



## THE WISDOM OF OUR FOREFATHERS: ANIMAL METAPHORS AND IMAGERY IN NZEMA PROVERBS

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### **Abstract:**

Metaphors generally, have been noted to be very significant in the interpretation and understanding of human discourse. Animal metaphors, especially in proverbs, have been widely used to portray certain behavioural traits related to human beings. This paper presents a cognitive-conceptual metaphorical analysis of animal proverbs in Nzema, a (Kwa) language of Ghana. The paper looks at the way certain animals are used in Nzema proverbs to depict various human experiences, behaviours and attributions; based on the socio-traditional values, beliefs and general worldview of the people of Nzema. Adopting the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), I demonstrate the metaphorical 'mapping' across conceptual domains; where the animals represent the source domain through which other human experiences are conceptualised as target domain. The data were purposively sampled from both primary and secondary sources. Categorising and discussing the data under relevant thematic sub-headings, the paper finds that, both domestic and nondomestic animals including birds, flies, insects and reptiles are deployed in Nzema proverbs to advise people against undesirable attitudes like recalcitrance, procrastination, greed, and all sort of social vices. These creatures are also used through the proverbs to direct people towards positive behaviours; such as tolerance, forgiveness, patience, cooperation, obedience, kindness, faithfulness and hard work among others.

**Keywords:** Nzema, animal proverbs, conceptual metaphor, source domain, target domain

### **1. Introduction**

The use of proverbs in the linguistics repertoire of people, especially in the African context; which speakers of Nzema are of course not exempted, is indispensable. Proverbs are used almost everywhere (Nyame & Tomekyin, 2018b). Due partly to their didactic roles, proverbs are prevalent in many communicative interactions; both formal

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and inform. Among the Nzema for instance, every communicative context has appropriate proverb(s) which are 'injected' into the discourse to achieve many effects including its embellishment. Most circumstances and experiences in our daily lives are intelligently concealed in the traditional proverbs belonging to specific languages and cultures. Several studies (e.g. Yankah, 1989; Basgoz, 1993; Hussein, 2005; Liu, 2013; Agyemang et al, 2015; Agyekum, 2017), among others have ascertained that real life occurrences in human societies are captured, and for that matter portrayed in proverbs cross-culturally.

For some time now, studies in 'paremiology' (proverbs) have attracted the interest of many renowned scholars to delve into different aspects of the concept. There have been enormous research on proverbs from the perspectives of semantics, pragmatics (Ramirez, 2015; Moshood, 2016), morpho-syntactic (Mensah, 2010; Akanbi, 2015; Yuka, 2016), sociolinguistics (Ababila, 2006; Maledo, 2015), and socio-cultural (cf. Agyekum, 2012; Owu-Ewie, 2019). Other researchers have considered the study of proverbs in relation to gender construction (Yusuf, 1998; Dogbevi, 2011, Barasa & Opande, 2017; Nyame & Tomekyin, 2018) and conflict resolution (Adegoju, 2009; Aden, 2010; Ademowo & Balogun, 2014).

These works among others reveal that literature on proverbs abounds cross-linguistically and culturally. However, studies on Nzema proverbs in particular have not received much attention. The only available works (at least to the best of my knowledge) are i) Quarm & Kwesi (1998), which is a massive compilation of proverbs in the language; serving as corpus for future researchers, ii) Nyame & Tomekyin (2018a; 2018b) and iii) Yakub (2018a; 2018b). Though these few works on Nzema proverbs are recognised, none of them focused on extensive exploration of animal metaphors in proverbs. Thus, from conceptual metaphoric perspective, this paper seeks to examine the mental relationship between animal behaviours and human characteristics as portrayed in Nzema proverbs. It tries to explicate the kinds of animals deployed in Nzema proverbs to portray human attributions; shedding light on some relevant themes that are inherently captured in the selected proverbs. The paper is organised to cover four (4) main sections; each section dedicated to systematic discussion of specific issues.

### 1.1 The concept of proverbs

Proverbs are succinct expressions that serve as a rich source of imagery on which more elaborate interpretations could be made (Finnegan, 2012). This can suggest that, when a particular proverb is cited, further explanations and interpretations may be made out of it. As an oral genre, the proverb forms part of the cultural heritage of any given society. They actually portray everyday happenings among people of a society. Proverbs reflect all features of particular cultural group; concerning their traditions, beliefs, habits, democracy, and gender among others (Belfatmi, 2013). Agreeing with Belfatmi, Kobia (2016: 227) rightly avers that "*proverbs as social discourse reflect the worldview of a people; they are used to unearth the beliefs that are upheld dear by the community*". This may imply that the general worldview of any particular cultural group is summed up and hidden

in its proverbs. By their nature, proverbs are impersonal (Owurasah, 2015). This means individuals may not claim ownership of proverbs of a particular language and culture; however, proverbs are attributed to the elderly people, handed down from generation to generation. A Proverb is a philosophical and moral exposition shrunk into a few words, and forms part of a mnemonic device in societies in which everything relevant to the day-to-day life has to be (Obiechina, 1975), cited in Owu-Ewie (2019: 26). This indicates that proverbs are compressed utterances which are based on the practical experience of humanity.

