the linguistic expressions were gathered into a miniature corpus, they were processed via the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) of the Pragglejaz group (2007). The MIP outlines the following steps for identifying metaphor in context.

1. Read the entire text–discourse to establish a general understanding of the meaning.
2. Determine the lexical units in the text–discourse
3. (a) For each lexical unit in the text, establish its meaning in context, that is, how it applies to an entity, relation, or attribute in the situation evoked by the text (contextual meaning). Take into account what comes before and after the lexical unit. (b) For each lexical unit, determine if it has a more basic contemporary meaning in other contexts than the one in the given context. For our purposes, basic meanings tend to be —More concrete; what they evoke is easier to imagine, see, hear, feel, smell, and taste. —Related to bodily action. —More precise (as opposed to vague) —Historically older. Basic meanings are not necessarily the most frequent meanings of the lexical unit. (c) If the lexical unit has a more basic current–contemporary meaning in other contexts than the given context, decide whether the contextual meaning contrasts with the basic meaning but can be understood in comparison with it.
4. If yes, mark the lexical unit as metaphorical.

Items were grouped into major metaphoric themes according to the basic connotations of the vehicle terms which provides the source domain for a particular metaphor and the data interpretation in line with the target domain inferences. The conceptual metaphors are presented with capital letters in keeping with CMT practice.

After applying the MIP test, some of the sentences which were initially thought of as containing metaphoric properties were disqualified from the corpus on the basis that their metaphorical qualities or properties could not easily be discerned because they failed the test, or that clear and sufficient information could not be found to justify their metaphorical properties. The analysis of the final corpus dwelt on the aspects/components/characteristics of the target domain which are highlighted by the source domain. The analyses were made regarding what conceptualization inferences can be realized from the vehicle terms.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

TIME IS A COMMODITY

This is one of the most common means found to underlie the conceptualization of time across languages. The following explains how the Mfantse people conceptualize time as money or a commodity. Generally speaking, various commodity entities possess various properties and characteristics that help to classify them as such. Some of the very common properties that commodity entities may possess include length, speed, size, quality, among others. In this section, I consider which of the properties of entities are metaphorically conceptualized for time in Akan, specifically, Mfantse. We begin with the measurability or quantifiability of time. Under this subject, we show that as a commodity, Mfantse time is conceptualized as possessing quantity, quality, length, size, taste and texture and is in fact edible.

Time is measured for **quantity**. The terms *dodow* (quantity) in 1a is used to determine amount. It specifically deals with 'how much'. In Mfantse, time can be quantified as either *pɔi* much/plenty or *kuma/kakra* small as shown in 1a and 1b below. In fact, while *pɔi* and *bi* are both optional in either of the structures, *pɔi* (plenty/much) is an actual determiner of large quantity/amount whereas *bi* is only used for emphasis in this context (*bi* is an indefinite article in other contexts). It is again important to note that *dodow* is used as a measure for all quantities and often used together with *pɔi* but hardly with *kuma/kakra*.

- 1) a) *Mber dodow (pɔi)*
 'Time much/lot (plenty)'
 'So much time'
- b) *Mber kuma/kakra (bi)*
Time little (some)
 '(Very) little time'
- 'How much time/ a lot.plenty/(very) little'

Time is a **countable** commodity. Indeed, one of the basic methods by which we can tell quantity is counting and this is found to operate in Mfantse time conceptualization in *kan* 'count'.

- 2) **Kan** *nda/mfe* (*dodow*)
 'Count days/years much'
 'Consider how many days/years'

Time in Mfantse has **size** in sync with how any commodity may be measured for its size. The linguistic evidence for this is *suar* (small) as in 3 below. In Akan, however, time is only considered for its smallness and not the other way round because the opposite of *suar*, which is by context 'so' *big* or '*kese*' *big/large* is not used to talk about time. The idea of 'bigness' concerning time in Mfantse is, thus, considered in terms of quantity rather than size. For this reason, Mfantse's only talk of small/little time and not 'big' time, but plenty or much time instead (see discussion on 1i).

- 3) *Hen mber suar*
 3PL.SUBJ time small
 'Our time small'
 'Our time is small.limited/we don't have much time'

Another feature that time in Mfantse shares in common with a commodity is **quality**. Quality, as it pertains to common commodity, allows them to be judged as either good or bad, or possessing high or low quality. The lexical items *pa/papa* (good) and *bɔn* (bad) in 4 below form the evidence. Extracts 4a and 4b are common expressions in Mfantse, which show good time(s) and bad time(s) respectively.

