

# Chapter 7

## Metaphors and Metonyms of *ti* and *yi* 'HEAD' expressions in Nzema and Dangme

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The study examines how *ti* and *yi* 'head' is conceptualised physically and metaphorically in Nzema and Dangme, two Kwa languages of Ghana. It highlights the similarities and differences based on socio-cultural experiences and conceptualisation patterns of the Nzema and Dangme people. In this study, we position our scholarship on metaphors and metonyms of 'head' among the Nzema and the Dangme as culturally constructed. In Nzema and Dangme, the head serves as a container for conceptualisations of intelligence and wickedness. Phenomena like fortune, insanity and death are construed in terms of cognitive representation of the head. Hard-work, unity, trust, and transparency are virtues that are communicated through head-related expressions in Nzema and Dangme.

### 1 Introduction

Nzema is a Kwa (Niger-Congo) language spoken mainly in the Western Region of Ghana and some parts of Côte d'Ivoire (Aboagye 1992). Nzema also refers to the speakers of the language. Their total population, according to the census (Ghana



Regina Oforiwah Caesar, Mohammed Yakub & Raymond Teye Akrobettoe. 2024. Metaphors and Metonyms of *ti* and *yi* 'HEAD' expressions in Nzema and Dangme. In Yaqian Huang, Nina Hagen Kaldhol, Jun Jie Lim, Sharon Rose & Anthony Struthers-Young (eds.), *ACAL in SoCAL: Selected papers from the 53rd Annual Conference on African Linguistics*, 149–177. Berlin: Language Science Press. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.11210454 

Statistical Service 2021), is 342,090. Nzemaland is bordered to the West by Côte d'Ivoire, to the East by the Ahanta, to the North by the Aowin (or Anyi) and Wassa, and to the South by the Gulf of Guinea. Nzema is studied from Basic to the Tertiary levels of education in Ghana. The basic word order of Nzema follows the Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) pattern (Kwaw 2008: 10).

Dangme is also a Kwa language, spoken in the Greater Accra Region and some parts of the Eastern and Volta Regions of Ghana (Kropp Dakubu 1987). Pockets of speakers are also found in Ntse and Gatsi in Togoland (Ameka & Kropp Dakubu 2008). Dangme has seven dialects, namely Adaa, Nugo, Gbugblaa, Osudoku, Sɛ, Manya Klo and Yilo Klo. Like Nzema, Dangme has Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) basic word order in a canonical clause structure (Lawer 2017). The language has three level tones (high, mid, low). These tones perform lexical and grammatical functions (Caesar 2016). Even though the Nzema and Dangme people are far apart in terms of their geographical locations in Ghana, it is assumed that their conceptualisations about human body parts (head) would be closely related, since both are Kwa languages with similar basic structural patterns. This serves as one of the motivations for undertaking this study.

In the present study, we examine the conceptual interpretations of expressions that incorporate *ti* and *yi* 'head', as they collocate with different lexical items (mainly adjectives, verbs and adpositions) in specific contexts to give same and/or different meanings in Nzema and Dangme. We attempt to unravel the metaphoric and metonymic relationships that exist in the examples examined. Head expressions that prevail in only one of these languages are also explored to show the differences in the conceptualisations of 'head' in Nzema and Dangme. These research questions guided the study:

1. What positive and negative experiences are conceptualised and described in Nzema and Dangme through head-related expressions?
2. To what extent are Dangme head-related expressions different from or similar to that of Nzema?
3. What are the common lexical items that collocate with *ti* and *yi* 'head' to achieve various interpretations?

This paper is organised into sections. Beyond the introduction, §2 discusses the notion of embodiment cognition and §3 presents a review of the interrelationship between metaphor and metonymy. §4 provides orientation about the theoretical frameworks adopted to underpin the analysis of data. The next section, §5, describes the methodology employed in carrying out the study, followed

by the presentation and analysis of data in §6. In §7, we present a discussion of our findings in light of existing literature on head conceptualisations, and we conclude the study in §8.

## 2 Embodiment and cognition

In a broader sense, Rohrer (2007) perceives the *embodiment hypothesis* as “the claim that human physical, cognition and social embodiment ground our conceptual linguistic systems” (cited in Ochieng 2022: 53). According to Kraska-Szlenk (2020a: 2), “in neuroscience and cognitive psychology, the strong connection between the human mind and body is known as *embodiment cognition*”. The notion of *embodiment*, as scholars such as Yu (2004) and Gibbs (2005) point out, refers to the bodily basis of human perceptions about the environment, and also structures our conceptual system. Evans & Green (2006) argue that:

The nature of conceptual organisation arises from bodily experiences, so part of what makes conceptual structure meaningful is the bodily experience, with which it is associated. (Evans & Green 2006: 157)

Evans and Green’s position provides an insight that body-parts also play a fundamental role in our conceptual system and understanding of our natural and social environment. Corroborating this observation, Yu (2020) states as follows:

The human body, along with bodily experiences, is a salient source domain for conceptual mappings onto the more abstract target domains such as human cognition, emotion, disposition, and so on. Body part terms found in metaphoric usages in language constitute linguistic manifestations of underlying conceptual metaphors. (Yu 2020: 12-13)

Research on embodiment has received attention from scholars across the world, especially from a cognitive-semantic perspective. Studies such as Yu (2004) on Chinese, Kraska-Szlenk (2014) on Swahili, Agyekum (2015, 2016, 2018) on Akan, Abdul-Hakim & Dogbey (2019) on Kasem, Bisilki (2019) and Bisilki & Yakpo (2021) on Likpakpaln, among others, have examined body-part expressions from a conceptual viewpoint. Several works have concentrated specifically on the conceptualisation of HEAD across languages. Among them are Luo (2020) on Chinese, Kóczy (2019) on Hungarian, Gaby & Bradley (2019) on Yanyuwa, Will (2020) on Hausa, Sime (2020) on Amharic, Al-Saleh et al. (2020) on English and Spanish, Bisilki (2022) on Likpakpaln, and Ochieng (2022) on Dholuo, among others. The

previous studies commonly found out that the metonymic conceptualisation of HEAD<sup>1</sup> can be extended to describe feelings and processes that are experienced within the head. In these studies, HEAD FOR PERSON metonymy is seemingly pervasive. The metonymic extensions can also relate to concepts that are external to humans, such as LOCATION, UNIT OF MEASUREMENT, TOPIC, TITLE, and HEADING. The analysis of the metaphors of HEAD showed that it is primarily connected to REASONING and in some cases to EMOTION and MEMORY.