In the view of Akporobaro (2008), a proverb is a short popular saying, which usually provides a moral advice expressed in a concise form. This can imply that proverbs are pithy statements which are inherently imbued with a lot of wisdom, employed in a discourse to straighten human behaviour. Among the Igbo of Nigeria, for instance, a popular traditional proverb says "*the proverb is the palm oil with which words are eaten*"; and that, words without the ornament of proverbs are difficult to swallow (see Agyekum, 2012: 6). Proverbs are a resource for speech embellishment. They serve as ingredient in the soup, for instance, without which the soup would lack palatability. In essence, proverbs are used to spice human communication (Agyekum, 2010). Across cultures, proverbs are orally 'woven' by incorporating both human and nonhuman entities such as plants, animals and other creatures in the natural environment. Thus, proverbs abound in imageries and metaphorical implications (Finnegan, 1970). These creatures (plants, animals etc), are relied upon to ensure the figurative and didactic nature of proverbs. Hence, the concern of this paper is to explore how, and which animals are used in Nzema proverbs to metaphorically depict several human characteristics and behaviours.

## 1.2 Metaphor and imagery

Perhaps, from literary perspective, Nyanzu (1994) describes metaphor as a sort of comparison or similarity between two or more objects/entities which do not actually belong to the same kind of category. It is seen as a rhetoric device and a kind of decoration that is added to an ordinary plane language (Nyanzu, 1994: 68). Torto (2002) proffers that metaphor manifests when there is the transfer of attributes between two different things based on comparison without the use of 'as' or 'like'. This means metaphor mostly results when there is an omission of connectives of simile. Buttressing this opinion, Agyekum (2013: 81) postulates that metaphor is an image whereby a comparison is made by a direct reference such as 'X is Y'. This shows a concise comparison of two entities by saying that 'one is the other' (see also Bayor, 2016: 88). Owurasah (2015: 92) describes metaphor as a stylistic device which makes implicit comparisons between persons, things, ideas or concepts which seem not to be directly related. Gleaning from the above definitions, we find that metaphor deals with the comparison in which two things of obviously unrelated features are brought together and given the same or similar attribute.

Some scholars (e.g. Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2002) also perceive metaphors rather as ‘cognitive mechanism’. Metaphors are considered beyond literary devices and linguistic ornaments, but as a matter of thought (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Lakoff & Turner, 1989) which allows us to interpret and conceptualise one sort of thing in terms of another. *“Metaphor is not just of language, but of thought and reason”* (Lakoff, 1993). This means metaphor transcend mere literary figure of speech, but has more to be concerned with the cross-domain mapping based on human cognitive experience. Metaphors are language elements which are not merely poetic devices, but also convey specific messages in everyday communicative interaction (see also Barasa & Opande, 2017).

Imagery has also been defined and discussed in connection with figurative language. Figurative language is a language that is not basic (Bayor, 2016). Cuddon (1977), cited in Bayor (2016: 30) views imagery as a broader term that is used to represent objects, actions, feelings, ideas, state of mind and all sensory experiences. Cuddon considers imagery as the images produced in the mind through the use of language. Agyekum (2013) also opines that imagery is a way by which oral and written literatures employ words to paint mental pictures which appeal to our feelings and understanding. Agyekum further reports on imagery that it is basically based on comparison of items/entities by lining up their features to see areas of similarities and differences. Taking insights from the above notions about imagery, we can observe the close relationship between the concept of ‘metaphor’ and ‘imagery’; considering the fact that both concepts concern the human mental faculty. In my view therefore, both metaphor and imagery may deal with figurative features of language use and the transfer of attributions. In each case, a basic idea is needed to be understood beyond its literal sense; where cognitive conceptualisation is paramount.

### 1.3 Theoretical overview

The paper is situated within the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). In their famous work, *‘Metaphors we live by’*, Lakoff and Johnson (1980:5) contend that *“the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another”*. Conceptual metaphors (see Kövecses, 2002; Semino, 2008) typically make use of more abstract concepts as target and a more concrete/physical concepts as source, through which we are able to understand unfamiliar concepts better. In the view of Semino (2008: 5), conceptual metaphors are systematic sets of correspondence, or ‘mappings’ across conceptual domains, where by a ‘target’ domain is partly structured in terms of a different ‘source’ domain. Affirming this observation, Mouraz et al (2013) aver that metaphors have the ability to create a conceptual relationship between a given source domain and a respective target domain, whereby inferences are made from the properties of the source domain to understand the target. All these order of thought imply that metaphorical expressions are better understood by building a mental imagery and relationship of similarity between the entities being compared (see also Owurasah, 2015: 92).

Deducing carefully from the above theoretical orientation, it could be observed that conceptual metaphors are responsible for ensuring our understanding of unfamiliar concepts (target) by means of transferring ideas from more familiar concepts (source), based on our cognitive experiences. The paper demonstrates that animal attributes in Nzema proverbs provide essential source domain through which human characteristics and day-to-day occurrences in our socio-cultural setting could be conceptualised. Hence, the adoption of the (CMT) as a theoretical backing for this study is deemed quite appropriate.