- 4) a) *Mber pa/papa beba*
 'Time good shall come'
 'There shall be a better time(s)/There are good times ahead'
- b) *Mber no ye mber bɔn*
 'Time the is time bad'
 'The times are bad'

Time has **length**, which satisfies the question How long? The sentences in 5 suggest that time has length in that time is regarded as distance, which can be either *tsentsen* (long) or *tsia/tsiaba* (short) as in 5a and 5b respectively. The emphatic/intensive forms *tsenteentsen* (very long) and *tsiatsiatsia/tsiatsiaba* (very short) also exist. It noted that *tsentsen* is a same lexical term used in the expression of both length and height in Mfante, but only the sense of length applies to the conceptualization of time.

- 5) a) *Mber tsentsen*

‘Time long’
‘A long time’

- b) *Mber tsiaba bi na wɔdze sii dan kese yi*
‘Time short’
‘A short time’

The commodity concept of time further allows for the metaphor **TIME IS A CONSUMABLE** in Mfantse. The basic meaning of ‘consume’, which is the root word for consumable is to eat, drink, or ingest (food or drink), while consumable means an item or commodity intended to be used up relatively quickly (and replaced). An interesting phenomenon that emerges under this conceptualization of time is that of food (or something edible). In Mfantse and Akan generally, the concrete verb *dzi* ‘eat’ is a prototypical action verb that depicts the physical action of consuming something through the mouth. In the following linguistic expressions in 6i below, time as a commodity is specifically depicted as a consumable, in fact, edible food which can be eaten. The expression actually means to spend time doing something or enjoy (eat) good times for which the metaphor **TIME IS FOOD** is realized. The spending of time is thus mapped unto the eating of food.

- 6) a) *Dzi mber*
‘Eat.consume time’
‘Spend time’

The conceptualization of time as a consumable, even edible entity further allows for the expressions such as 6b to 6d below, where the action ‘dzi’ eat is mapped unto time from the domain of edible commodity in Mfantse. This specifically depicts time as an edible entity, which one can actually enjoy or savour.

- b) *Yeribedzi afe/borɔnya*
‘We coming to eat year/Christmas’
‘We are about to celebrate an anniversary/Christmas’

- c) *O-e-dzi ne mber*
2SG-PST.PERF 2SG.POSS time
‘He has lived a life of affluence or power (in the past)’

- d) *O-ri-dzi ne mber*
2SG-PROG-eat 2SG.POSS time
‘He is living a life of affluence/power presently.’

This is not surprising because, in Mfantse, the sense of *dzi* in these contexts is often associated with pleasure and the savouring of ‘good’ things. This ‘good’ may only be in the eyes of the being

‘enjoying’ it. In the eyes of the observer, it may be negatively motivated towards the ‘enjoying’ being, for instance, in the case of the abuse of power of any form. By time’s property of being consumable, we can have a state of the food (*time*) having been eaten *Oedzi* (perfective) and of being eaten *Oridzi* (progressive) as expressed in 6c and 6d.

Time has **texture** and **taste**. It seems only natural to discuss the issue of taste and texture with the discussion under edible food since both concepts especially taste associate with food and eating, while texture may be used in contexts too. The examples in 7a and 7b show proof of this as far as Mfantse time conceptualization is concerned. In 7a *dzen* hard in *ɔye dzen* (it is hard) indicates texture whereas *dew* sweet indicates taste in 7b.

7) a) *Mber a ɔye dzen*
 ‘Times which is hard’
 ‘Hard times’

b) *Mber a ɔye dew*
 ‘Time which is sweet’
 ‘Good time/Nice time’

It is important to note that in general, Mfantse like English observes *dzen* ‘hard’ times but not ‘soft’ times. However, when it comes to taste, English may speak of sweet versus bitter times but Mfanste and Akan generally only recognizes sweet times. Instead, the reverse of *dzen* hard times is simply good or pleasant times and that of *dew* is *bɔn* bad times.

As a consumable commodity, time can also be **spent**, finished up or used up. The understanding of *sa* in Mfantse, as in expression 8 below, is to use up or finish up something in a process, which is very similar to the understanding of spending in English. Further, time can be **wasted** or unprofitably spent as it is with food or any other consumable commodity. This idea is conveyed by *sɛɛ* in expression 9 below.