### 3 Metaphor and metonymy

Metaphor and metonymy, among other tropes, are attributed to cognitive processes (Kövecses 2006, Cruse 2011, Peña-Cervel & Ibañez 2022). Metaphors, for instance, as Lakoff & Johnson (1980) contend, are not simply poetic parts of speech, or obscure idiomatic expressions, but rather part of human entire cognitive reasoning through which they are able to understand and talk about the social world in which they live. Gibbs et al. (2004) opine that metaphor is not merely a linguistic rhetoric figure, but an aspect of cognition which constitutes a fundamental part of people's ordinary thought, reason, and imagination. Writing on the cognitive aspects of metaphor, Steen (2011) asserts that:

Metaphor has turned out to be a conceptual mechanism, a 'figure of thought', by which specific and operational knowledge about more concrete phenomena and experience is projected onto a wide range of more abstract ones. (Steen 2011: 28)

In line with the above postulations, Yu (2020: 13) notes that "metaphor is primarily a matter of thought. It is how we think and reason". Metaphors are conceptually grounded on physical and mental experiences and metaphorical conceptual systems in the mind (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, Lee 2005, Agyekum 2015, 2018). A striking feature of metaphor is that it involves understanding an abstract concept (target domain) based on another, which is rather concrete (source domain), and this understanding is based on the perceived similarities between two concepts or entities (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, Lakoff 1993, Gibbs 2008, Steen 2011, Diaz-Vera 2022).

Metonymy, on the other hand, is a *stand-for relationship*, which establishes connection within a single domain (Dawson-Ahmoah & Wonkyi 2021). Metonymy

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<sup>1</sup>By convention, conceptual metaphors are written in capital letters.

is not necessarily anchored in perceived similarities, but rather spatial, temporal, or conceptual contiguity within the same cognitive model (Agyekum 2018: 24, Ochieng 2022: 52). In metonymic relations, as Kövecses (2006: 99) avers, one conceptual entity, the vehicle, provides mental access to another conceptual entity (thing, event, property), the target, within the same frame or cognitive domain. Thus, Kövecses describes metonymy as *within-domain mapping*. As Ochieng (2022: 52) points out, there are two basic metonymic mappings: PART-FOR-WHOLE and WHOLE FOR PART. Agyekum (2018) indicates that:

When we talk of any part of the body as being part of the entire body or personality, we are having a partonomic (*part-and-whole relation*) view between the body and its parts, and these are terms of *metonymy*. (Agyekum 2018: 24-25)

In this study, we show that figurative expressions involving the human head in Nzema and Dangme are grounded in metaphorical and metonymic abstractions. This seeks to enhance our understanding of the way these two cultures perceive their world based on embodiment and cognition.

## 4 Theoretical framework

The paper draws largely on Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) (Lakoff & Johnson 1980), which seeks to primarily explain that our cognitive faculty, and for that matter our conceptual systems play a vital role in experiencing and understanding our day-to-day realities. Another theory that is considered effective to underpin this study is the Cultural Conceptualisations and Language framework, which also deals with cultural schemas and features of language that have cultural basis. Some orientations of these two frameworks adopted are presented in Sections §4.1 and §4.2 respectively.

### 4.1 Conceptual Metaphor Theory

Metaphor was noted for its artistic function, and a kind of “decoration” that is added to an ordinary plain language, perhaps to achieve speech embellishment. In contrast to the traditional views of metaphor, Lakoff & Johnson (1980: 5) assert that “the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another”. This is to say that, in contemporary studies, metaphors have been described beyond mere linguistic and communication ornaments; they are seen as “a mechanism” of thought and reason (Lakoff &

Johnson 1980, Lakoff & Turner 1989, Lakoff 1993). Conceptual metaphor theorists see metaphor as a mental process that transfers images from one concept to another. Conceptual metaphors typically structure more abstract concepts (target) in terms of more concrete/physical (source) concept whereby we are able to understand unfamiliar concepts better (Kövecses 2002). Semino (2008) notes that conceptual metaphors are systematic sets of correspondence, or “mappings” across conceptual domains, whereby a “target” domain is partly structured in terms of a different “source” domain. This underscores that certain mental mappings are essential to influence our thinking and imagining in everyday life. Take for instance, the conceptual metaphor LOVE IS A JOURNEY. Here, Lakoff (1993) presents LOVE as abstract (target domain) and JOURNEY as concrete (source domain). Lakoff (1993: 224) argues that one can conceptualise the LOVERS as TRAVELERS, and the LOVE RELATIONSHIP as A VEHICLE. He makes his point clearer by stating:

Just as significant life events are special cases of events, so events in a love relationship are special cases of life events. Thus, the LOVE IS A JOURNEY metaphor inherits the structure of the LIFE IS A JOURNEY metaphor. What is special about the LOVE IS A JOURNEY metaphor is that there are two lovers who are travelers and that the love relationship is a vehicle. The rest of the mapping is a consequence of inheriting the LIFE IS A JOURNEY metaphor. Because the lovers are in the same vehicle, they have common destinations, that is, common life goals. Relationship difficulties are impediments to travel (Lakoff 1993: 223).

According to the Conceptual Metaphor Theory, unfamiliar and delineated concepts in our experiences can only be grasped by means of other concepts that we understand in clearer terms (Agyekum 2018: 13). The body part “head” provides a conceptual basis that can be projected metaphorically to explain and describe other abstract concepts in both Nzema and Dangme communication. Thus, adopting CMT as a theoretical lens to guide this paper is considered effective and appropriate.

