Metaphorical Extensions of Ye (eat) Verb: *The Case of Gã*

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to examine lexical semantics from a cognitive approach in Gã, a Kwa language. In Gã, the verb Ye 'eat' has polysemous and metaphorical uses. There has been linguistic research in Gã and there is still the interest to study the language. Currently, to the best of our knowledge, there is no study that specifically explores lexical semantics from the cognitive approach. This is the gap the researcher attempts to fill. The verb denoting perception has metaphorical expressions that will have some relationship with the original verb. In the discussion, we consider the pragmatic implications and relevance of the extensions derived from the verb ye 'eat'.. We look at the nature of the derived semantic patterns and consider the extent to which they are peculiar to the Gă language and culture. The study is based on Sweetser's (1990) cognitive approach of semantic change. The paper shows that most of the metaphorical extensions are based on human perception and interaction with the physical world. The findings of the study reveal that the metaphorical meanings reflect the socio-cultural experiences of the Gă land, hence, the more they move away from the physical realms, the greater the realizations.

Keywords: Metaphorical extensions, Metaphor, Perception, Polysemy, Pragmatics, Semantic change

1. Introduction

This paper examines the interpretive use of *ye* a perception verb in Gă, a Kwa language spoken in the southern part of Ghana. Polysemy is a term used in semantic analysis to describe the situation in which a word has two or more related meanings. Though this explanation seems very simple, polysemy is not a clear-cut concept. Linguists have been trying to give a sound account of what polysemy is and how it can be accounted for.

The purpose of this present study is the analysis of the polysemy that exist in the perception verb in Gă. Perception verbs in this language do not only convey meanings related to the physical perception of this sense modality (vision, hearing, taste etc), but they are used to express other meanings as well (*ye wala' eat life'* as in enjoy life, *ye sεε* 'eat back' as in to succeed someone). The aim is to find out which semantic extensions are found in this semantic field, the pragmatic relevance of the extensions derived from the verb *ye* 'eat'. We also look at the nature of the semantic patterns and consider the extent to which they are peculiar to the Gă language and culture. The question is why these semantic extensions seem to occur between very specific conceptual domains and not others. The reason why these semantic extensions take place are important, but the question of how these meanings are obtained is equally important. How these semantic extensions are carried out, that is how two different conceptual domains, such as physical visual perception and intellectual connections are brought together. How is it possible to shift from a physical domain to a more abstract domain? To answer these questions, we base our study on Sweeter's (1990) cognitive approach to the study of polysemy and semantic change. Sweeter's model involves semantic change and polysemous patterns, metaphorical connections between semantic fields, the mind as a body metaphor, sense perception and the structure of the metaphors of the perception. Within this approach, the knowledge and experiences human beings have of the things and events that they know are transferred to those other objects and events, which they are not familiar with, and even to abstract concepts.

2. Literature Review

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) were among the first ones to point out this conceptual potential,

especially in the case of metaphor. Lakoff and Johnson (1980:5) posit that "the essence of metaphor, is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in term of another". Agyekum (2013:185) states that "a metaphor is a statement that one thing is something else which in literal sense is not."

Littlemore (2003:273) also defines metaphors as "culturally loaded expressions whose meaning has to be inferred through reference to cultural knowledge." This means that there will be variations in the interpretation of metaphorical expressions in a language. Lakoff and Johnson and Agyekum share the same idea on metaphor.

Sweeter (1990) investigates the multiple meanings in the semantic field of English perception of verbs. She shows that lexical polysemy cannot be understood independently of human cognitive structure. The fact that everyday cognition is metaphorically shaped, at least partially, helps us to understand the way in which the senses of polysemous words are related.

Although I agree that metaphor is a cognitive means by which the structure of human experience is created and extended, metaphor cannot entirely explain why some semantic changes do not shift towards a more abstract meaning but remain physical.

The use of metaphors is one of the highest uses of language creativity. Meanings of metaphorical utterances cannot be deduced from literal senses of the words. For one to be able to interpret metaphors, one needs to understand both the literal meaning and conceptual and the cognitive facts about the world. There is no one correspondence over the individual words and their meanings. The whole chunk must be taken (see Agyekum 2013). Various types of metaphors have been identified and discussed in literature. For example, Blakemore (1992, 160 – 164 cited in Agykum 2002) have made distinctions between living metaphors and dead metaphors. In living metaphors, the traits and comparison can easily be identified with the literal meaning while in dead metaphor the meaning of the metaphorical expressions may not have any link with their literal meanings with the passage of time. The discussions in this work will not cater for the dead metaphors.