8) *Mber asa*
 ‘Time finished’
 ‘Time is finished/there’s no more time’

9) *M-ma nnsɛɛ hɛn mber*
 NEG-give NEG-spoil 3PL.POSS time
 ‘Don’t waste our time’

Furthermore, we may **have or lack** time, in which case time is acquired and possessed as indicated by *Nya* in expression 10 below, which literally means ‘to get’. As well time needs to be **sought**

and found as it is with a precious commodity. This concept of ‘to seek’ is conveyed by *Hwehwe* in expression 11 below, while *fa* in the same expression means ‘to take’ in its very basic sense.

10) *Nya mber fa sua adze*
Obtain/Get time take learn thing
Get/make time to study

11) *Fa/hwehwe mber bra ma yenkasa*
‘Take/look for.seek time’
‘Find time’

The fact that time can and essentially needs to be sought for predicts that time can be **lost** if not well guarded. Time in this sense can and should be managed well so that we don’t finish or waste it as suggested by *sa and see* in 8, 9 after we have to seek and find it as expressed by *nya, fa* in 10 and 11 respectively. Thus, time, once found, has and needs to be controlled and managed else we simply lose it as conveyed by *Hwer* (lose) in expression 12 below. In fact, there is also the sense ‘waste’ (see expression 9) carried by *hwer* and this ultimately suggests that to lose time is to waste time and vice versa.

12) *Hwer mber*
‘Lose time’

Indeed, if time is a measurable and indeed a consumable commodity that one can possess then it stands to reason that one can ‘need’ it and that the one who possesses it can ‘give’ it out if they so wish. These thoughts about time allow us to make expressions such as 13 and 14 below:

13) *O-hia mber kakra dze a-toto ndzemba yie*
3SG-want time little hold PST.PERF-place.RED things well
‘S/he need time little (more) to place things well’
‘S/he needs a little (more) time to put things in order’

14) *Ma no mber kakra na ɔ-m-fa n-dwen ho.*
Give 3SG.SBJ time small and 3SG.SBJ-EMPH-take EMPH-think POST ‘Give him/her time little and he use.take to think about’
‘Give him/her a little time to think about it.’

Because time is a consumable, it can be spent/used up and finished up as seen earlier thereby resulting in ‘need’ if one does not make a conscious effort to manage/control or provide it. This makes it obvious that time is a possession and can be provided by another as is evidenced by the senses of ‘need’ and ‘give’ expressed in sentences 13 and 14, respectively.

TIME IS A BEING

The concept 'motion' is popular and quite common in languages around the world. Motion is common with beings, thus, to understand time the Mfantse language conceptualizes it as a being with a capacity to be in motion. In this sense, time which is abstract (target domain) is conceptualized as a being (source domain) which is concrete. The following linguistic expressions show clearly that Mfantse leans to the moving-time model where time is in motion.

- 15) a) *Mber kɔ*
 'Time gone'
 'Time is spent.'
- b) *Mber ba / mber bi be-ba (abesen/abotwa mu)*
Time come/ time some FUT-come
 'Time come/time a will come (pass-through)'
 'A time will come (and pass)'
- c) *Mber e-du* (as a destination) /*aso* (to the top of the number)
Time PST.PERF-reach
 'Time has arrived'
 'Time is up'
- d) *Mber/bosom a-so* (to the appropriate level)
Time/month PST.PREF-reach
 'Time has reached'
 'It is time'/Time is up'

In the sentences under 15, time is conceptualized as a being on a journey who can go *kɔ* and come *ba* (sentences 15a and b) and has a destination in the direction either lengthwise or height-wise (sentence iii and iv). It should be understood here that time 'going' and 'coming' is not in the sense of time returning on the same path or trajectory but rather in the sense of opportunity of occurrence or even reoccurrence. In 15c, time is conceptualized as having and reaching a destination (*edu*). This expression is preferred in Mfantse when a certain positive attitude is required for an action in a particular, usually positive and desirable direction. For example, '*Mber edu de yetu yarba yi ase*' (*It is time we eradicated this disease*), is a call to the audience who apparently have been resting on their oars till now to take some action about the situation at this point. The expression is, therefore, a call to action. The meaning of *so* is essentially the same as 'du'. On the other hand, even though 'aso' may be used interchangeably with 'edu', it seems to allude to the full or right number, level, amount or capacity associated with things in a container. The use of 'edu' or 'aso' is context dependent in Mfantse and Akan generally. Consequently, it is more appropriate to use 'aso' in the sense of expending the time allowed for an activity, as an indication for closure of an event, and 'edu' as a call for other action. It is worth noting, however, that whereas both expressions may be used interchangeably in the case of the appropriateness of time to act, 'edu' is hardly used as an indication that time is far spent.