## **4.2 Cultural conceptualizations**

Cultural Conceptual Metaphor is a facet of Cultural Linguistics, a sub-branch of linguistics which explores the relationship between language, culture, and conceptualisations (Sharifian 2011, Sharifian 2017). The early notion of Cultural Linguistics may be attributed to the works of Langacker (1994) and Palmer (1996),

who seem to make a common observation that cognitive linguistics recognises and embraces “cultural knowledge” as a significant facet of grammar. In this regard, Palmer (1996) argues that cognitive linguistics can be applied to the study of language and culture; where Palmer makes use of the term *imagery*, perhaps to make reference to cognitive concepts. Following this, Sharifian (2011) elucidated the concept of Cultural Linguistics from a multidisciplinary perspective, using the term *Cultural Conceptualizations*; which he notes enables members of a cultural group to think in one mind (see also Sharifian 2003). According to Sharifian (2017: 2), “Cultural Linguistics engages with features of human languages that encode or instantiate culturally constructed conceptualisations encompassing the whole range of human experience”. This suggests that many features of human languages are entrenched in cultural conceptualisations. Cultural Linguistics, thus, is responsible for exploring features of language that have cultural basis (Sharifian 2014). It employs three analytical tools such as “cultural schema”, “cultural category” and “cultural-conceptual metaphor”. Sharifian (2014) avers that the meaning of many lexical items of human languages lends itself best to cognitive schemas that are abstracted from cultural experiences. Metaphorical expressions are pervasive in ordinary language; they are not just used for artistic purposes. These everyday metaphors reveal cognitive and cultural conceptions of the world (Jackendoff & Aaron 1991).

Among the Nzema and Dangme people, as this paper reveals, head related expressions encode both positive and negative human experiences that are culturally constructed. To this end, our analysis further takes insight from Cultural Conceptual Metaphor, a facet of the Cultural Linguistics framework to help provide adequate description of how the Nzema and Dangme conceptualise the human head in their day-to-day communication.

## 5 Methodology

Data for the study were obtained from both primary and secondary sources. A total of 30 respondents were involved in the primary data collection. Twenty-four (24) of them were Level 300 students of the University of Education, Winneba. They comprise 12 Dangme and 12 Nzema students. The remaining six respondents were elderly native speakers of Dangme and Nzema, three from each language community. Their ages ranged from 60 to 75 years. The elderly people were purposely selected because of their rich linguistic and socio-cultural knowledge in the two languages. We tasked the students to write expressions that relate to “the head” in Dangme and Nzema. As native speakers, we also relied on our intuitions to generate additional data for the study. The secondary

data were obtained from Dangme and Nzema literary materials: *Dangme Abegbi* (Accam 1972) and *Nyamenle asa enlomboe ne* (Soboh-Blay 2013) respectively. Through semi-structured interviews, we cross-checked the data with the elderly respondents and audio-recorded the interview sessions, which were transcribed and translated for the analysis. In all, fifty (50) expressions related to the head were assembled, but thirty-five (35) were purposively selected for the analysis. The data were coded, categorised, and thematised for the analysis. In §6, the head-related expressions in both languages are provided, followed by morpheme-by-morpheme interlineal glossing and translations in English, accompanied by analysis.

## **6 Analysis of Nzema and Dangme head-related expressions**

This section deals with the data presentation and analysis in the light of metaphor and metonymy. We agree with Peña-Cervel & Ibañez (2022) who argue that metaphor (conventionally formulated as A is B) is a different trope than metonymy (A for B), and that the two must not be conflated, although they can co-occur. In our analysis, therefore, we attempt to explicate metaphoric expressions differently from metonymic expressions related to “head”. The analysis falls under two major headings: (i) head-related expressions that encode positive experiences (§6.1) and (ii) head-related expressions that encode negative/unpleasant experiences (§6.2). Each category has various sub-headings. We provide the examples in Nzema and Dangme and present the interlinear glossing as well as the English translation.

### **6.1 Head expressions that encode positive experiences**

The data demonstrate that head-related expressions among the Nzema and the Dangme encode pleasant concepts and experiences, including luck, intelligence, good intentions, and comfort. We take the discussion up by considering these thematic areas.

#### **6.1.1 Expressing luck/fortune**

Both Nzema and Dangme speakers consider GOOD HEAD metonymically as FORTUNE. The expressions in (1) illustrate the phenomenon:



(1) 'HEAD' for FORTUNE Metonymy

a. Nzema

ε            ti        ε-yε        boε  
2SG.POSS head PFV-make well  
'Your head has been good'. (You are fortunate)

b. Dangme

E            yi        hi  
2SG.POSS head good  
'Your head has been good'. (You are fortunate)

In both examples, (1a) and (1b), GOOD HEAD is used metonymically to stand for FORTUNE. As we see in these expressions, only the body part 'head' is modified by the value adjective good; however, GOOD HEAD stands for all other things that work out successfully for a person. For instance, if a woman is able to bear children after marriage, her fortunate situation is not described by mentioning the stomach/womb or the vagina that are directly involved in the process of child bearing/delivery. Rather, the HEAD would be mentioned as in the following examples:

(2) 'HEAD' for FORTUNE Metonymy

a. Nzema

ε            ti        ε-yε        boε    kε    wɔ-nyia    m-ralε    wɔwo    la  
2SG.POSS head PFV-be good that 2SG-born PL-child 2SG-born PART  
'Your head has been good for having gotten children'. (You are fortunate for bearing children)

b. Dangme

O            yi        hi            kaa    o        fɔ        bi-mε  
2SG.POSS head be.good that 2SG born child-PL  
'Your head has been good for having gotten children'. (You are fortunate for bearing children)

Besides, if a person is able to escape from any danger or accident, the head is used to express his/her fortunate situation.