## 2. Related literature review

The use of animal metaphors in the expressions of many languages of the world is pervasive (Muhammed & Rashid, 2014). The literature on animal metaphors has shown that different languages and cultures attach different meanings to animals in proverbial expressions. This implies that one same animal may not be equally conceptualised in different languages and cultures (Barasa & Opande 2017: 85). This section of the paper provides a review of some previous studies concerning animal metaphors in proverbs.

Yusuf (1997) examined how forty-six (46) proverbs in Yoruba and English compared women with plants, animals, food, property and trouble. In the study, women in state affairs were likened to monkeys; in that women in state affairs would look awkward and be destructive as monkeys living in glass house. In the study, both English and Yoruba proverbs compared women with dogs. Here, a man kicking his dog (pet) is likened to beating his wife. Women through the analysis were also seen as 'vessels' who are capable of conveying troubles and inconveniences to their husbands. According to the findings, women in their matrimonial homes are considered as 'meat', since men enjoy women through sexual intercourse. The study explicated that any man who marries a beautiful woman marries problems, since she claims to be related to everybody. Notwithstanding these negative images painted about the behaviours of women, the study interestingly revealed a bit of the positive attitudes and significance of women in the lives of men in particular. Here, women are seen as 'property'; as they are considered as 'filled houses' and 'tilled fields'. This implies that, if a man has a good wife, he has a well furnished house and a ploughed land which is fertile and rich for crop cultivation.

Liu (2013) did a comparative study of English and Chinese animal proverbs from the perspective of metaphors. In the data analysis, the animals which were prevalent in the proverbs in both languages and cultures are dragon, dog, cat, tiger, lion, cattle and bee. The study showed that both English and Chinese proverbs portray some similarities and differences in the attribution of these animals. In Chinese for instance, as the discussions revealed, dogs are considered inferior as they are domestic animals that are born to eat excrement. In Chinese culture therefore, dogs are used metaphorically to represent people who cannot change their bad behaviour. The Chinese, according to the study, use the cat to represent people who are good and justice since the cat does not allow any mouse a free rein to destroy anything. Hence,

the cat is likened to powerful people who have the ability to be in leadership. However, from the English proverbial perspective, cats are likened to bad women who like speaking ill of others, as the author noted. Cats are also likened to people who are lazy and greedy, as the proverb says “*the cat will eat fish but would not wet its feet*” (Liu, 2013: 1848).

Another significant contribution to the study of animal proverbs is “Cat Metaphors in Malay and English Proverbs” by Muhammed and Rashid (2014). The purpose of the study was to ascertain whether the common proposition made by Lakoff and Turner (1989) that cats are ‘fickle and independent’ could hold true and be applicable to Malay and English proverbs. The study also aimed at examining the similarities and differences in the meanings associated with the cat metaphors in proverbs within the two cultures. The data comprised cat-related proverbs gathered from Malay and English books and online database of proverbs. Adopting the conceptual metaphor theory and the great chain of being framework as its theoretical backing, the study focused on how the animal, cat, could serve as a source domain to convey specific meaning in the target domain of human beings. The study revealed that proverbs in Malay and English proverbs depict attributions of cat that are contrary to the propositions made by Lakoff and Turner (1989). According to the data analysed, the following were rather found to be common attributions of the cat; which could be projected metaphorically to describe human characteristics: cat is authoritative, dangerous, coward, untrustworthy, lazy, useless, and shameless.

With data, (27 chicken-related proverbs) purposively sampled from a published secondary source, Kobia (2016) did a metaphorical analysis of domestic animals in selected Swahili proverbs with a focus on chicken metaphor based on their source domain. Situating the discussions within the tenets of conceptual metaphor theory, the paper aimed at analysing Swahili proverbs metaphorically to understand the underlying societal meaning since animals are used symbolically to represent human beings. In the study, *the hen represented women; the cock represented men; whereas the chick represented children*. The paper showed that, in Swahili proverbs, chicken could be ‘mapped’ onto human beings to reveal positive attitudes like caring, protective, motherly, gentle, creativity, honesty and hard work. Some negative human characteristics such as cowardice, foolishness, ignorance, easily manipulated and deceitful among others were also noted to be projected from the behaviours of chicken as concealed in Swahili proverbs. The paper further noted that chicken metaphors in Swahili proverbs are embedded in the culture and environment of the people; which are used to convey societal meanings that depict all sort of human behaviour. It concluded that Swahili proverbs are used metaphorically as a repository traditional wisdom of the people and a vehicle to articulate and propagate their socio-cultural worldview.

