

ANIMAL-BASED METAPHORS IN IGBO

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Abstract: The study examined animal-based metaphors in Igbo with a focus on their cultural and contextual meanings and interpretations. It adopted the pragmatic methodological approach involving interviews with 20 participants drawn from various Igbo culture areas to collect animal-based metaphors as well as their meanings and interpretations. Introspection also featured in data collection as the authors are native speakers of Igbo. The study revealed that animal-based metaphors are used to describe human personality, conduct or behavior. This is essentially by the process of associating some features or attributes of the animals with human conduct and personality. The study further identified that some metaphors could be used in dual metaphorical sense, i.e., derogatory/negative, and commendatory/positive, and these depend on the cultural connotations as well as contextual meanings and interpretations of the referents. The study concludes that animal-based metaphors in the Igbo language and culture reflect and represent the description of a person, conduct or behavior, as well as beliefs and realities among the Igbo.

Keywords: animal-based metaphor, metaphor, pragmatics, semantics, Igbo, culture

MÉTAPHORES BASÉES SUR LES ANIMAUX EN IGBO

Résumé : L'étude a examiné les métaphores basées sur les animaux en Igbo en mettant l'accent sur leurs significations et interprétations culturelles et contextuelles. Il a adopté l'approche méthodologique pragmatique impliquant des entretiens avec 20 participants issus de diverses zones de culture Igbo pour collecter des métaphores basées sur les animaux ainsi que leurs significations et interprétations. L'introspection a également figuré dans la collecte de données car les auteurs sont des locuteurs natifs d'igbo. L'étude a révélé que des métaphores basées sur les animaux sont utilisées pour décrire la personnalité, la conduite ou le comportement humain. Cela se fait essentiellement par le processus d'association de certaines caractéristiques ou attributs des animaux avec la conduite et la personnalité humaines. L'étude a en outre identifié que certaines métaphores pouvaient être utilisées dans un double sens métaphorique, c'est-à-dire péjoratif/négatif et élogieux/positif, et celles-ci dépendent des connotations culturelles ainsi que des significations contextuelles et des interprétations des référents. L'étude conclut que les métaphores basées sur les animaux dans la langue et la culture Igbo reflètent et représentent la description d'une personne, d'une conduite ou d'un comportement, ainsi que des croyances et des réalités chez les Igbo.

Mots-clés : métaphore animalière, métaphore, pragmatique, sémantique, Igbo, culture

1. Introduction

Metaphor is an extension of a standard or literal meaning to another level and concept on the basis of some resemblance. Metaphor is a figure of substitution based on similarity (Lodge 1981). The two things considered must be similar to be substituted one for the other. It is based on similarity between things that are otherwise dissimilar and separate in space and time. Metaphorical statements assert something to be what it is known not to be.

The study of metaphor has been one of the main research areas in pragmatics. Within this framework, metaphor “is not just a figure of speech that relates one entity to another by associating their features but also a vital expression of traditional thought, belief and worldview of the Igbo” (Onwukwe 2020a: 1). In the Igbo language, animals are commonly used in metaphorical statements in which case they are assertions about a person, conduct, and general behavior.

Igbo metaphor has attracted plenty of research attention involving different aspects such as body-based metaphors (Okeogu 2015; Okeogu & Chukwu 2016; Ejinwa 2021), anthropolinguistic aspects (Onwukwe 2020a) and metaphors in idiomatic expressions and proverbs (Nwoye 2018; Okoye & Mmadike 2019). However, there has not been any detailed investigation of animal-based metaphors in the Igbo language, particularly with regard to the cultural and contextual nuances of the metaphors. This necessitated the present study on animal-based metaphors in Igbo. The study reports on data collected via the pragmatic methodological approach, and uses the framework of the traditionalist conception of metaphor as a rhetoric or literary device.

Specifically, the study identified forms of animal-based metaphors in Igbo, their interpretations based on the cultural meanings associated with the animals, or the attributes/features of the animals. The paper begins with the study purpose, and methodology. This is followed by a theoretical background detailing a brief review of the concept of metaphor based on different schools, types of metaphor, and brief review of previous studies on Igbo metaphor. This is followed by data

presentation and the analysis section, where we highlight the contextual and cultural meanings and interpretations of the metaphors.

1.1 Purpose of the study

The study analyzes animal-based metaphors in Igbo with a focus on the cultural and contextual meanings of the animals used as referents. The following specific objectives guided the study:

- i) To examine and categorize animal-based metaphors in Igbo
- ii) To analyze the implied cultural and contextual meanings of the metaphors.