Moreover, in Nzema and Dangme cultures, and for that matter according to their "anatomic conceptualisations", the human head is perceived as the most "significant" part of the body, as it accommodates certain vital organs such as eyes, mouth, ears, and brain. Though the heart, the kidney and other internal organs cannot be taken for granted, the brain remains crucial because whoever

loses his brain becomes dysfunctional in every respect. This “super important” brain is situated within the head, which means that the head keeps something good. Therefore, describing a person as having ‘good head’ implies that all good (positive) things work out successfully for the person. In other words, the person is said to be lucky. Agyekum (2018) shows that the Akan also have a similar conception, where LUCK is construed as GOOD HEAD and UNLUCKY is seen as BAD HEAD, where bad head implies that one has a bad omen (Agyekum 2018: 44). He uses the expressions in (3a) and (3b) to exemplify lucky and unlucky respectively.

(3) Akan

- a. Ne            tiri    yɛ  
              3SG.POSS head COP.good  
              ‘His head is good’. (He is lucky)
- b. Ne            tiri    n-yɛ  
              3SG.POSS head NEG-COP.good  
              ‘His head is not good’. (He is not lucky) (Agyekum 2018: 44)

### 6.1.2 Expressing intelligence

In discussing intelligence and/or unintelligence among the Nzema and Dangme, the mention of ‘head’ is key. As we have hinted earlier, the head contains the brain/mind, which is also associated with human intellectual activities. Since the head harbours the brain, the CONTAINER and the CONTAINED relationship (see Agyekum 2018: 44) is noticeable under this category. Consider the Nzema and Dangme examples in (4a) and (4b) respectively:

(4) ‘HEAD’ for INTELLIGENCE/THINKING Metonymy

- a. Nzema  
          ɔ-lɛ        etile  
              3SG-POSS head  
              ‘He/she has a head’. (He/she is intelligent)
- b. Dangme  
          E    ngɛ    yi  
              3SG POSS head  
              ‘He/she has a head’. (He/she is intelligent)

In examples (4a) and (4b), we find that both Nzema and Dangme speakers perceive the head as the centre for reasoning. In these constructions, head is a complement of the subject pronouns *ɔ* and *E* 'he/she' respectively. Here, head is a possessed entity, which presents us with the metaphor BEING INTELLECTUALLY INCLINED is POSSESSING A HEAD. These expressions show the metonymic use of head for a part of it which relates to thinking.<sup>2</sup> Here, we see a WHOLE-FOR-PART metonymy. Instead of mentioning the brain, which is a portion of the elements contained in the head, and which is used for thinking, the entire head is rather mentioned, leading to the conceptualisation and interpretation of intelligence. Since the brain resides in the head, whoever has a head is considered as "having a brain", which implies that the person has intellectual capabilities. Other possible expressions that describe intelligence deal with the concept of "maturity". Dawson-Ahmoah & Wonkyi (2021: 101) indicate that maturity is an "innate trait" that is demonstrated in deeds, which is believed to reside in the mind. The Nzema and Dangme share this perception, and so they akin maturity to intelligence as can be seen in (5) below:

(5) MATURE BRAIN is INTELLIGENCE Metaphor

a. Nzema

Ye            adwenle ε-di  
3SG.POSS brain    PFV-grow  
'His/her brain is mature'. (He/she is intelligent)

b. Dangme

E            juɛmi nya    wa  
3SG.POSS brain mouth be.grown  
'His/her brain is mature'. (He/she is intelligent)

The examples in (5a) and (5b) both make specific mention of BRAIN. In these examples, BRAIN is described as GROWN or MATURE to express a person's intellectual capability. The verb 'grow' is significant to the utterance interpretation as it expresses increment/expansion in size or height. When a tree, mahogany, for instance, is fully grown/matured, the trunk expands, and its roots can penetrate the soil and reach very far. In a similar sense, a 'mature brain' enables its owner to think far, so as to make reasonable decisions. This "far-reaching phenomenon" is what foregrounds the metaphoric correlation between MATURE BRAIN and INTELLIGENCE.

The next examples capture the notion of "openness" and "deepness" to conceptualise intelligence.

<sup>2</sup>We are grateful to an anonymous reviewer for pointing out to us this important observation.

(6) OPEN/DEEP BRAIN is INTELLIGENCE Metaphor

a. Nzema

Ye            adwenle nu        ε-buke  
 3SG.POSS brain    inside PFV-open  
 ‘His/her brain inside is deep’. (He/she is intelligent)

b. Dangme

E            juɛmi mi        kuɔ  
 3SG.POSS brain inside deep  
 ‘His/her brain inside is deep’. (He/she is intelligent)

In (6), we notice the conceptual metaphor OPEN-MINDEDNESS is INTELLIGENCE. In this example, intelligence is measured in terms of the openness of one’s mind, whose interpretation is enhanced by the use of the postposition *nu* or *mi* ‘inside’. The metaphoric abstraction and correlation between open-mindedness and intelligence is triggered by the fact that a widely open entity or space covers a broader or vast area. So, if one’s brain/mind is open, it implies that the person’s mind, which represents wisdom/intelligence, perhaps has no boundaries, and for that matter the person has vast knowledge (see also Dawson-Ahmoah & Wonkyi 2021). The Dangme expression in (6b) is somewhat in line with the Nzema version in (6a). As a widely open entity can be loaded with a lot of materials or goods, a deep entity, say a hole, can also be loaded with many goods. In (6b), therefore, intelligence is measured in terms of the depth of one’s brain. A DEEP BRAIN, as the Dangme expression suggests, is able to contain a lot of WISDOM, which arrives at the metaphors DEEP BRAIN is INTELLIGENCE and SHALLOW BRAIN is UNINTELLIGENCE. In (6a) and (6b), the relevant noun ‘brain’ occurs in a dependent position in a postpositional construction. The postpositional phrases *nu εbuke* ‘inside open’ and *mi kuɔ* ‘inside deep’ contribute to describing the state of affairs of the BRAIN in relation to intelligence.