Barasa and Opande (2017) also conducted a study on the use of animal metaphors in the representation of women in Bukusu and Gusii proverbs. The authors obtained data through ethnographic approaches, where five (5) respondents aged between 60-70 years from Bukusu and Gusii communities were consulted. Adopting the

conceptual metaphor theory and the feminist critical discourse analysis theory, the study examined 48 proverbs with respect to how women are perceived within the two cultures. The authors reported that proverbs among the people of Bukusu and Gusii cultures relegate and compare women with creatures such as birds, farmyard animals, wild animals and inanimate objects. The metaphoric projection of attributes portrayed women as inferior, worthless and weak; who could be used as sexual objects for male satisfaction and later thrown away (rejected). Women according to the selected proverbs are marginalised and discriminated in terms of decision making.

### 3. Methodology

The paper draws data from primary and secondary sources including my native speaker intuition. I recorded some Nzema proverbs during traditional gatherings such as durbars (involving chiefs), funerals, and arbitrations where the use of proverbs in discourse is indispensable. I also consulted one published work (a collection of Nzema proverbs and their meaning), titled *Nzema mrele nee be ngile* by Quarm & Kwesi (1998). From this source, I purposively selected proverbs related to animals and other creatures like birds, flies, insects and reptiles. Having collected these proverbs, I consulted two (2) retired Nzema lecturers noted for their rich knowledge in the socio-cultural and linguistic aspects of Nzema language and culture. These experts were consulted to crosscheck the raw data at hand; and to elicit useful clarification through semi-structured interviews. My introspection was also significantly brought to bear on the study. Overall, eighteen (18) animal proverbs were finally analysed in this paper.

### 4. Data and discussion

In this section, I present and analyse the data. I categorise the proverbs according to the various animals involved, and take up the discussions under relevant thematic sub-headings. For the flow of discussion, I demonstrate the metaphoric mapping between the source domain and the target domain for audience to best appreciate the discussion.

#### 4.1 Proverbs concerning domestic/nondomestic animals

##### a. Proverbs related to sheep

- 1) *Boane bazi a oko o nzi.*

'The sheep retreats before it goes forward to butt'.

**Theme:** On the need to think/prepare adequately before acting

**Metaphoric mapping:**

**Source domain**

Sheep ----->

**Target domain**

a person who intends to undertake a task.

In proverb (1), sheep represents a person who may decide to take up any activity. The 'horizontal arrow' as can be seen above shows the metaphoric projection of concept from the source domain to the target domain. We can actually base our knowledge on

the physical behaviour of the sheep (as the source domain) to conceptualise the need for people to make adequate preparation before tackling a task. As the sheep retreats, it reorganises itself and prepares adequately before it moves forward with much vigour to butt effectively. In essence, proverb (1) entreats us as humans, not to rush in doing things especially when we face some challenges; rather, we should 'stay back' for some time to reflect and reorganise our thoughts before proceeding to do any work or solve any problem to ensure effective work done.

2) *Boane toa su-su a anrɛɛ ɔnli alee.*

'While feeding, the sheep becomes adamant'.

**Theme:** On the need to remain focused

**Metaphoric mapping:**

**Source domain**

**Target domain**

Sheep -----→ a person who does what is right / important.

From the above mapping in (2), we realise that sheep represents a person who may be doing something very important. This means a particular attribute of the sheep corresponds to human experience that appears at the target domain. Among other habits, the sheep is noted for remaining adamant and turning deaf ears to an attempt by human to prevent it from feeding on pastures, grains or any sort of feed which may not be deliberately offered to the sheep to feed on. This happens because the sheep sees what it does (feeding) as an essential thing; which will make it survive. Thus, the sheep considers the act of driving it away as some sort of external force to hinder its success; and so it ignores the attempt to prevent it and continues to feed. Conceptualising the behaviour of the sheep as outlined above, we are taught to remain focused in doing what is beneficial and important, though some people may criticise and discourage us in diverse ways. This does not however suggest that we should continue to cause destruction and infringe upon others' right for our benefits; rather, the import of the proverb enforces human behaviour in this regard, in the positive direction.

**b. Proverb related to cattle**

3) *Enlanke ndɔma engenda mgbane.*

'The scrotum of a bull does not hang aimlessly'.

**Theme:** On family royalty

**Metaphoric mapping:**

**Source domain**

**Target domain**

The scrotum of a bull -----→ a member of a family (especially a woman).

In (3), the scrotum of the bull is projected to a member of a particular family. The bull's scrotum hangs and sways. At a glance, one may think that the scrotum is detached and separated from the animal's body. However, getting closer, one would find that the scrotum is firmly attached and forms part of the body. This is metaphorically likened to

a person who may be behaving as homeless and lonely, yet may be belonging to even a royal family. This proverb, particularly in the Nzema context, appreciates the preciousness of human beings; most especially women. Among the Nzema, like in many other diverse cultures, a man is not supposed to meet any woman and just take her away to his house as a wife 'as if he had picked a missing item from the ground'. Any man who does so does it at his own risk because if any mishap befalls the woman, the man would be held strongly responsible. In fact, since the scrotum of the bull does not hang for nothing, so the woman does not move about worthlessly; she actually belongs to a particular family group as the scrotum essentially forms part of the bull's body in totality. Therefore, the Nzema cherish that a man who finds a woman as a marriage partner would quickly go to see her family for necessary traditional marriage rituals to be performed. Above all, the proverb advises people not to consider others as inferior and useless in the society because all persons are precious assets to their families.