A further extension of time's destination is the sense of permanent or terminal cessation – *wu* 'death' – where time actually dies. This is in particular reference to *bosoom* 'month' and *afe* 'year' in expression 16. Thus, the following expression is permissible in Mfantse:

- 16) *Bosoom/Afe no e-wu*
 Month/year DEF PST.PERF-die
 'Month/Year the is dead'
 'The month/year is dead'

It is interesting to note that while we talk of dead/dying month or year in Mfantse, we do not talk of either their 'birth' or 'resurrection' but rather make reference to their newness – *bosoom/ afe fofor* (New month/year). The idea of a month or year dying presents that the Akan conceptualizes time as a living being, in which case, we can have the conceptual metaphor TIME IS A LIVING BEING. Living things are birthed and they die; therefore, if an aspect of time is capable of death, it is presupposed that has been birthed before. The ending of time as the target domain is thus mapped unto the death of a being.

- 17) a) *Afe n-kɔ m-bɔ-to hɛn (bio)*
 Year EMPH-go EMPH-FUT-reach 3PL.OBJ
 'Year should go should come/reach/meet us (again)'
 'A new year should find us alive/ We should live to see another year. /May the year make its rounds and return to find us (alive).'

A fuller translation of the expression under 17a should actually be '*The year should go and come to find us alive*'. The expression presents 'being' as a stationary object, while time may be considered as travelling or moving on a horizontal line. However, in 17b below, we find the idea of time being circular or travelling on a circular trajectory. As noted early on in this paper, time is unidirectional, i.e., time moves in one direction only and that once a time is lost, it cannot be regained. This, therefore, excludes any possibility of the notion of time returning on the same track on which first passed by. Rather, it presents the notion of time touching some various temporary destinations and eventually returning to the point where it initially took off as its final destination.

- b) *Afe a-kɔ aprɔw a-bɔ-to hɛn*
 Year PERF-go roam PERF-FUT-reach 3PL.OBJ
 'Year has gone around has come to reach us'
 'The year has made its round and has still come and find us (alive)'

In 17b, year 'afe' (time-year) is conceptualized as running a circular course and returning to its original starting point. Man (ego) is still a stationary object in this sense while time is in motion and making its round. It should be further understood that the understanding of *round/circulation (aprɔw)* here is not solely in the strict sense of an arc or trajectory, but may apply

to the sense ‘*to make the rounds*’ (in the sense of touching or reaching several different places before returning to the original starting point). The deeper idea expressed here is in terms of the vicissitudes of life i.e. May the new year (another year) find us no matter what challenges of life we might suffer. Either way, however, the concept of time ‘departing’ and ‘returning’ to a particular starting point is maintained in both thoughts. Radden (2011) discusses the iconic motivation of the round clock in the Western understanding of the 24-hour day cycle, but which merely suggests the repetition of the same or event rather than metaphorize time in English as round. Even though the idea of a circular clock is not traditional to Akan, the concept of a week (which is eight days in Akan), a month (month is 40 days in Akan) and a year is proof of the existence of the idea of time having some cyclic nature within the Akan culture. The *apɔw* concept under the current discussion seems to better express *nkɔ mbɔto* in 17a given the fact that this expression does not indicate time returning on the same path.

TIME IS AN ENEMY

Time is further conceptualized as an enemy in Mfantse. The expression in 18 below is typically used in demonstrates this. In the circumstances of time where one is running against time or running out of time (i.e., when time works against you or when you don’t have much of it). In such a situation, we tend to conceptualize time as an enemy who is against us in the path of progress.

- 18) *Mber e-tsia hen*
 Time 3PL-against 3PL.OBJ
 ‘Time has against/opposed us’
 ‘Time is against us’

This is indicated in *tsia* ‘against’ in ‘*etsia*’. The expression 18 is a signal to speed up activity and strive hard to work faster to achieve as much as possible under the constraint but hardly the other option of giving up under the constraint. An enemy is one who comes up against us, or the one (or an entity) that comes up against us in a situation is an enemy. In this sense, time is somehow considered ‘*an enemy of progress*’, which thwarts one’s effort at achieving a particular goal. In a situation like this, one is usually seen as disadvantaged against whatever circumstance they are dealing with. In this sense, therefore, time can be reckoned as a negative force in the context of this expression 18 and, therefore, an enemy.