### 6.1.3 Expressing good intentions and positive mindset

In both Nzema and Dangme cultures, white colour provides conceptual basis to talk about positive mindset and wholeheartedness. As opposed to black colour, which is linked to evil-mindedness as would be highlighted later in this paper, white colour symbolises victory and purity. Using the metaphor of WHITE COLOUR (PURITY) to express POSITIVE MINDSET, however, is strictly associated with the internal part of the head as seen in example (7):

(7) PURE HEAD for GOOD INTENTIONS Metonymy

a. Nzema

ɔ ti akunlu le fufule

3SG.POSS head inside COP white

'His/her head inside is white'. (He/she has good intentions)

b. Dangme

E yi mi nge hei

3SG.POSS head inside COP clear/clean

'His/her head inside is pure'. (He/she has good intentions)

In these examples, we observe that the Nzema and Dangme expressions incorporate 'white' and 'pure' respectively to communicate that one has good intentions or thinks positively. Both expressions make use of the postposition 'inside'; implying that the assumed clarity/whiteness, which is linked to positive thinking (one's mindset), is situated within the head. Therefore, PURE HEAD is a WHOLE-FOR-PART metonymy for GOOD INTENTIONS. In Nzema and Dangme, clear is expressed by white, and the semantic motivation for the extension of white to clear is that the person has nothing to hide. So, if there is whiteness or purity in a person's head, it means that they do not harbour negativities in their minds. In other words, such people easily forgive and forget. It also implies that they are sincere, not envious or jealous, and always wish that other people would make progress in their endeavours.

#### 6.1.4 Expressing comfort

As part of their cultural conceptualisations, the Nzema and the Dangme liken a state of comfort to "sweetness", which is believed to exist in the head of a less-troubled individual. The expressions in (8) came up as part of the data in this regard.

(8) SWEETNESS IN THE HEAD for COMFORT Metonymy

a. Nzema

ɔ ti akunlu ye ye fe

3SG.POSS head inside has 3SG sweet

'There is sweetness inside his/her head'. (He/she is comfortable)

b. Dangme

E yi mi ngɔɔ le

3SG.POSS head inside be.sweet 3SG

'There is sweetness inside his/her head'. (He/she is comfortable)

In examples (8a) and (8b), there is a WHOLE-FOR-PART metonymy in the sense that being comfortable in life deals with one's psychological state, which relates to "stable (undisturbed) mindedness" that resides in the head as a whole.<sup>3</sup> Both expressions imply that a person has no worries, or that their troubles are highly controllable. Any consumable that is sweet, people enjoy it with comfort. However, in consuming something bitter, the consumer feels uncomfortable. Therefore, sweetness existing in a person's head implies that they have a "limited burden", if not completely free from troubles, and for that matter they enjoy life.

## 6.2 Head expressions that encode negative/unpleasant experiences

Some unpleasant experiences such as unintelligence (lack of academic excellence), insanity, wickedness and death are expressed via the conceptualisation of the human head among the Nzema and Dangme. We discuss these phenomena in the following sub-sections.

### 6.2.1 Expressing unintelligence

The expressions in (9) can imply lack of academic excellence. Both (9a) and (9b) capture the concept of INCOMPLETENESS to describe one's lack of adequate academic excellence, such as:

#### (9) INCOMPLETE HEAD for UNINTELLIGENCE Metonymy

##### a. Nzema

ε            ti        le    ebule

2SG.POSS head COP half

'Your head is incomplete'. (You are unintelligent)

##### b. Dangme

O            yi        su-i

2SG.POSS head up.to.number-NEG

'Your head is incomplete'. (You are unintelligent).

In (9a) and (9b), the Nzema and Dangme examples respectively employ *ebule*, 'half' and *su-i*, 'not up to the number' as quantifying adjectives which collocate with 'head' to conceptualise and express unintelligence. In (9a), while the Nzema

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<sup>3</sup>Here, one also sees the conceptual metaphors, COMFORT is SWEETNESS and DISCOMFORT is BITTERNESS.

perceive an unintelligent person as possessing 'half head', the Dangme conceptualise an unintelligent person as someone who possesses a head which is 'not up to number', in other words, the person's head is not 'full' as in (9b). Here, the brain, which relates to thinking, is perceived as insufficient (not up to its maximum quantity that can foster one's reasoning). In the examples, however, the 'whole head' is mentioned and described as incomplete. This reveals a WHOLE-FOR-PART metonymy to conceptualise unintelligence.

In (10), we present examples in Nzema and Dangme that use the phenomenon of death to express unintelligence.

(10) DEAD HEAD for UNINTELLIGENCE Metonymy

a. Nzema

ɛ            ti            ɛ-wu

2SG.POSS head PFV-die

'Your head is dead.' (You are unintelligent).

b. Dangme

O            yi            tɔ            gbo

2SG.POSS head container die.PFV

'Your head is dead.' (You are unintelligent)

In example (10), HEAD (the container) rather stands for BRAIN (the contained), and the entity for reasoning. When a person dies, all their senses become dysfunctional; not responding to any stimuli (Yakub & Agyekum 2022). Just as an animate entity does not perform any activity when they are dead, so the brain, represented by the head, is described as 'dead' when a person is unable to think critically to achieve academic excellence. Here, the brain is seen as not able to receive information and process it accurately for a desired output.

The following examples in (11) and (12) are further expressions that encode unintelligence, which are also peculiar to the Dangme people. The expressions incorporate 'rotten head' and 'finished head' respectively. These also present a metonymic use of HEAD, as it stands for the BRAIN that is actually associated with intellect. Take the examples as follows:

(11) ROTTEN HEAD for UNINTELLIGENCE Metonymy<sup>4</sup>

Dangme

O        yi    mi    sa

2SG.POSS head inside be.rot.PFV

‘Your head inside is rotten’. (You are unintelligent)

(12) FINISHED HEAD for UNINTELLIGENCE Metonymy

Dangme

O        yi    ta

2SG.POSS head finish.PFV

‘Your head is finished’. (You are unintelligent)

In (11), the Dangme see an unintelligent person as someone who possesses a head with rotten content. The use of *mi* ‘inside’ (of the head) can enhance our understanding that reference is being made to the brain, since its habitat is within the head. This metonymic conceptualisation is prudent in the sense that it is the human head that possesses the brain used to think about the world around us. Thus, to be intelligent, according to the Dangme, one must have the head containing the brain and other components which must be alive, active, and functioning. The expression in (12) implies that one’s reasoning ability, especially for academic purpose, is non-existent.