**c. Proverb related to dog**

4) *Twea ayile bengua ye sonla ko.*

'One person cannot put 'medication' into the nostril of a dog'.

**Theme:** On cooperation and collaboration.

**Metaphoric mapping:**

**Source domain**

**Target domain**

Putting medication into a dog's nostril -----> performing a difficult task.

As the projection above demonstrates, the act of putting any medication in a dog's nostril represents the source (more familiar domain) through which we are able to conceptualise that a challenging activity needs more hands on board. Proverb (4) actually tries to communicate that people should always unite and work in collaboration. Among the Nzema, most farmers go to farm accompanied by their dogs. As a way of getting some meat to feed the family, most of these farmers (and hunters in particular) pour some traditionally manufactured medication into the dogs' nostril so that they could run after rats and other animals to catch them. Putting medication in a dog's nostril however, is obviously not an easy task because it is a wild animal and can bite whoever tries to undertake the exercise. Therefore, such an activity requires multiple hands to be performed. Extending the import of this proverb from cognitive metaphoric perspective, we are taught to cooperate and work together; especially when the task is a herculean one for an individual to tackle.

**d. Proverb related to cat/mouse**

5) *Kusu enle eke a kila dwe.*

'The mouse misbehaves when the cat is away'.

**Theme:** On authority

**Metaphoric mapping:**

**Source domain****Target domain**

Cat -----→ a leader / a parent / an elderly person.  
 Mouse -----→ a subordinate / a child.

In (5), the mental picture that is created helps us to understand that cat represents a leader or an elderly person whereas the mouse represents someone under authority. The cat has power over the mouse; thus, any time the former finds the latter, it bounces on it and catches it for consumption. In the absence of the cat however, the mouse becomes happy and does whatever it wishes. This proverb makes us aware that people sometimes take the law in their own hands and misbehave whenever there is no authority. Likewise the case of parents and children; when parents are away, some indiscipline children take the advantage to misbehave and 'mess-up' in the house. Hence, the proverb in a way advocates the need for every society to institutionalise and maintain leadership in order to control the behaviours of its inhabitants.

**e. Proverb related to tiger**

6) *Betoa boboduma nyelee a anrɛɛ beku ye a beyela ye nwoma.*

'If you consider the tiger's habit, you would burn its skin into ashes when you kill it'.

**Theme:** On forgiveness.

**Metaphoric mapping:****Source domain****Target domain**

Tiger -----→ a wicked and dangerous person.

This proverb tells people to try as much as possible to forgive others for wrong doing. It informs us not to consider somebody's wickedness or bad deeds and try to take revenge. In this proverb (6), the nature of a tiger is projected to map onto a wicked and unapproachable person in a given society. The tiger is a wild, unapproachable carnivore which does not spare other animals in the jungle. In other words, it treats other animals cruelly in their own 'Kingdom'. In our human setting also, some people would not forgive when others 'step on their toes'. Such people are fearful and unapproachable. People with this attitude are rightly likened to the tiger as can be conceptualised through the proverb. Such people usually treat others unfairly, just as the tiger does. Burning the tiger's skin into ashes as in the proverb implies that one does not want to set eyes on anything concerning that unsympathetic animal in his/her environment. The tiger is detested because of its behaviour and so everything relating to it must be discarded. What is rather interesting here as per the import of the proverb is that, people who behave as the tiger should be forgiven when they also commit offences; we should not follow their negative deeds and also treat them unfairly. Hence, the proverb calls for forgiveness to ensure peaceful societal-coexistence.

**f. Proverb related to elephant**

7) *Ezonle tia ehane zo a onvuanidi.*

‘When an elephant steps into a trap, it does not experience any adverse effect’.

**Theme:** On discrimination and individual differences.

**Metaphoric mapping:**

**Source domain**

**Target domain**

Elephant -----→ a chief / a wealthy person in a society.

In (7), elephant represents either a King or anybody with a higher position or a wealthy person among people in a particular community. In the bush for instance, elephants and other smaller animals are all mingling to constitute their own ‘Kingdom’. In case a hunter goes to set a trap somewhere in the bush, the smaller animals would be likely to be affected (caught). The elephant however, being so huge and a strong creature can easily disentangle itself if it accidentally falls into the trap. In other words, the trap would not be able to cause any harm to the elephant. Projecting the message in this proverb to human existence, we realise that certain circumstances can adversely affect some people whereas others would pass through same situation and get away unaffected. For example, wealthy people and other ‘big men’ including people in authority such as chiefs and presidents may not be so frustrated in times of economic hardship in a country. Since they have already gained strong financial grounds, they may not experience adverse effects of the frustrating situation. Another possible interpretation is that, when leaders like chiefs and presidents commit offences for which they must suffer, sometimes, other subordinates may not get the opportunity to reprimand those leaders; and so they would go unaffected because they are ‘big personalities’. However, when the indigent and vulnerable in the society commits same offence, he/she often suffers for it. The proverb thus advises us to take precaution and be mindful of our deeds because discrimination and favouritism usually pertain in human societies.