TIME IS A CONTAINER

The containment metaphor seems a popular metaphor underlying several concepts across languages. The metaphor was found to operate in Mfanste time conceptualization as follows:

- 19) a) *Ber no mu*
 ‘Time the in’
 ‘Within the period/time’
 b) *Ber kor noara mu*

‘Time one the same in’
 ‘At the same time’

Expression 19a is used to talk about a situation of time where more than one phenomenon is co-occurring albeit concurrently. In the expression, the Akan preposition *mu* ‘inside or into’, (which also translates into ‘at’) as in 19b, allows time to be conceptualized as space within which the co-occurring activities can be conveniently contained. This idea makes it possible for us to reclassify expression 3 ‘...mber suar’ under the containment metaphor because, aside the concept of size, it further expresses the idea of time lacking the capacity, in terms of duration, to ‘contain’ the prescribed action or activity. However, in the specific case of expression 19a, the idea of co-occurrence suggests time’s capacity to contain more than just one activity at any given time. Time here is of a large capacity and therefore can hold more activities at once. Expression 19b is a variant of this expression which also aptly and even more specifically depicts the concurrency of occurrence at a given time. The *kor* ‘one’ followed immediately with the intensifier *noara* ‘the same’ serves to emphasize the fact that the entities are taking place at the one-and-the-same time, i.e., *within* the same period, thereby depicting the concept of containment by highlighting capacity.

20) *Ber a ɔpa abaw no ...*
 ‘Time at s/he lost strength the’
 ‘At the time (When) his strength is gone.’

Sentence 20 describes a specified point in time – *When they are weary*. ‘*Ber a*’ ‘at a/the time’ expresses a particular point on a line or in a larger space when an event occurred in relevance to time and another event. The metaphoric presence is seen in the use of the deixical, even multi-purpose preposition ‘*a*’ (as the context may determine), which translates into ‘at’ in this particular case. It shows concurrence of events in relevance to each other within the same spate of time. The concept is more aptly conveyed by ‘while/whilst’, which typically depicts cooccurrence in English.

21) *No ho akyer no*
 ‘His/her body has constrained him/her’
 ‘S/he is time-constrained.’

Expression 21 is an expression of time in Mfantse where there is no explicit mention of ‘time’. It should be noted that the expression has other meanings in Mfantse especially referring to someone finding themselves in trouble where there appears to be little or no room for escape, e.g., finding oneself in the grip of the police or standing in critical need of money or some other thing. The basic meaning of ‘*kyer*’ is actually ‘to catch’, to grab’ or ‘to bind’, in all of which there is the ready presence of the notion of being restrained. It is in this view that time is considered in the above expression, revealing the state of one being under the constriction of time. The expression relates to a container and its content in terms of stricture and expresses the limitedness of time. Here time is conceptualized as a container, which is rather small for its content, i.e., the person amid the event

or activity on hand. The content (ego), not finding enough freedom to relax in the container, feels bound and restricted/constricted in space of time, the container.

TIME IS A PATH/WAY

The concept of time in expression 22 is that time is a 'way' or 'path', which understanding is more closely related to the English concept of an opportunity or a chance to do something. Thus, in the metaphor, the chance or opportunity (in specific relation to the availability of time) is a path one can take to a particular destination, i.e., what the time is spent to achieve.

- 22) *Nya* *kwan*
 'Have/Get way/path'
 'Get or find time'

In its typical cultural sense, the interpretation is more in the sense 'of being less busy' or 'having some time to spare' as in '*Minya kwan a mebeba abesra wo*' (I'll visit you when I'm less occupied' or 'when I get the chance/opportunity'). A variant linguistic expression for expressing the idea of 'time to spare' more aptly is '*Minya ho a*' (If I get the time/When I'm free). However, this paper cannot adequately prove the exact conceptualizing idea that underlies the meaning of '*ho*' and is, therefore, unable to prove its relevance in terms of metaphoric conceptualization within the scope of the study.