### 6.2.2 Expressing senselessness

Unlike the foregoing examples in Section 6.2.1 which focus on the lack of academic excellence, the next examples in (13) represent the generic expressions that describe senselessness. Consider these expressions:

(13) HEADLESS for SENSELESS Metonymy

a. Nzema

ɛ-n-lɛ            etile

2SG-NEG-have head

‘You are headless’. (You do not reason)

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<sup>4</sup>A rotten entity can be likened to a dead entity, since they both share the semantic attribute, -life. Therefore, examples (11) and (12) are analogous in terms of semantic relevance. Although these examples are largely metonymic, one also observes the metaphors, DEAD/ROTTEN HEAD (BRAIN) is UNINTELLIGENCE and ALIVE HEAD (BRAIN) is INTELLIGENCE.



b. Dangme

O be yi

2SG NEG.have head

'You are headless'. (You do not reason)

The expressions in (13a) and (13b) also explain how the Nzema and Dangme conceptualise the phenomenon of SENSELESSNESS. It is evident in the two expressions that both societies use HEADLESSNESS to express one's irrational or unreasonable act. The expressions imply that to reason, one must possess the HEAD, which is used metonymically to represent the BRAIN. Here, the bare noun, HEAD is used, and this is relevant for the interpretation; suggesting that a person's mind does not exist. The head contains the schemas which is used to reason or think about the world around us, which also helps in perceiving and responding to complex situations. So, to express senselessness, the Nzema and Dangme see a person's head to be absent. In this way, the individual cannot use the schemas to organise his or her thought to make meanings of concepts.

### 6.2.3 Expressing insanity

Absolute madness is attributed to "damaged" head. The Nzema and Dangme share this conception and respectively use *zekye* and *pue* 'to spoil' in describing insanity, as can be seen in (14):

(14) DAMAGED/SPOILT HEAD for MADNESS Metonymy

a. Nzema

ɔ ti ɛ-zekye

3SG.POSS head PFV-spoil

'His/her head is spoilt'. (S/he is insane)

b. Dangme

E yi pue

3SG.POSS head spoil-PFV

'His/her head is spoilt'. (S/he is insane)

Unlike in (11), where the Dangme use ROTTEN HEAD/(BRAIN) to conceptualise UNINTELLIGENCE, (14a) and (14b) capture SPOILT HEAD to metonymically express INSANITY. Only a part of the head, BRAIN (CONTAINED) relates to thinking and what can become dysfunctional, but the entire HEAD (CONTAINER), is used in the expressions to imply madness. Generally, any spoilt entity goes bad and loses its value. Based on this conceptualisation, the Nzema and

Dangme describe one who is insane as having a head that has dysfunctional and useless content.

#### 6.2.4 Expressing wickedness

The concept of MISCHIEVOUSNESS is well construed among the Nzema and Dangme by linking it with DARKNESS, which is believed to exist in a person's head. Consider the following expressions in (15a) and (15b):

(15) DARKNESS IN THE HEAD is WICKEDNESS Metaphor

a. Nzema

ɔ            ti    akunli le    awozinli

2SG.POSS head inside COP darkness

'There is darkness in your head'. (You are wicked)

b. Dangme

O            yi    mi    wo            diblii

2SG.POSS head inside wear/keep darkness

'There is darkness in your head'. (You are wicked)

The Nzema and Dangme examples in (15a) and (15b) respectively use the colour adjectives *awozinli* and *diblii* 'dark' to indicate negative mindedness. In these expressions, DARKNESS IN THE HEAD is mapped onto 'WICKEDNESS'. As we have hinted earlier, the Nzema and Dangme also associate black colour, and for that matter darkness, with bad/unfortunate occurrences and situations such as death and bereavement. "Darkness in the mind", however, is specifically attributed to evil deeds and thoughts. The correlation between darkness in the head and wickedness is triggered by the negative attributes that both the Nzema and Dangme societies associate with darkness. They see wicked people as not possessing 'purity' in their heads (minds). This implies that such wicked people can even murder their fellow humans mercilessly, including undertaking other brutalities. The statement in (16) below is another Dangme expression that describes wickedness. It employs *ti* 'be thick' to fully arrive at the interpretation that a person's mind is not 'transparent', and that many evil thoughts can be hidden behind their minds which one would hardly become aware of. The expression says:

- (16) THICKNESS IN THE HEAD is WICKEDNESS Metaphor

Dangme

O        yi    mi    ti

2SG.POSS head inside be.thick

'Your head inside is thick'. (You are wicked)

Here, THICKNESS IN THE HEAD is metaphorically mapped onto WICKEDNESS. This also means that the Dangme perceive the contents of the head to be THIN for a person to be ascribed with the positive attribute, KINDNESS. However, for a person to be seen as WICKED, then the contents in their head must be THICK.

### 6.2.5 Head expressions concerning death

As a fear-based concept, the subject of DEATH is usually not discussed freely in many cultures without resorting to cover-up strategies like euphemisms to tone-down the shock, discomfort and embarrassment that might be caused (Yakub & Agyekum 2022). This is common among both the Nzema and Dangme people. Both have "roundabout" means to express death. The examples in (17) and (18) especially show how the Nzema employ metaphorical euphemisms related to *ti* 'head' to escape from the explicit pronouncement of death. Take the examples as follows:

- (17) TO HIT ONE'S HEAD ON THE GROUND is TO BE CONQUERED BY DEATH Metaphor

Nzema

ɔ        ti    ε-bo    aze

3SG.POSS head PFV-hit floor

'His/her head has hit the ground'. (He/she is dead)

- (18) SHORT HEADEDNESS is WIDOWHOOD Metaphor

Nzema

ɔ        ti    le    sinli

3SG.POSS head COP short

'His/her head is short/reduced'. (He/she is a widow/widower)