1.2 Methodology

The study adopted the pragmatic methodological approach which entailed the adoption of Key Informant Interviews (KII) (“a qualitative, in-depth interviews of 15 to 35 people selected for their first-hand knowledge about a topic of interest” (USAID 1996: 1)) involving recorded oral interviews with 20 participants purposively selected from randomly selected Igbo communities and culture areas namely Ngwa, Ohafia, Owerri and Awka. The participants included 14 males and 6 females aged 60 years and above, and were considered relevant for eliciting appropriate responses on animal-based Igbo metaphor, and their interpretations. Also, introspection featured in data collection, and knowledge of data as the researchers are native speakers of the Igbo language, born and bred in the Igbo culture area. Also, the pragmatic analytical approach was adopted, which entailed that each metaphor was analyzed in relation to the context, as well as to interpretations or to the meaning provided by the participants.

2. Theory of metaphor

In this section, we present the theoretical overview of metaphor as a way of understanding the use of animal-based metaphors in Igbo. We present different approaches to the conception of metaphor, and

different structures of metaphor, as well as types of metaphor within which we highlight animal-based metaphors (human-animal metaphors), which are used to describe humans. This study is hinged on the traditional conception of metaphor which sees metaphor as aspect of rhetoric, and this relates to our pragmatic analysis of the use of animals as metaphorical referents.

There are two broad approaches to the conception of metaphor and they include the traditionalist and the modern conceptions. Metaphors are means by which words carry cultural, linguistic and literal meanings. A simple way of defining metaphor is to “say that it is a way of using language to make a comparison so that people are caused to understand something in relation to something else” Emezue (2015: 45).

According to Saeed (2016), the traditionalist conception can be traced back to Aristotle’s writings on metaphor which views metaphor as a rhetoric device used at certain time for the purpose of achieving certain effect. It is therefore seen as the figurative use of language which is mostly seen in poetic writings. Thus, a metaphorical expression involves the comparison of two unlike things whose meaning is not intended to be understood literally. The traditional approach sees metaphor as aspect of rhetoric.

The modern school of thought views metaphor as a cognitive aspect of language. According to Lakoff & Johnson (1980), metaphor is a systematic cognitive device used in the understanding of certain abstract concepts through the application of concrete ones. That is to say that it is a way in which speakers or users of a language relate what they know or what is in their environment to express what is abstract or less familiar in the environment. It is said to be cognitive because it involves some kind of mental reasoning which enables language users to map out the right concept or analogy for understanding and expressing abstract or less delineated concepts. Zhang & Hu (2009: 1) state that

Studies of metaphor have taken on an absolutely new look ever since 1980s, evidenced by “Metaphors we live by” collaborated by Lakoff & Johnson (1980), which has rocked to the core studies of metaphor in

linguistic field, attributing to their interpretation of metaphor system in the line of cognition named modern metaphor and proposes that metaphor is a matter of thought and action rather than a device of poetic imagination and the rhetoric flourish.

To this school of thought, the conception of metaphor is that which takes into account the cognitive dimension of metaphor i.e., metaphor mediates human understanding and world view (Lan 2005). A conceptual metaphor uses one idea and links it to another to better understand something. For example, the conceptual metaphor of viewing communication as a “conduit” is one large theory explained with a metaphor. So not only is our everyday communication shaped by the language of conceptual metaphors, but that is the very way we understand scholarly theories. These metaphors are prevalent in communication and we do not just use them in language; we actually perceive and act in accordance with the metaphors. A primary tenet of the cognitive school is that metaphor is a matter of thought and not merely of language: hence, the term conceptual metaphor. The metaphor may seem to consist of words or other linguistic expressions that come from the terminology of the more concrete conceptual domain, but conceptual metaphors underlie a system of related metaphorical expressions that appear on the linguistic surface. Similarly, the mappings of a conceptual metaphor are themselves motivated by image schemas which are prelinguistic schemas concerning space, time, moving, controlling, and other core elements of embodied human experience (Ejinwa 2021). In this study, we are more concerned with the pragmatic conception of metaphor which is often related to the traditionalist school.

There are two main structures of the conceptual domains posited in conceptual metaphors: Source domain (referent): the conceptual domain from which we draw metaphorical expressions (e.g., love is a journey), and the target domain from which we try to understand the expression. It has been pointed out that metaphor is a mapping (Kövecses 2005). A mapping is the systematic set of correspondences that exist between constituent elements of the source and the target domains. To know a conceptual metaphor is to know the set of mappings that apply to a given source-

target pairing. The same idea of mapping between source and target is used to describe analogical reasoning and inferences (Kövecses 2005). In relation to the study, animal-based metaphors are examined in terms of the cultural and contextual conceptions of their referents, which are basically animals such as goat, dog, eagle, etc.

According to Memon (2000), there are four main types of metaphor, and they are standard, implied, visual, and extended metaphors. While “a standard metaphor states that one idea is another, making a direct comparison as if the two ideas were synonyms, an implied metaphor makes an implied comparison without ever making a direct comparison between two ideas. A visual metaphor compares something to a visual image of another. This type of metaphor is common in advertising where a product is visualized with another object. For example, spicy Cheetos being compared to fire. An extended metaphor uses descriptive language to elaborate a comparison. It’s the type of metaphor that you find referenced throughout a stanza, a full poem, a couple of paragraphs, or an entire blog post” (Memon 2000: 3).