#### 4.2 Proverbs concerning domestic/nondomestic birds

**a. Proverbs related to chicken**

8) *Nyamenle a kposa akole alee a.*

‘It is God who chews food for the chicken’.

**Theme:** On the need to be confident in life.

**Metaphoric mapping**

**Source domain**

**Target domain**

Chicken -----→ a needy / vulnerable person.

In (8), chicken represents a needy, vulnerable, handicapped or disabled person in our socio-cultural setting. This didactic proverb among the people of Nzema is often deployed in discourse interaction to encourage a needy person in the society to have confidence in life. Naturally, the chicken does not possess any ‘teeth’ for chewing its food. After swallowing any feed into its gizzard, the feed digests through natural

means (support). This is metaphorically likened to people who are handicapped, vulnerable, and indigent in the society. Such people are virtually helpless and so need maximum support from well established and wealthy personalities in the society. Since God helps the 'toothless' chicken in terms feeding, the needy person is also emboldened through this witty proverb to have the hope that other capable people would provide him/her some support. Therefore, the proverb advises us not to despair in adversity. It actually reminds us not to do ourselves any harm, such as committing suicide because of our calamities and unbearable situations; rather, we should always be courageous that undesirable conditions would get better. It is worth mentioning that the Nzema partly portray their religious beliefs and values via this proverb that; God really cares.

9) *Be nee akɔle la a bembiza alehyenle.*

'Whoever sleeps with the cock must not ask others about daybreak'.

“ **Theme:** On the need to be content with what a person possesses.

#### Metaphoric mapping:

**Source domain**

**Target domain**

Cock -----→ a useful resource at one's disposal.

The cock knows the right time for day breaks; and so, it crows when the time is due. Whoever has the cock at his/her disposal needs not to seek the time from anybody else since the cock would alert him/her. This proverb metaphorically informs us to cherish and be satisfied with things readily available for our benefit. We are told here, to value and recognise the significance of good things that we may have and make judicious use of our available resources. In a way, this proverb tries to remind us against the spirit of greed. For what reason should a person sleeping with the cock abandon it and seek the time for daybreak elsewhere? Another crucial theme that proverb (9) seeks to address is **the need to be patient** (i.e. not to rush in life, expecting things to happen within shortest possible time). Here, we are taught to note that everything has its rightful time to occur. Once the day breaks, the cock will 'ring the bell' and so whoever sleeps with the cock must not rush to know the time. In our existence therefore, we are directed to use good resources judiciously and avoid unnecessary rush.

10) *Akɔle bele ze alehyenle noko ɔtie nyinli ane.*

'The hen recognises daybreak but it looks up to the cock to crow'.

**Theme:** On gender relation and construction.

#### Metaphoric mapping:

**Source domain**

**Target domain**

Hen -----→ female gender

Cock -----→ male gender

In this metaphoric projection, the hen stands in for women, while the cock represents men. As has been hinted in section 2, cross-cultural studies have shown various societal

perceptions of femininity and masculinity. Among other proverbs in Nzema, (10) attempts in a way to portray the inferiority of women. This proverb tends to subjugate the status and capabilities of women. In a more positive sense however, the proverb depicts how submissive, humble and respectful women are. The hen is equally aware of the convenient time for daybreaks, but it allows the cock to 'announce' it. This portrays submissiveness on the part of women. This proverb reveals that, women, especially married ones are also knowledgeable but usually they give the opportunity to their husbands to make certain decisions as culture demands (particularly in the Nzema cultural context).

11) *Akɔsea mɔɔ doale ɔ nli la lile abɛbɛ ɛzɔlɛ.*

'The chick which follows its mother feeds on the thighs of a grasshopper'.

**Theme:** On the need to be obedient.

**Metaphoric mapping:**

**Source domain**

**Target domain**

Chick -----> a child

The chick, as in (11) represents a child. The proverb calls for the need for people to heed advice and obey orders from authorities. The chick following its mother (the hen) is likened to not only a child, but all categories of persons obeying and following instructions from elders and authorities. The 'thighs of the grasshopper', on which the chick feeds for following its mother is also equated to the benefits that an obedient person is likely to gain. Hence, the proverb advocates the necessities of obedience.

**b. Proverb related to 'birds in the bush'**

12) *Anloma ɛva ɛya baka nwo.*

'Birds (in the bush) must not be angry at the tree'.