In the context of death-discourse among the Nzema, examples (17) and (18) are specific head-related expressions that are used to avoid overt pronouncement of death. In (17), the conceptual metaphors, DEATH is DOWN and LIFE is UP, are

noticeable. The Nzema perceive the phenomenon of death as a struggle/war between life (being alive) and death (being dead). So, if one's head is said to have hit the ground, in the context of discussing death, it implies that the individual's life is conquered by death (see also Yakub & Agyekum 2022: 138). This is one of the subtle ways to report the demise of a person in Nzema language and culture. In (18), we find that both a widow and a widower are described figuratively as people who are "short-headed" or that they have "reduced head". In this example, the conceptual metaphor, WIDOWHOOD is REDUCED HEAD is evidenced. Married couples are expected to put heads together to plan for their present and future lives. Therefore, "short/reduced-headedness", according to the Nzema cultural conceptualisation, implies that the widow has lost an additional 'head', which represents her husband's wisdom and knowledge through which he contributed significantly during their decision making among other things. The same is conceived of a man who loses his wife by death. Put simply, the Nzema see people who lose their spouses as possessing "reduced or shortened" heads because a 'head' that supports their decision making has passed on. Hence, one also observes HEAD for PERSON metonymy in (18).

In (19), the Dangme expression related to *yi* 'head' to rather talk about the cessation of descent line is also provided.

(19) FINISHED HEAD for END OF LINEAGE Metonymy

Dangme

Aku yi ta

Aku.POSS head PFV.finish

'Aku's head has finished'. (Aku has passed on without giving birth)

The Dangme talk about the discontinuity of a descent line by employing a metonymic expression as in (19), where 'head' is used for the lineage. Specifically, Dangme speakers use this expression to imply that an adult passed on without giving birth to any child, and so they have left to the spiritual underworld without leaving children behind. Therefore, from Dangme cultural perspective, everything about such a person is finished, especially, no descendants would ever emerge from that person.

### 6.3 Proverbial expressions related to *ti* and *yi* 'head'

The data further revealed that both Nzema and Dangme speakers have conventionalised proverbs which incorporate *ti* and *yi* 'head' respectively to communicate and inculcate positive values and virtues such as unity and cooperation

(collective decision making), proper time management and hard work, among others. Examples of these proverbs are discussed in the following sub-sections.

### 6.3.1 Proverbs that express cooperation and collective decision making

Speakers of Nzema and those of Dangme think that any decision making that involves the collective wisdom of people is mostly fruitful, as opposed to one that is championed by an individual. Thus, both cultures have proverbs that encourage collaboration and collectiveness, especially with regard to decision making as we notice in (20):

(20) HEAD for PERSON Metonymy

a. Nzema

Etile ko le namule

Head one COP cottage

'Single head is cottage'.

b. Dangme

Yi kake ye dami

Head one go.NEG meet

'Single head does not attend a meeting'.

Metonymically, both examples use HEAD to stand for A PERSON. The proverbial expressions point out that "a single person does not deliberate" to yield a fruitful outcome. The Nzema example in (20a) also metaphorically compares individual decision making with "living in a cottage". Life in the cottage is quite unpleasant in the sense that all social amenities that make life in the urban cities enjoyable are completely absent at the cottage. This notion is transferred to conceptualise individual decision making as portrayed in (20a). A decision taken by 'single head' also lacks many brains on board, and so it is likely to lack successful accomplishment and/or implementation. In this case, people may not realise any "enjoyable" outcome of such a decision. The Dangme proverb in (20b) communicates similar sense as the Nzema version. It buttresses the fact that individualism must be discarded in human endeavours, especially in terms of decision making. Crucially, both proverbs seek to promote unity and cooperation among members.

### 6.3.2 Assigning duties to rightful individuals

The following proverbial expressions in (21) also reveal PART-FOR-WHOLE metonymy, where we are cautioned not to assign duties to wrongful persons when

the people who deserve to undertake the activities are available. The examples are:

(21) HEAD/KNEE for PERSON Metonymy

a. Nzema

Etile de aze a egyake nangunloma ε-n-zoa kyele  
Head sit down PART leg knee EMPH-NEG-wear cap  
'The head must not be ignored for the knee to rather wear a cap'.

b. Dangme

Yi hi si ne nakutso bu pee  
Head sit.NEG down CONJ knee wear cap  
'The head must not be ignored for the knee to rather wear a cap'.

The analogy of the knee in these proverbs, as Bobuafor (2021: 205) suggests based on parallel proverbs she provides in Tafi and Ewe, could be due to the common practice where one removes their hat and hangs it on their knee. The advisory content of these proverbs (Bobuafor 2021: 205) is that "one should let appropriate person do the things that are required". A hat/cap is worn on the head, thus when the head is readily available, no other part of the body must wear the hat. Since it could be disastrous for people who lack adequate knowledge and expertise to embark on certain "skill-based" activities, these proverbs inform us to always allow experts to do their job.

### 6.3.3 Proverbs about unpredictability of intentions

The Nzema and the Dangme have common proverbs which communicate that a person's intentions cannot be known unless they disclose their own agenda. Such proverbs advise people to take precautions when dealing with their fellows. They convey the message that human beings must not be fully trusted because one cannot determine what others harbour in their mind. The proverbs capture what we have referred to in this paper as *opposing metaphoric link* between paw-paw and the human head to drive home such advisory message. Consider the examples in (22):

(22) HEAD not as PAWPAW Metaphor

a. Nzema

Etile ε-n-le ke kpakpa  
head EMPH-NEG-COP like pawpaw  
'The head is not like pawpaw'.

b. Dangme

Yi be kaa gɔ  
 head have.NEG like pawpaw  
 'The head is not like pawpaw'.

Though pawpaw and the human head may share some similarities, for example, in terms of shape (roundness), some other features make the two entities distinct. For instance, pawpaw is a soft edible fruit that can easily be cut (opened) to know its content. The human head, however, is not easily opened unless one aims at killing his fellow. So, the Nzema and Dangme employ these proverbs to inform members of the society to "fear" mankind, since we cannot be certain whether one thinks positively or negatively. If a person is up to doing good or evil, no one can easily detect or read from their mind.