TIME IS A STATE OF BEING

- 23) *Mber* *adan/asesa/asakyer*
 'Time has changed'
 'Times have changed'

The lexical items *dan*, *sesa*, and *sakyer* are variants forms for change in Akan. When used intransitively as in 23, the impression created is that of the subject possessing inherent tendencies to 'change' its nature by itself, unaided. Therefore, the conceptualization underlying this linguistic expression suggests that time is capable of self-transformation without aid. The import here concerns the transience and non-permanency of time or a state of being, therefore, suggesting that times and seasons are not permanent. The 'self-transforming', unaided-by-man quality of change of times further suggests that times and seasons simply '*happen*' to us without us having to play a role in the turn of events. A similar idea of not being controlled by man is carried out by '*mber aso*' (15d) where time (a state of being) occurs by itself and when it is due no one can help it.

Table 1: Summary of conceptual frames of time in Akan

| Source domain of time | Lexical expression | Vehicle | Properties of source domain of time |
|----------------------------|--|---|--|
| Time as commodity | Mber asa Mber dodow(pii/kakra) Mber tsentsen/tsia Mber pa/bɔn Dzi mber Mber suar Sɛɛ mber Kan mber/nda Pɛ/Hwehwe mber Nya mber Fa/Gye mber Mber aso | Sa (Finish/consuming /use up to (How much) Tsentsen/tsiatsia Papa/ bɔn (Good/bad) Dzi (Eat) Suar (small) Sɛɛ (waste) Kan (Count) Pɛ/ Hwehwe(seek/look) Nya (Get/Have) Fa/Gye(Take) Aso (number, level, amount or capacity | To be finished/consumed/ used up quantity/amount Length Quality Food/Consumable Quantity Could be waste Can be counted To be sought for/looked for Possession Taking Being right in number, level, amount or capacity |
| Time as a traveler | Mber kɔ Mber ba Mber edu/aso Mber apaho /abɛsen/etwamu | kɔ (Go) Ba (Come) Edu/Aso (Reached/Up) Apaho / abɛsen / etwamu (Pass) | Power to go Power to come Has a destination Can pass by Ego or an object |
| Time as an enemy | Mber tsia hɛn Hɛn mber ayɛ mber | Etsia (Opposed or Against) Mber (Time) | Time is opposing to man Time is a boss or all-powerful |
| Time as container or space | Mber no mu Ber a Ahokyer | Mu (inside or at) A (Point of reference or spot) Ahokyer (Constrain) | Space in a container A particular point or spot in space or on a line Relation to the content and the container |
| Time as length or distance | Mber tsentsen Mber tsia | Tsentsen (long) Tsia (short) | The distance of a journey (long) The distance of a journey (sort) |
| Time as situation | Mber dan or sesa or sakyer | Dan or sesa or sakyerv(change) | The impermanence of situations or conditions |
| Time as path | Nya kwan Sɛ kwan ba mu a | Nya kwan (way) Sɛ kwan ba mu a | The time to do something is a path to get or travel to a destination |

DISCUSSION

Table 1 sums up the data analyzed for the study. It is obvious from the analysis and discussion that Mfantse reserves a fairly large stock of linguistic expressions for conceptualizing time. The data revealed that the Mfantse dialect conceptualizes time by as many twelve underlying concepts for the TIME IS A COMMODITY metaphor alone. The metaphor makes allusions to three crucial elements of the commodity as the source domain – measurable, manageable and possessed. The expressions that point to the measurability of time in Mfantse suggest that time can be measured in terms of quality (*papa, bɔn*), quantity (*dodow*) (by counting, etc), size (*suar*) and length (*tsentsen, tsiaba*). It is worthy of note that Mfantse time shares several of its underlying conceptualizations (i.e., length, quality, amount, etc.) with of English; however, the conceptualizations differ when it comes the idea of ‘spending’ time. With the lexical item ‘spend’,

English time alludes to the conceptual metaphor TIME IS MONEY, while Mfantse time lends its *dzi* (to eat) to the conceptual metaphor TIME IS FOOD. Mfantse time is further conceptualized as possessing texture (*dzen* hard) and taste (*dew* sweet) to further establish the TIME IS A COMMODITY METAPHOR. Other expressions of time in Mfantse suggest that time is a precious commodity that requires careful management in order not to prevent waste or loss of it. Some of the lexical items suggesting this include waste (*sɛɛ*) and lose (*hwer*). As it is, the very essence of time as a commodity and specifically edible requires that we manage it prudently as it can be finished up and we may encounter luck and need if it. Some of the expressions further intimate the fact that time is a possession that can be sought for (*pɛ*, *hwehwe*), acquired (*nya*), given (*ma*) and taken (*fa*).