Polysemy is a semantic phenomenon where the same word has two or more different related meanings Hornby (2015:1189). Agyekum (2015) notes that "The major feature which differentiates polysemy from homonymy is that of relatedness and unrelateness of meanings". When words have related meanings they form categories and their meanings bear resemblance to one another. The common characteristic makes it possible for a society to use polysemy to organize its concept into categories. According to Lakoff (1987) cited in Agyekum (2005:149), polysemy arises because there are systematic relationships between different cognitive models and between elements of the same model. The same word is often used for elements that stand in cognitive relations to one another. In polysemy, new meanings are developed from words over a period of time, in which case the original established meanings is not lost. This means that the original word with its original sense is now loaded with other senses. Because the new derived sense still share some connotations and links with the basic sense, the word is believed to be carrying a heavy load of meanings, that is the basic and the derived senses. In situations like this, the contextual and pragmatic features come in to help solve the problem of ambiguity that might crop up. We want to make a distinction between polysemy and homonymy. Cruse (2000:109) posits that polysemy refers to one word with several connected meaning while homonymy refers to several words with the same formal properties both phonological and graphic but with different meanings.

Following the perspective of lexicalization, several papers in semantics and pragmatics of sensory verb has been studied in a number of works. Newman (2009) focused on eat and drink verbs, a cross-linguistic study. Aikenvald (2009) studied the linguistics of eating and drinking verbs, Adjei (2013) works on verbs of ingestion and their semantics in Gbe, Atintonu (2013) The semantic and grammar of positional verbs in Gurene, Agyekum's (2015) works on Ani 'Eye' metaphorical extension in Akan and Agyekum (2002) is on lexical polysemy and metaphorical extension of 'Te' 'hear' perception verb in Akan. These works prove that the cognitive device makes it possible to link a physical domain with an abstract domain. They argued that the domain of physical perception is polysemous because it does not only refer to physical perception itself, but also to other domains of experience. Extensive

work on perception verbs has been done in different languages e.g. Akan, Ewe, Gurene and other Indo-languages like Basque and Spanish. However, there is no study that specifically explores lexical semantics from the cognitive approach in the Gă language. This is the gap the researcher attempts to fill.

3. Grammatical Features

In Gã, word order and pronominal forms are used to signal grammatical relation, Dakubu(2007). A simple declarative sentence has SVO word order that is the subject precedes the verb, and the object follows the verb. Hence, Gã is an SVO head – initial language. The grammatical categories associated with the verb include tense, aspect, mood and negation (Kropp 2008). The categories may be marked morphologically on the verb. Also, the form of the pronoun used indicates whether an entity is to be considered as a subject or an object in a given construction in Gã. Pronouns are not gender – specific (Kotey 2014). The morpheme / a/ is used to mark plurality in order to show concord in sentences. Again, it is realized as 3SG / PL INDEF. i.e. Third person singular or plural indefinite marker. For easy understanding of the analysis, we give the full meanings of the abbreviations.

Abbreviations: COMP, Complementizer; COPL, Copula; CONJ, Conjunction; DET, Determiner; FUT, Future tense; FOC, Focus; ICV, Inherent Complement Verb; INDEF, Indefinite; LOC., Locative; MP, Motional prefix; NEG, Negation marker; OBJ, Object position; PERF, Perfective aspect; POS, Possessive; Postp. Postposition; PROG, Progressive aspect; 1 SG, First Person Singular; 2SG, Second person singular; 3SG; Third person singular; PL, Plural marker.

4. Methodology

The data for the analysis is drawn from our speech contexts. This includes recordings from our daily conversational speeches. We also collected some of the data from secondary source e.g English – Gã Dictionary (Dakubu 2009). Consultation and interview sessions were held with native speakers to explain some of the expressions which are considered as metaphor. We conducted unstructured interviews with two scholars of linguistics who are native speakers of the language. We did this in order to confirm or disconfirm researchers' intuitive knowledge regarding certain usages. After that, the examples of the relevant *ye* constructions were extracted and in each example, we evaluated which of the construction is considered correct, we then grouped the data as used in the work. Finally, the translated version from the Gã language into English is mine.