**Theme:** On the need to control one's temper.

**Metaphoric mapping:**

**Source domain**

**Target domain**

Birds -----> people who are dependent on others

Tree -----> one who supports people in one way or the other

Proverb (12) could be suitably deployed in the context of advising a person to avoid unnecessary anger. Whoever supports others in any positive direction is precious and must be recognised as such, pampered and handled with care. The bird (in the bush) has nowhere else to build its nest apart from on top of trees. This is where the bird acquires convenient habitation. Where will the bird then perch/sleep if the tree refuses to avail its branches and leaves? Therefore, the bird must always recall the usefulness of the tree and try to live in harmony with it. This 'bird and tree' metaphor is a common phenomenon in our human existence; where many people depend on others for assistance in various dimensions. Here, the proverb urges us to be tolerant and control our tempers; especially towards people who live to be very useful to us. It tries to

remind us to value our helpers, treat them fairly and perhaps offer them some help in our capacity for the sake of reciprocity. Another common proverbial expression among the Nzema which underscores the advisory content of (12) says; *efa sane nwo eya a wo sua nu bo* 'if you get angry at the broom, you room stinks'. Brooms are used for sweeping out rubbish; and so anyone who has any confrontation with the broom cannot approach it, let alone to pick it for sweeping. If this happens, the person's room would obviously smell. This proverbial expression really underscores the fact that we should live in harmony and be on good speaking terms with all members of our society; else, we would not be able to seek assistance from people who could donate for us to benefit. Proverb (12) however, may not suggest that we should always allow others to hurt or bully us and infringe on our rights even when we a right. So, the essence of this proverb is to mitigate assault, chaos and commotion for peace to prevail at all times.

#### 4.3 Proverbs concerning insects/flies

##### a. Proverb related to ant

13) *Ngyigyilira le o nwo zo atwe.*

'There is an appropriate arrow to pierce the ant (despite its size).'

**Theme:** On the need to work within one's limit / capacity.

##### **Metaphoric mapping:**

**Source domain**

**Target domain**

Ant -----> a child.

In (13), an ant represents a child. The ant is a small insect. Unlike the elephant for instance, the ant cannot be easily killed using an arrow. Nonetheless, there could equally be an arrow that can convenient pierce the ant. This proverb seeks to create the awareness that, since there is an appropriate arrow to pierce the ant despite its tininess, there are equally some prescribed activities which a child would be able to accomplish better, though a child does not possess same amount of strength as an adult. Elders and parents often 'invite' this proverb in discourse to also warn children who try to keep the company of adults and indulge in bad practices that may be spearheaded by people above the ages of the children. Children according to Nzema tradition are expected to engage themselves among their peers; especially when it comes to matters of jokes. Among the Nzema therefore, just as may be observed in many other cultures, children who intrude and engage in matters concerning adults (see Yakub, 2018a) are detested. This is not to say that the Nzema child must not approach an elderly person for knowledge, advice or support; rather, the traditional norm is that a properly trained and 'cultured' child should act within his/her limit. Thus, the proverb could be cited to reprimand children who go beyond their bounds to engage in adult discussions.

**b. Proverb related to housefly**

14) *Efa nrezenra nwo eya a ekondo wo hanle.*

'If you become angry at the housefly, you end up irritating your sore'.

**Theme:** On the need to control one's temper.

**Metaphoric mapping:**

**Source domain**

**Target domain**

Housefly -----> a troublesome person

In this proverb, housefly represents a person who causes discomfort to others. The housefly is always attracted by filth. It feeds on dirty and stinking substances and materials such as the carcass. Wounds and sores on human body are also enjoyed by houseflies. When a housefly (a parasite in this case) settles on someone's sore, it thrusts its proboscis and feeds on the sore. Since the person would obviously be embittered by the sting, he/she would intend to take revenge by killing the tiny fly. In so doing, the victim must be very patient; otherwise, the fly would escape while he/she irritates the sore for blood to ooze. This scenario created out of proverb (14) usually happens in human societies; where people lose their tempers because of little discomfort and later find themselves in serious predicaments. For example, if a child often loots his/her parents, the parents need to use persuasive means to prevent the child from that negative practice which causes the parents to be displeased. If the parents lose their tempers and rush to beat the child, he/she may die accidentally which could adversely affect the parents than their items being looted. Proverb (14) thus, tells us to handle sensitive and delicate situations with caution. Most significantly, it warns us to exercise much patience in reacting towards people who may act in certain ways which would cause our displeasure; else, we may end up causing greater harm to ourselves. We are to learn from this proverb that the consequence of losing our tempers could sometimes be disastrous.

**c. Proverb related to gnat**

15) *Akowule bekye ye be bo anwo.*

'The gnat is inseparable from mankind'.

**Theme:** On patience (avoiding rush).

**Metaphoric mapping:**

**Source domain**

**Target domain**

Gnat -----> a recalcitrant / troublesome child.

Among the Nzema, the gnat is called *akowule* (a tiny fly which stings people especially when they go to the farm). It is a stubborn fly which is inseparable from humans, specifically farmers. Sometimes, it follows farmers to their homes. In proverb (15), gnat rightly represents a stubborn child. Every child cannot be separated from his/her parents especially mothers. Therefore, if a child proves recalcitrance, parents do not need to rush in getting hold of the child to be reprimanded since the child is always available in the midst of the parents. The child has nowhere to go; and so he/she could

easily be grabbed. In this proverb, we are taught to avoid rush in getting or receiving something when the possibilities of getting that thing is assured.