Animal-based metaphors (human-animal metaphors) which are used to describe humans are categorized under implied metaphors. Hart & Long (2011: 1) describe it as “a powerful tool for framing our relationship with the environment and that they can be best understood in the context of humans as evolved animals”. Animal-based metaphors offer linguistic evidence of the transfer of animal characteristics or attributes to humans by means of metaphors.

3. Previous studies on Igbo metaphor

Metaphor has been studied from different perspectives: as a rhetoric / literary, and cognitive aspect of Igbo language. Some of the extant studies include Okeogu (2015), Okeogu & Chukwu (2016), Okoye & Mmadike (2016), Onwukwe (2020a), as well as Ejina (2021). We report on the major findings of these studies.

Okeogu (2015) examined body part metaphors in Igbo. The study specifically investigated how the body parts *ihu* ‘face’, *obi/afọ* ‘heart/

belly', *ire* 'tongue', and *ukwu* 'feet' serve as sources of metaphor in Igbo. According to Okeogu (2015), *ihu* 'face' as a source of metaphor in Igbo can depict shame, bad or good fortune, hypocrisy and cheerfulness. The study observed that the metaphorical expressions *ihu oma* meaning 'good face' and *ihu ojoj* meaning 'bad face' express good and bad fortune respectively in Igbo. The study further states that a hypocrite in Igbo is metaphorically described as 'having two faces', *onye ihu àbụọ*, while a cheerful person is described as *Onye nwere ihu ocha* 'one that has white face'. In terms of *obi/afọ* 'heart/belly' as source of metaphor in Igbo, the study argues that the Igbo use the two organs interchangeably to represent emotions like kindness, contentment, wickedness and anger as in *obioma/afọ oma* 'goodheart/belly' = 'kindness', *obi ojoj/ afọ ojoj* 'bad heart/bad belly' = 'wickedness'. The study concludes that body parts metaphors are used to describe a huge portion of the Igbos' experience, physical, mental and inner world.

In their study, Okeogu & Chukwu (2016) studied the heart body-part metaphor in Igbo within the framework of conceptual metaphor theory. The study aimed to examine some of the evidence from Igbo for the claims of the conceptual metaphor theory, (CMT), focusing exclusively on mappings from the heart bodypart source domain to target domain, and referring to human emotions, character, and attributes. The study contributes to the accumulating linguistic evidence on the conceptual foundation of metaphor and its pervasiveness in everyday language. It argues that the heart body parts source domain is particularly a rich source of metaphorical expressions in Igbo. The study described the heart as the seat of emotions and sundry human attributes, and those metaphors arising from the mappings of the heart body parts yield myriad of metaphorical expressions. The study provided the following examples (1).

- (1) a. *Okonkwo nwèrè óbì*
 Okonkwo has heart
 'Okonkwo is courageous.'

- b. *Ndí úwé ójìl bù ndí óbì ójóò*
 police COP DET heart bad
 ‘The police are people with bad hearts’ (i.e., ‘Police are wicked’).
 Okeogu & Chukwu (2016: 34)

In another study Okoye & Mmadike (2016) examine meaning and interpretation of Igbo body parts-based idioms. The study analyzed some Igbo idioms relating to such body parts as head, hand, eyes and teeth. The study presents some Igbo idioms associated with body part metaphors, whose meanings are based on a single mechanism such as conventional knowledge as in the following examples (2).

- (2) a. *i pū eze elū*
 to grow teeth upwards
 ‘to indulge in a forbidden act’
- b. *inwī okwà n’aka*
 to.catch guinea.fowl PREP.hand
 ‘to be very early’ (Okoye & Mmadike 2016: 1)
- c. *inyē aka āzū*
 give hand back
 ‘to give bribe’
- d. *imē aka àbùọ*
 do hand two
 ‘stealing’
- e. *i bū n’isī*
 to carry PREP.head
 ‘to carry on the head’ (i.e., ‘to get involved in something’)
- f. *itīkō isi ọnu*
 to.put head mouth
 ‘to share ideas or think together’
- g. *igbā isi akwara*
 kick head vein
 ‘to be stubborn’

They also present those Igbo idioms associated with body-part metaphor whose meaning are based on two mechanisms, for instance, idioms which are motivated by conventional knowledge and metonymy as examples (2c) and (2d) demonstrate.

The study also analyzed idioms in which three mechanisms namely metaphor, metonymy and conventional knowledge are employed in their meaning interpretation. Examples of such idioms include the instances demonstrated in (2e), (2f) and (2g).

The study argues that conventional knowledge is a vital mechanism in the interpretation of the Igbo body part idioms, and that the meanings of idioms or metaphors are not entirely arbitrary but achieved through various cognitive mechanisms.