In addition to the commodity, time in Mfantse is further conceptualised as a being, an enemy, a container or space, and also as length or distance, a state of being and as a path. As a being, time in Mfantse is conceptualized as an entity in motion, i.e. ego. Thus, time (ego) can go (*kɔ*) or come (*ba*) or both and has a destination to reach (*du*) and may actually die (*wu*). It is important to note here that going-and-coming in this context does not necessarily mean that time returns on the same track but should rather be understood in terms of the vicissitudes of life, i.e., the journey of time and all that goes on within it. As demonstrated in the examples under 17.

Time is further considered in Mfantse as space within which activities or events are performed or as a container, which may restrict its contents if it is the case that it is not large enough. The concept of containment with time in Mfantse is mainly demonstrated through the prepositional items 'inside' (*mu*) and 'at' (*a*), which show occurrences within the same allowance of time. The special case of 'kyer' helps to bring home the appreciation of time when we are constrained by time. Of course, this is when we begin to figure time as an enemy wanting to thwart our effort as we see in the singular and unique case of against (*tsia*) in 18. Other conceptualizations of time within Mfantse include path, and finally, time as a state of being. Time is typically conceptualized as a means and therefore a way/path to a destination. This is akin to the concept of opportunity or chance in English but different in that while lexical items way/path refer directly to time in Mfantse and Akan in general, their usage in allusion to opportunity/change is hardly used to refer to time in English. The state-of-being conceptualization is used for the changing seasons of life and projects time as an entity with the ability to transform itself unaided. It shows man's helplessness in times and seasons when situations happen to and can do nothing but wait or at best adapt to our ways to the suit new life.

There remains the case of some few lexical items whose conceptual underpinnings could not be immediately identified for their relevance to the study in terms of the source domains they lend themselves to. Those linguistic items, which include 'kyer', 'ho' and 'kyer' do not explicitly mention time but taken together, the expressions reveal aspects of time in the metaphors they represent.

From the foregoing discussion, therefore, this study suggests that the conceptions of time as *food* (with eat (*dzi*) and sweet (*dew*) within the COMMODITY metaphor), a *path/way* (*kwan*) and the *dying* (*wu*) of time (within the BEING metaphor) are a specific novelty to the literature. However, to a large extent, the study shows a lot of similarities between Akan (Mfantse) and languages such as English as mentioned in the literature, in their metaphorical conceptualization of time. For example, the paper seeks to confirm the general, seemingly universal conceptualization of time as an essential commodity, a being, a state of being, a container and an enemy. Furthermore, Radden's 2011 argument for the cyclic movement of time in relation to the future in Toba, a conceptual phenomenon which appears uncommon in many languages, is noted to closely relate to the notion of cyclic movement of time in Akan, where it also makes reference to expectations of the future.

CONCLUSION

This paper confirms the uniqueness of the understanding of time across cultures despite the existence of numerous points of similarity of underlying concepts among various linguistic cultures. The analysis proves that the Mfanse dialect specifically – and the Akan language in general since the different dialects are mutually intelligible – is replete with linguistic shreds of evidence for the conceptual metaphor TIME IS A COMMODITY. There is also evidence for the conceptual metaphors TIME IS A BEING, TIME IS AN ENEMY, TIME IS A CONTAINER (SPACE), TIME IS A PATH/WAY and TIME IS A STATE OF BEING. However, pieces of evidence for some of these metaphors are much fewer and even scanty in terms of linguistic expressions for source-target domain relationships. Evidentially, whereas there are fourteen counts of varied linguistic items identified under *commodity*, there are as few as three for *container/space* and a sole linguistic example each for *path*, *enemy* and *state of being*. This, notwithstanding, does not mean that the enemy metaphor or any of the less exemplified ones are less relevant. In reality, they are of no mean importance to the study as they provide great insight into the Mfantse (Akan) conceptualization of time. These cases could probably be an important point of variation in the linguistic universality of the conceptualization of time. The case of TIME IS FOOD seems unique to Mfantse Akan as English comes close only in TIME IS MONEY. In this case, however, what one does with money is *spend* it, not *eat* it as it is in Akan. So is TIME IS PATH where the English concept of path/way as opportunity has little to do with time. The data further reveals ample commonalities of the Mfantse time conceptualizations with other languages around the world. For instance, the TIME IS A COMMODITY/MONEY and TIME IS A CONTAINER metaphor is quite common among languages of the world.

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