5. Basic Sense of *ye*

The basic realization of *ye* verb is to eat. It involves the physical swallowing a physical object as seen below. The object can be soluble or insoluble.

	X	Ye	Something
a.	NP [+amiate]	V [physical]	NP --- [+ solube + insoluble]
	Kofi	e-ye	Omɔ [+ solube]
	Kofi	PERF eat	rice

"Kofi has   eaten rice"

  b. Abifao lɛ   ye   fufɔ [- solube]
     baby DET.   eat + past   breast
     "The baby   sucked breast milk"

5.1 Basic Sense of Ye in the Gã Language

I discussed in this section the expressions of the verb Ye 'eat'. The meaning of ye 'to eat' in Gã refers to eating food. The food could be solid or liquid. We can therefore talk of solid foods such as kenkey, banku, and liquid foods such as soups, and fruits or breast milk. This verb is transitive and required a syntactic object of eating. The examples given below illustrate the primary sense of the verb ye.

1. Odoi   yè kɔmi

    Odoi eat-Past Kenkey

    (Odoi ate Kenkey)

2. Mi ye banku

    ISG eat-Past banku

    (I ate banku)

In Gã, the meaning of the verb *ye* also can be extended to include suck.

3. Akwei ye-ɔ e- wao

    Akwei eat-HAB 3SG POS finger

    (Akwei sucks his finger)

4. Abifao lɛ ye fufɔ

    Baby DET eat-Past breast milk

    (The baby sucked breast milk)

It is important to point out that, eating of fruits may involve sucking of the juice from the fruit. It is believed that everything is eaten including the chaff.

5．E - ye akutu

    He-3 SG eat-Past orange

    (He ate an orange)

The above examples satisfy the concept of eating which selects edible nouns as its compliment. Linguistically, features of *ye* 'eat', the basic verb which refers to eating may have the semantic features as

  6. N + animate   N – animate

+ food   + food

+ solid   + washable

Food + cookable food +non cookable

Chaf

Apart from the basic meaning given above other expressions of *ye* is used metaphorically. I will now illustrate or examine some expressions with a data.

5.2 *To contract debt / be indebted*

When one is indebted, the metaphorical expression use is *ye nyɔmɔ* 'eat debt'

The act of borrowing money, either from the bank or a friend or acquiring goods that you cannot pay back, gives the impression that you have consumed the money. The examples illustrated below explain the fact.

7. Moi ye nyɔmɔ

     Moi eat-Past debt

     (Moi contracted debt)

8. Awo ye shika lɛ

     Awo eat-Past money DET

     (Awo spent the money)

9. Ado ye e- dɛŋ fɛɛ

     Ado eat-Past 3SG POS hands all

     (Ado destroyed his store of wealth)

The verb *ye* can be interpreted to mean waste money or be indebted. When someone becomes bankrupt: *Ye nyɔmɔ* or *Ye shika* is used in the Gã language. However, *ye edɛŋ* is metaphorically used as depletion of one's store of wealth' because when we consume food or something the container in which the food is served becomes empty hence the depletion of wealth. This makes the utterance relevant.

5.3 *To win a Case*

The act of winning a case at traditional court or the law court is literally considered as eating. But with the notion in mind, one can draw the conclusion that the person who wins a case also gets a sense of fulfillment and this is relevant in the Gã culture and many other cultures.

10.   E – ye kunim yɛ maŋtsɛ we lɛ.

     3SG eat win COP chief house DET.

     (He won the case at the chief's Palace)

11. Kofi ye bem.

   Kofi eatPast case

   (Kofi won the case)

5.4 To Become Disturb

Another conventionalized metaphorical usage associated with *ye* verbs in the data relates to emotional disturbance. When someone becomes sad, worried or disturb. It is literally stated that one has eaten sadness or worried. The metaphorical interpretation is that the person is emotionally disturbed which is an abstract notion. The examples illustrated in (12 &13) support the claim made.