Onwukwe (2020a) examined Igbo metaphorical expressions from the anthropolinguistic perspective. The study specifically examined metaphorical expressions in Igbo, and analyzed the linguistic features and implied cultural values and beliefs in Igbo metaphors. The study holds that the Igbo use metaphors by associating features of an entity (animate and inanimate) to a person, situations and that the Igbo are selective of referents of their metaphorical expressions. However, he identified body-parts, animals and natural or physical objects as some of the sources of metaphor in Igbo. In addition to metaphors about a person, conduct and situation, Onwukwe argues that traditional thoughts, belief and values represent the life of the Igbo and could be reflected in metaphors. The study submits that metaphorical expressions project and reinforce the Igbo core values. It further holds that some ills and social abnormalities are expressed using metaphors, and these forms of metaphors represent what he called “metaphors about culturally significant issues”. The study provides the following examples (3).

- (3) a. *Uwa bu ahia*
 life COP market
 ‘Life/ existence is seasonal (temporal, purpose-driven)’

- b. *Uwa bu oku*
 life COP fire
 ‘Life /existence is filled with challenges and pains’
- c. *Onwu bu agu*
 death COP lion
 ‘Death is strong, fearless, formidable’
- d. *Amamihe bu oke ohia*
 wisdom COP big forest
 ‘Wisdom is inexhaustible’

Onwukwe (2020a) argues that the examples in (3) are forms of metaphorical expressions that do not refer to a person, conduct, behavior but to the Igbo worldview. Their referents are essentially animals and natural /physical objects. He argues that (3b) and (3c) are examples of the conceptualization of the Igbo worldview using metaphors. The concepts: *uwa* ‘existence/life’ and *onwu* ‘death’ and the perceptions of the Igbo about them are implied in the metaphorical expressions. The Igbo beliefs on these concepts are implied by associating them with *ahia* ‘marketplace’ and *agu* ‘lion’. By associating *uwa* ‘life/existence’ with *ahia* ‘marketplace’, the belief of the Igbo implied is that life is a journey, seasonal, and purpose-driven. To the Igbo, the market place is seasonal, periodic, gone for a purpose after which one returns to abode. The association of *ahia* ‘marketplace’ with *uwa* ‘life/existence’ suggests or implies the belief of the Igbo in reincarnation because by leaving a market place after achieving your purpose, one could as well visit it again when it (market) holds. He holds that the Igbo conceptualize and concretize realities implicitly through metaphors, and this is essentially through the choice of referents.

In another study, Ejinwa (2021) examined *ányá* ‘eye’ as a source of metaphorical expressions in Igbo. Specifically, it analyzed the diverse ways in which *ányá* ‘eye’ can be used to express some abstract concepts, ideas, and experiences in Igbo. This study critically examined *ányá* ‘eye’ as a source of metaphor in Igbo form the conceptual metaphor

theory as propounded by Lakoff & Johnson (1980). The study identified how *ányá* ‘eye’ as a concrete domain or source domain is used in the mapping out of some abstract concepts and ideas such as greed, jealousy, goodwill or good intention, respect, politeness, hope, surprise, suffering, etc. In the Igbo cultural life, a greedy person is one who always wants the larger part of everything and so they equate such insatiable lusts to the size of the eyes. He presents the following examples for greed in Igbo (4).

- (4) a. *ányá úkwú*
 eye big
 ‘greediness’
- b. *ónyé ányá úkwú*
 person eye big
 ‘a greedy person’
- c. *ányá ùfù*
 eye pain
 ‘jealousy’
- d. *ónyé ányá ùfù*
 person eye pain
 ‘a jealous person’

Ejinwa (2021) argues that in examples 4a and 4b the concept *ányá* ‘eye’ is the concrete and source domain which is used in understanding and expressing the concept of ‘greed’ in Igbo which is the target domain. On jealousy, he presents examples that can be seen in (4c) and (4d).

Ejinwa’s (2021) study speaks to metaphor as a cognitive process, a mental tool that helps us in understanding and expressing our worldviews. Thus, some aspects of the Igbo culture, belief, core values and morals are embedded or expressed metaphorically.

It is evident from the brief overview of previous studies of Igbo metaphors dealing with other semantic domains that both the traditional and modern or cognitive conceptions of metaphor has been applied in

the analysis of Igbo metaphors. This establishes the hinging of the present study on the traditional conception of Igbo metaphors, as well as signals a gap in literature involving a detailed study on animal-based metaphors in Igbo.

4. Cultural and contextual interpretation and meanings of animal-based metaphors in Igbo

Like other forms of metaphors, animal-based metaphors have referents, which are essentially animals. They are basically associated with the description of a person, conduct/action or situation. The features of the referents are associated with the person, action/conduct or situation being described. Virtually all known animals in Igbo culture are used as referents depending on what is being described, hence they become metaphors of a person, action/conduct or situation. We begin our analysis by identifying some animals which are used as referents of some Igbo metaphors, and highlight their cultural and contextual interpretations which are drawn from the attributes or features of the referents in the Igbo culture. We categorize the animals into domesticated and non-domesticated for the purposes of finer analysis of data.