**d. Proverb related to spider**

16) *Esisì kedéba (ananze) a esisi é nwo.*

‘If you intend to trick the spider, you suffer at last’.

**Theme:** On the need to be truthful and faithful

**Metaphoric mapping:**

**Source domain**

**Target domain**

Spider -----→ an experienced person

Spider, as in proverb (16) represents someone who is more skilful / knowledgeable or one who possesses something in abundance. Simply put, the spider represents an experienced person. In most African folktales and literary works, the mention of spider as a fictional character is pervasive. Spider is prevalent also in Nzema traditional folktales and other oral genres. It is perceived as a cunning creature because it behaves wisely and often disentangles itself from many predicaments. Since the spider is a very sensible creature and the master trickster, anyone who would try to cheat or deceive it would end up toiling in vain. This can be likened to some real situations in our human societies. For instance, if a mother sends a child to the market to buy some stuffs for food preparation and the child refuses and goes to hide somewhere with the intent to making the mother suffer, the child would eventually go hungry because the mother has money to buy food from somewhere else. As a grown up, the mother is also more experienced and would be able to endure hanger (survive) in case everybody (in the family) is expected to starve. In fact, in the long run, it is the child (an inexperienced person) who suffers. This proverb warns people not to play tricks on others. It teaches that a subordinate must not attempt to deceive a superior, the less experienced should not try to deceive the most experienced and the poor should not try to deceive the rich.

**4.4 Proverbs concerning reptiles**

**a. Proverb related to snake**

17) *Éwólé ayile bété ye ndé.*

‘In seeking medication to rescue a victim of snake bite, one must be in hast’.

**Theme:** Avoiding procrastination.

**Metaphoric mapping:**

**Source domain**

**Target domain**

Medication for snake bite -----→ something that is very important.

In this pithy adage, ‘medication that is meant for saving the life of a victim of snake bite’ is metaphorically projected to mean anything that serves a very important purpose in the life of mankind. The proverb teaches us to desist from procrastination in general; and most especially when we are required to react to intervene during deadly circumstances. When a person is bitten by a snake and medication is not sought

immediately, the victim would be likely to die. The implication here is that sometimes people need to act in haste when dealing with certain situations that are likely to be disastrous. We should not delay in doing things which will eventually ensure success in our lives. Although proverb (15) in this paper touches on the need to avoid rush, this proverb (17), rather seeks to inform us to sometimes react quickly to critical conditions (Yakub, forthcoming). This 'counter notion' about patience as proverbs (15) and (17) have depicted may be found interesting as it seems to portray a bit of the Nzema perception about the relevance and irrelevance of being patient.

**b. Proverb related to lizard/crocodile**

18) *Kekebetele di adwinli a bonze engyia dadee nwo.*

'When lizard works as a blacksmith, crocodile should not be in need of metals'.

**Theme:** On kinship.

**Metaphoric mapping:**

<b>Source domain</b>	<b>Target domain</b>
Lizard ----->	a member of a particular family.
Crocodile ----->	another member of same family.

In (18), the metaphoric projection schematised above reveals a situation where two or more people have the same relationship such as belonging to the same family, or with regard to nationality, ethnicity, religion, and occupation among others. The lizard has almost the same natural features as the crocodile (both are reptiles, both crawl, both have tails, both lay eggs). Regarding their habitation, both live on earth except that the crocodile is often found in water (an amphibian). Following this range of similarities, it may be worth describing them as 'siblings' or simply put, people with common background. Once the lizard fortunately works as a blacksmith, it grants the crocodile a greater opportunity to possess all kinds of metals in abundance. Therefore, the advice concealed in this proverb is that we should help our family members including others who relate us in diverse ways when we are blessed and find ourselves in better occupations. The proverb advises us to refrain from selfishness. It tries to tell us that we should not enjoy life while our relatives go hungry and struggle. As part of their culture and traditional philosophies, the Nzema cherish people who are kind and benevolent donors. They appreciate people who succeed in life and recognize others who may be needy; hence, proverb (18) as one of their numerous culturally-constructed didactic expressions.

**5. Conclusion**

Relying on (CMT), this paper has brought to fore the conceptual metaphorical correlations between animal behaviours and human attributions as conveyed in selected proverbs in Nzema. The paper demonstrated the metaphorical 'mapping' across conceptual domains; where the animals represented the source domain through which other human experiences were conceptualised as target domain. The paper

showed that both domestic and nondomestic animals including birds, flies, insects and reptiles are prevalent in Nzema proverbs to advise people against undesirable attitudes like recalcitrance, procrastination, greed, selfishness and all sort of social vices. These creatures are also used through the proverbs to direct people towards positive behaviours; such as tolerance, forgiveness, patience, cooperation, obedience, kindness, faithfulness and hard work among others.

### **Acknowledgement**

I am grateful to Professor Kofi Agyekum of the University of Ghana, Legon, whose numerous works on metaphorical conceptualisations in Akan have motivated me to also take up such metaphorical analysis in Nzema proverbs.

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