### 6.3.4 Proverb about hard-work and proper retirement preparation

Hard-work and perseverance is an essential virtue every society cherishes. Indolence is frowned at because it hinders socio-economic development and breeds vices, including theft and murder (Ibrahim et al. 2022). Example (23) is a proverb in Nzema that repudiates laziness. It points to the benefit of hard-work and the essence of proper time management in terms of retirement preparation and planning. The proverb says:

(23) BLACK/GREY HEAD for AGE Metonymy

Nzema

Wɔ-an-zoa etile bile zo a ɛ-soa egyɛne zo  
 2SG-NEG-carry head black top PART 2SG-carry grey top  
 'If you refuse to carry your load on black head, you would carry it on grey head'.

In this proverb, the Nzema conceptualise and liken BLACK HEAD to YOUTHFUL AGE, a period in which one has enough strength to work hard, and when he/she is expected to do so. The GREY HEAD also represents OLD AGE, a period when a person is expected to retire from any active service and relax comfortably at home, reaping what they had sown. The proverb encourages industriousness; doing hard-work when a person is capable (at their youthful age), else, they would suffer when they are not capable (at old age).

## 7 Discussion of findings

Adopting the Cultural Conceptual Metaphor Theory, the study examined how *ti* and *yi* ‘the human head’ is conceptualised physically and metaphorically among the Nzema and Dangme speakers. Lexical categories such as adjectives, verbs, adverbs and adpositions in both languages were noted for collocating with *ti* and *yi* ‘head’ to arrive at various contextual interpretations. The paper showed that both Nzema and Dangme have a rich variety of expressions related to the HEAD, which serves as the CONTAINER of the BRAIN/MIND for conceptualisations of GOOD LUCK, INTELLIGENCE, POSITIVE THINKING, and COMFORT. This study has shown that Nzema and Dangme see the HEAD as a locus of intellect and reasoning/thinking. This observation corroborates the findings of several studies such as Agyekum (2018) in Akan, Gwarzo (2015) and Will (2020) in Hausa, Kóczy (2019) in Hungarian, Bisilki (2022) in Likpakpaln, and Ochieng (2022) in Dholuo. Kraska-Szlenk (2014: 119) argues that “because of its upper location and distinctive features such as hair, colour and style, and facial features, the head stands out as a prominent part of the physical appearance of a person which triggers a cross-linguistically common metonymy: HEAD FOR PERSON. In this study, we found metonymic expressions in Nzema and Dangme, where the HEAD stands for A PERSON, an observation that also supports the findings of studies by Kraska-Szlenk (2020b: 145) and Ochieng (2022: 57). As Kraska-Szlenk (2014: 16) indicates, HEAD can refer to a part of the head, which is the fragment covered with hair. In line with this observation, Will (2020) and Ochieng (2022) also found HEAD FOR HAIR (WHOLE-FOR-PART) metonymy in Hausa and Dholuo as illustrated in (24) and (25) respectively; however, it is important to note that examples like these were not evident in our data.

(24) Hausa

Ta        sa    a-ka        aske   ma-ta    kai   kwal  
3SG.F.PFV cause 4-PFV.REL shave DAT-3FSG head being.hairless  
‘She had her hair shaved completely’. (Will 2020: 160).

(25) Dholuo

Mary o-dhi   suko wi-ye  
Mary PFV-go plait head-POSS.3SG  
‘Mary has gone to plait her hair’. (Ochieng 2022: 57).

Our data showed that both Nzema and Dangme speakers resort to “colour metaphors”, specifically *white* and *black* in relation to the internal part of the head to describe POSITIVE THINKING and CRUELTY respectively. This is also



prevalent in Akan conceptualisation of HEAD (Agyekum, 2018). Almost all bad deeds (criminal acts) take place under the cover of darkness, and this seems to be universal, hence the metaphors WHITE/CLEAR/LIGHT is VIRTUE and DARKNESS is VICE (see also Agyekum 2018: 42). Another intriguing finding is that, while Nzema and Dangme speakers conceptualise DARKNESS IN THE HEAD as WICKEDNESS (see example 8 above), Hausa speakers associate DARKNESS IN THE HEAD with IGNORANCE/LACK OF KNOWLEDGE (Will 2020: 175). In Hungarian also (Kóczy 2019: 239), DARKNESS IN THE HEAD relates to DULLNESS/INABILITY TO UNDERSTAND SOMETHING. We identified head related expressions in Nzema that point to death and widowhood (see (17) and (18)). The Dangme example in (19), with regard to death, rather expresses the end of descent line. These observations, however, seem to be rare in previous scholarship on the figurative conceptualisation of HEAD. Parallel proverbial expressions related to HEAD in Nzema and Dangme were noted to express the sense of collaboration and cooperation, hard-work and proper time management, assigning duties to capable and experienced people among others. These expressions seem to be uncommon in the literature explored in this study, except the work of Bobuafor (2021) on Tafi and Ewe proverbs.

## 8 Conclusion

The paper showed that both Nzema and Dangme speakers use head-related expressions to describe pleasant and unpleasant experiences such as fortune, intelligence, positive mindset, wickedness, insanity, unintelligence, and death. We also found that speakers of both languages have close similarities in their cultural conceptual systems in terms of head-related expressions. This, as we have hinted earlier in §1, may partly be due to the fact that Nzema and Dangme are both Kwa languages, and that both are spoken in the Southern part of Ghana. Both languages appear to exhibit similar syntactic and semantic properties, hence the use of verbs like *open*, *grow* and the adposition *inside* to describe intelligence, that is perceived to be situated in the HEAD. We assume that the apparent linguistic similarities may account for why both languages use the colour adjectives *white* and *black* to modify HEAD when expressing positive mindset and wickedness respectively. The study concludes that, largely, the Nzema and the Dangme have similar tropes related to HEAD, and that both groups perceive their world based on embodiment and socio-cultural experiences.

## Abbreviations

Abbreviations in this chapter follow the Leipzig Glossing Rules, with the following additions:

CONJ	conjunction	EMPH	emphatic particle
PART	particle		

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