4.1. Domesticated animals

In this subcategory, we identified the following animals *ewu* ‘goat’, *nkita* ‘dog’, *ezi* ‘pig’, *ijiji* ‘fly’, *oke* ‘rat’, *aturu* ‘sheep’, *nwamba* ‘cat’, *anwuta* ‘mosquito’, *torotoro* ‘turkey’ and *azu* ‘fish’. The animal *ewu* ‘goat’ in Igbo culture is perceived as foolish and senseless, and this is derived from its tendency to stray away in search of food (symbolically represented as palm frond). Among the Igbo, it is a belief that domesticated animals share some affinities with humans, a reason for which some of them are called pets, and a deviant such as goat is perceived among the Igbo as foolish and senseless. So, a goat becomes a metaphor for foolishness, and could be used to describe a human, his conduct or behavior, this is illustrated in (5).

- (5) a. *Emeka bu ewu*
 Emeka COP goat
 ‘Emeka is foolish or senseless.’
- b. *Abum ewu gi?*
 1.SG goat 2.SG
 ‘Am I a fool or senseless to you?’

Nkita ‘dog’ is also a metaphor among the Igbo, and it is frequently used in dual metaphorical sense, i.e., derogatory or negative, but also what may be considered commendatory or positive. Consider the example (6).

- (6) a. *Ada bu nkita*
 Ada COP dog
 ‘Ada is promiscuous, a protector or guardian.’
- b. *Jiri nwayo i buzi nkita*
 take.it.easy 2.SG COP dog
 ‘Take it easy, you are (now) a noise maker.’
- c. *I na-ehikwa ura? I buzi nkita*
 2.SG AUX-sleep 2.SG COP dog
 ‘Do you sleep (at all)? You are (now) a guardian or protector.’

The example above could be used in dual metaphorical sense i.e., derogatory/negative as well as in what could be described as commendatory/positive sense. Its derogatory sense which is related to promiscuity derives from some cultural interpretations. Promiscuity as a feature of a *nkita* ‘dog’ stems from the fact that a dog has multiple unspecified sex partners or it engages in indiscriminate sexual activity. This is commonly constructed and represented in folk (songs and tales) among the Igbo. “Sexual relations are traditionally recognized in two institutions among the Igbo, namely marriage and concubinage. Any sexual relation outside these is seen as *akwara* ‘promiscuity’” (Onwukwe 2020b: 12). The Igbo associate this feature of a dog with

promiscuity. Dog therefore becomes a metaphor for promiscuity, and could be used to describe one (male or female) who has multiple, unspecified sex partners. In addition, dog's barking signifies noise in the ears of an unconcerned person but a danger alert to its owner. This is associated metaphorically with someone who is loud or a noise maker which may also be considered derogatory use, as illustrated in (6b).

Secondly, the animal *nkita* 'dog' could be used in what may be considered a commendatory sense. In this sense, it could imply a guardian/protector as in (6c).

Other animal frequently used in Igbo metaphors is *ezi* 'pig'. Consider the example (7).

- (7) *O bu ezi*
 3.SG COP pig
 'He/she is dirty.'

In the Igbo culture, *ezi* 'pig' is associated with 'dirt' because of the way and manner it is reared in the Igbo culture, which is more often than not dirty as a result of the type of food it consumes. This partly accounts for why some Igbo people abstain from eating pork. This feature of the pig is used as a metaphor for a person or situation that is dirty or eye-sore. *Ijiji* 'fly' is also used in Igbo metaphors with varied metaphorical interpretations or meanings among the Igbo. Consider the illustration in (8).

- (8) *Nwata a bu ijiji*
 child DET COP fly
 'This child is stubborn, parasite, nuisance.'

Example (8) reveals varied metaphorical meanings of the animal *ijiji* 'fly', which include stubborn, parasitic and a nuisance, all of which are all cultural connotations of flies derived from its features. To the Igbo, flies are associated with stubbornness, and this is derived from

the attribute of being resilient in going after its food. This feature is also represented in Igbo folk tales and songs in which stubbornness is attributed to flies. The cultural connotation of ‘parasitic’ stems from the fact that a fly follows its food to any point even to its own peril (as described in the proverb, *Ijji nti ike na-eso ozu ala n’ili* ‘A stubborn fly follows the corpse to the grave’), while the metaphorical meaning of ‘nuisance’ derives from the buzzing sound of flies, which is often disturbing to humans.

Oke ‘rat’ could be used in dual metaphorical sense, i.e., derogatory/negative, as well as in what could be described as commendatory/positive sense.

(9) a. *Chinedu bu oke*
 Chinedu COP rat
 ‘Chinedu is a thief.’

b. *A bu m oke n’ulo a*
 DET COP POSS rat PREP.house DET
 ‘I am an insider or I am conversant with this house.’

Its derogatory connotation is derived from the rat’s tendency to eat from unchecked food or other substances in a home which culturally implies stealing, hence rat is a metaphor for a thief. On the other hand, rat connotes an insider, which is a positive interpretation. This is derived from the fact that a rat is domestic, and as such is quite conversant with the nooks and crannies of its habitat house. Both of these features are associated metaphorically in the description of a person as in the example (9b).

Aturu ‘sheep’ among the Igbo has the cultural connotations of foolishness, gentleness, unharmed or friendly behavior. These are associated with its attributes including being untamed or not controlled which could be perceived as being disloyal to its owner which is culturally interpreted as foolishness as in (10a) as well as being unharmed, gentle and friendly to humans as in the example as (10b).

- (10) a. *Ada bu aturu*
 Ada COP sheep
 ‘Ada is just a sheep.’
- b. *Emeka enweghi nsogbu o bu aturu*
 Emeka does.NEG problem 3.SG COP sheep
 ‘Emeka is friendly, harmless, gentle.’

In the Igbo homesteads, *anwuṭa* ‘mosquito’ is frequently found. It sucks human blood (associated with the spread of malaria), and this happens often with accompanying buzzing sound, which is quite disturbing. This feature is referenced in the description of a person who is pestering or disturbing as in the example (11).

- (11) *O kweghi m zuru ike o bu anwuṭa*
 3.SG.agree DET rest 3.SG COP mosquito
 ‘He/she would not let me rest, he/she is pestering or disturbing me.’

Nwamba ‘cat’ has dual metaphorical sense in the Igbo culture i.e., derogatory/negative as well as in what could be described as commendatory/positive sense. In a derogatory sense, it is associated metaphorically with a person who is deadly or poisonous, and this sense describes its poisonous nature, unlike other domestic animals.

- (12) a. *Ada bu nwamba*
 Ada COP cat
 ‘Ada is poisonous/deadly.’
- b. *Abu m nwamba n’ulo a*
 1.SG COP cat PREP.house DET
 ‘I am a protector of this house (against any intruder).’

The cat’s commendatory or positive connotation is derived from associating it with a protector, which derives from the fact that it preys

on rats and other rodents often found in houses or homes in the Igbo culture, as demonstrated in example (12b).

Torotoro ‘turkey’ is known for its unique appearance, which is considered flamboyant, due to the way it spreads its wings, and showcases its colors and beauty. This unique nature to the Igbo connotes or is conceived as pride, and associating this feature with a person leads to the metaphorical meaning/interpretation of a proud person as in the example (13).

- (13) *Emeka bu torotoro*
 Emeka COP turkey
 ‘Emeka is proud.’

Another metaphorical sense in which the bird is used in Igbo, is in the description of an Igbo who is not bred or immersed in the Igbo culture. This is derived from the derogatory conception of the bird’s nature in the Igbo culture. There is an Igbo folk tale, in which the bird is considered as alien to other domestic birds known to the Igbo. This feature, by analogy, is referred to in the description of an Igbo who lacks knowledge of the Igbo culture, traditions and values. Such a person is described as an alien or foreigner as in the example (14).

- (14) *O bu torotoro*
 3.SG COP turkey
 ‘He is alien (i.e., not bred in Igbo culture or not immersed in Igbo culture).’

4.2 Non-domesticated animals

In this sub-category, we identified the following animals *enwe* ‘monkey’, *odum* ‘lion’, *agu* ‘leopard’, *azu* ‘fish’, *udele* ‘vulture’, *usu* ‘bat’, and *ugo* ‘eagle’. Others are *egbe* ‘kite’, *agwo* ‘snake’, *mbe* ‘tortoise’, *osa* ‘squirrel’, *edi* ‘hyena’, *ufu* ‘fox’, and *awo* ‘toad’.

Enwe ‘monkey’ is frequently used in Igbo metaphors. Consider the example (15).

- (15) *Nwoke a bu enwe*
 man DET COP vulture
 ‘This man is ugly, primitive, cunning, wayward.’

Enwe ‘monkey’ has varied metaphorical meanings or interpretations derived from its features or connotations among the Igbo, including ‘ugly’, ‘primitive’ ‘cunning’ and ‘wayward’, and these relate to the description of a person and conduct. It derives its metaphorical meaning of ‘ugly’ from its physical look which to the Igbo is ugly, and ‘primitive’ from the tales of human evolution where it is claimed that monkey family is one of the stages of human evolution. Associating monkey to ‘waywardness’ and ‘cunningness’ is a description of the characteristics or tendencies of the animal. In describing a personality or conduct, *enwe* becomes a metaphor for ugly, wayward, cunning and primitive.

Odum ‘lion’ and *agu* ‘leopard’ are seen as strong, brave, and fearless animals, and these are associated with the characteristics of the animals as carnivores, and their description as the king of the jungle. The Igbo associate these features with a person, hence *odum* ‘lion’ and *agu* ‘leopard’ are metaphors for strong, powerful, brave and fearless person as in the examples in (16a) and (16b).

- (16) a. *Kalu bu odum*
 Kalu COP lion
 ‘Kalu is fearless, brave, strong.’
- b. *Emeka bu agu*
 Emeka COP leopard
 ‘Emeka is strong/brave/fearless.’

The fish is another animal which is referenced in metaphorical expressions. It is perceived by the Igbo to be unstable and uncontrollable as it is often difficult to catch a fish in its natural habitat, water, and the Igbo associate this feature with a person that is unstable, not taking a particular position/stance as in the example (17a) and (17b). Similarly,

azu ‘fish’ is an aquatic animal, and the Igbo associate this feature in the description of a person that is skillful in swimming as in example (17a).

- (17) a. *Obi bu azu*
 Obi COP fish
 ‘Obi is good/skillful swimmer or unstable.’
- b. *I na-amighari i bu azu?*
 2.SG AUX-wobbling 2.SG COP fish
 ‘You are unstable’

Another animal used metaphorically is *udele* ‘vulture’, and it has various metaphorical meanings as revealed in the features or attributes of the referent *udele* ‘vulture’. Among the Igbo, the animal connotes a number of attributes including ‘ugly’, ‘not useful’, and ‘associate of deities’. These features could be implied in a metaphorical use of the animal, often to describe a person or conduct. The connotation of ‘ugly’ reflects its form as bird, which is quite different from other birds, and the Igbo perceive it as ugly. The connotation of ‘not useful’, reflects the fact that, unlike other birds, it is not edible among the Igbo. Other connotations are ‘associate of deities’/ ‘messenger of the spirits’, which reflects a similar cultural belief among the Igbo, and as such they go about unharmed and seen to have no enemy. Onukawa (2016: 23) observes that “the Igbo revere their deities or spirits, and they transfer the reverence to objects, persons, animals or things associated with them.” These cultural connotations are inferred in the description of a personality, conduct or behavior, such as someone that is ugly, not useful, or associate/messenger of deities, or one that has no enemy. The vulture not being edible among the Igbo is interpreted as ‘not having any enemy’. In this sense, man that hunts other birds is considered bird’s enemy.

- (18) *Obi bu udele*
 Obi COP vulture
 ‘Obi is not useful, associate/messenger of deities/spirits (has no enemy).’

Usu ‘bat’ is also used in Igbo metaphors with varied metaphorical interpretations or meanings among the Igbo. Consider the illustrations below:

- (19) a. *Ichie Kalu bu usu*
 elder Kalu COP bat
 ‘Elder Kalu is evil/devilish/indifferent.’
- b. *Kwuo uche gi i bu usu?*
 say your mind 2.SG COP bat
 ‘Say your mind, are you indifferent?’
- c. *Emeka biko abukwala usu n’ulo a*
 Emeka please do.not.be bat PREP.house DET
 ‘Emeka please do not be indifferent in this family.’

The Igbo perceive *usu* ‘bat’ as an animal with distinguishing but terrifying or horrific looks, and that it’s ominous, as its presence portends danger and evil presence. It is a folk belief that bats are messengers of the (evil) spirits. The Igbo associate this belief with persons or conduct; hence bat is a metaphor for devilish person, conduct or evil messenger as illustrated in example (19a). In the Igbo culture, other connotations of a bat include that it has no specific habitat, i.e., it neither belongs to the space or ground. It has dual habitat. It is said to be neutral or indifferent with regard to habitat. The Igbo perceive this feature as being indifferent, thus, the bat is referenced in the description of a person who is considered neutral or indifferent as (19b) and (19c).

Ugo ‘eagle’ is one of the birds that are highly revered in the Igbo culture; it is associated with honor, prestige and greatness, as well as seen as special, beautiful and rare. These qualities are derived from the features of an eagle, including the facts that, unlike other birds, it is not easily seen (related to it being special), it lives in areas that humans cannot identify or access (a reason for it being rare), associated with royalty (related to it being honorable / prestigious / great). The Igbo associate these features in the description of a person; hence the eagle is a metaphor for beauty, greatness, honor as in the example (20).

- (20) *Ada bu ugo*
 Ada COP eagle
 ‘Ada is beautiful, great, rare, honorable.’

Egbe ‘kite’ has dual metaphorical sense i.e., derogatory/negative, as well as what could be described as commendatory/positive sense.

- (21) a. *Obinna bu egbe*
 Obinna COP kite
 ‘Obinna is a thief.’
- b. *Anya di ya nkọ ọ bu egbe/ele*
 Anya COP sharp 2.SG COP kite/antelope
 ‘He is vigilant or watchful, he is swift/sharp.’
- c. *Obinna bu agwọ*
 Obinna COP snake
 ‘Obinna is deceitful/tall.’

Its derogatory connotation is derived from the kite’s carnivorous nature and the fact that it preys on chicken and other domestic birds which the Igbo perceive as stealing. The Igbo associate this feature in the description of a person hence *egbe* ‘kite’ is a metaphor for a thief.

The other metaphorical sense of the use of *egbe* ‘kite’, which is also shared by the *ele* ‘antelope’, among the Igbo is considered positive, and it is its ‘swiftness’, ‘watchfulness’, ‘vigilance’ and ‘sharpness’. These describe other features of the kite, particularly how it attacks and preys on its target, usually very swift and sharp, and the speed or swiftness of the kite as well as *ele* ‘antelope’. These features are associated with the description of a person, as seen in the example (21b).

Agwọ ‘snake’ has some connotations such as “long” which reflects its form as reptile as well as “deceitful” which reflects the role assigned to it in some Igbo traditional folk and myths. Associating these

connotations with the person would lead to the metaphorical meanings of “tall/long, deceitful” as in (21c).

Ufu ‘hawk’ has the cultural connotation of a thief, and this is derived from the manner it preys on its target. It secretly attacks its prey often abruptly. This feature is associated with stealing in the Igbo culture, hence *ufu* ‘hawk’ is seen as metaphor for a thief as in the example (22).

- (22) *Nwoke ahụ bu ufu*
 man DET COP hawk
 ‘That man is a thief.’

Edi abali ‘hyena’ is a metaphor for a person who is sleepy. This is derived from associating this feature or attribute of the animal with a person. In the Igbo culture, hyena is perceived as an animal that is sleepy, and sleeps deeply. So, when a person engages in deep or unnecessary sleep, he/she is metaphorically referred to as hyena, as in the example (23):

- (23) *Kalu bu edi (abali)*
 Kalu COP hyena
 ‘Kalu is often sleeping/sleepy.’

In most Igbo folk tales, songs as well as myths, the *mbe* ‘tortoise’ plays a role of a cunning, wise and deceitful animal. This folk belief is implied in the description of a person as in the examples (24a) and (24b). Likewise, *awọ* ‘frog’ or ‘toad’ is metaphorically associated with fatness in the Igbo culture, and this is derived from the fatty or stout feature of the toad/frog as in (24c).

- (24) a. *Mazi Ude bu mbe*
 Mazi Ude COP tortoise
 ‘Mazi Ude is deceitful or cunning.’

- b. *Jụọ ya ọ bu mbe*
ask DET 3.SG COP tortoise
'Inquire of him, he/she is wise.'
- c. *Nwanyi ahụ bu awọ*
Nwanyi DET COP toad
'That woman is fat/shapeless.'

Ọsa 'squirrel' has dual metaphorical sense in the Igbo culture i.e., derogatory/negative and what could be described as commendatory/positive sense. In a derogatory sense, it is used to imply 'restiveness' or 'instability' as in the example (25a).

- (25) a. *Ada bu ọsa*
Ada COP squirrel
'Ada is restive or unstable.'
- b. *Eze bu ọsa*
Eze COP squirrel
'Eze is skillful trader.'

Its commendatory or positive connotation is derived from the feature of the squirrel, as it jumps from one tree to another almost all the time, and shows some skill in doing this. The Igbo associate this feature to a person who is skillful in task or whatever he/she does, as demonstrated in the example (25b).

5. Summary and conclusion

The study examined animal-based metaphors in Igbo, and focused on their cultural and contextual meanings and interpretations of the referents of the metaphors. The study demonstrates that, like other forms of metaphor in Igbo, animal-based metaphors are used to describe humans and their personality, conduct or behavior. This is achieved by associating some features or attributes of the animals with the humans

or the situation. The study also identified that animal-based metaphors like other types of metaphors in Igbo constitute a rich repository of cultural beliefs, values and norms of the Igbo. It is not just a figure of speech, but also a means of conceptualizing the Igbo beliefs and worldview. It is observed from the analysis that metaphors derive their meaning culturally and contextually. In terms of culture, there are cultural conceptions of the referents which are associated with by the use of the referents.

The study identified that some animals have dual metaphorical sense, such as derogatory/negative and commendatory/positive, and these relate to the features as well as cultural and contextual interpretations of the referents. The study further identified some cultural conceptions or connotations of some referents including ‘thief’, ‘stubborn’, ‘strong’, ‘brave’, ‘insider’, etc. As a conclusion of this study, metaphor as a rhetoric device intercepts semantics and pragmatics, and metaphors including animal-based types in the Igbo language and culture reflect and represent the Igbo conceptions of a person conduct or behavior, as well as beliefs and values and norms. This relates to the theoretical framework of traditional conception of metaphor, which conceives metaphor in the realms of pragmatics and rhetoric. In this sense, the cultural contexts of the use of the animal referents produce different metaphorical meanings among the Igbo. Our conclusion therefore supports the observations of previous studies on Igbo metaphor that metaphors in Igbo may be used to describe a person’s conduct and behavior, as well as in concretizing Igbo beliefs and values.

Abbreviations

1, 2, 3 – 1st, 2nd, 3rd person pronouns

AUX – auxiliary verb

COP – copula

DET – determiner

NEG – negative marker

POSS – possessive

PREP – preposition

SG – singular

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