12. Yoo lɛ ye e- tsui

    Woman DET. eat-Past 3SG POS heart

    (The woman is disturbed or worried)

13. Aku ye awerɛho ejaakɛ e- nyɛ é - gbó

    Aku eat-Past sadness because 3SG POS mother PERF die

    (Aku is sad because her mother is dead)

5.5 To Enjoy Life

In Gɑ̃, when someone is enjoying life people think that the person is eating life. This is the literal expression of the people in the Ga culture.

Gibbs. (1997:145) noted that, our cognitive verbs extend beyond our individual minds and are extended into our cultural world. This by our conceptual knowledge, the person is profiting from life. This could be that the person adorns himself with expensive clothing and make ups to have a good look. It could also be that the person is experiencing a good feeling. The metaphor here implies the person is enjoying life.

14. Atu ye wala
    Atu eat-Past life
    (Atu enjoyed life)

5.6 To Celebrate a Festivity/ Christmas

We do conceptually accept the interpretation of *ye* metaphorically to mean celebration of our festivity such as the annual festival, Easter and Christmas. Anything that we enjoy is considered to bring delight and satisfaction to the celebrants. The examples below attest to this.

15. Wɔ - ye Hɔmɔwɔ

    2 PL eat-Past Hɔmɔwɔ

    (We celebrated the Hɔmɔwɔ (festival)

16. Amɛ - ye blonya

    3 PL eat-Past Christmas

  (They celebrated Chrismas)

5.7 To Rule / Acquire Power

The acquisition of power is another conventional metaphor that is associated with the 'eat' ye verb in the data. The acquisition of power in the data mainly relates to chieftaincy. When someone exercises power over others or installed / ruled as a chief. It is literally sated that, the person is eating power. The interpretation is that the person feels a sense of accomplishment in life. The abstract notion is that the chieftaincy power is in his possession and he is benefiting by using that power to control his subjects. In this sense, he gets some privileges which are self fulfilling. Examples below supports the claim:

17. E ye mantsɛ yɛ La maŋ.

    3SG eat-Past chief at La town

    (He ruled as a chief in La township)

5.8 To become an Orphan

Another conventional metaphor which is associated with *ye* is the act of becoming an orphan. When a parent dies, it is literally stated that the person has eaten orphan. The metaphoric interpretation is that he or she has no one to take care of him/her as the parents would do. Thereby he is alone to plan his / her future.

18. E – ye awusa ejaakɛ e nyɛ e- gbo.

    3 SG eat-Past orphan because 3SG POS mother PERF die

    (He become an orphan because his mother is dead)

5.9 To Relate to Someone

The Gɑ̃ verb ye can be used to associate oneself closely to his/ her friend. In this case the people concerned are closely related.

19. Amɛ ye ɔ ka kome mli nii

    2Pl eat + HAB bowl one inside food

    They eat from one pot

    (They are closely related)

5.10 To Testify

    The act of giving testimony for someone in a case is literally considered as eating. But the notion in mind gives the impression that the friend is testifying on his behalf. eg.

20. Ayi ye odase e - ha lɛ

Ayi eat-Past testify PERF give 3SG OBJ

(Ayi had testified for him)

5.11 To Tease / Mock

To tease or mock is referred to as eating in Gã. When someone tries to play an expensive joke or uses abusive words at a friend, then we say he is teasing or mocking at the friend. Mocking involves a little bit of laughter when talking to the friend.

21.   E ye Kofi he fɛo

3SG eat-PastKofi POS self beauty

(He teased Kofi)

22.   E ye Kofi la

3SG eat-Past Kofi fire

(He teased / mocked at Kofi)

5.12 To be Honest / Loyal / Faithful

This conventional metaphor which is associated with ye is the act of becoming faithful/loyal or honest. When someone is honest to his friends or parents, it is literally interpreted that the person has eaten truth

23. Amɛ ye lɛ anɔkwa

3 PL eat 3SG truth

(They were honest / loyal/ faithful to him / her)

5.13 To Represent

The act of representing someone in a gathering or in a case is literally considered as eating. But with the notion in mind that the person representing the one can also have a sense of fulfillment.

24. E ye Aku naji- aŋ

3Sg eat-Past Aku legs inside

(He represented Aku)

5.14 To Suffer / Go Through an Ordeal

There are metaphorical expressions that are used to refer to suffering, undergo an ordeal. The conventionalized metaphorical usage associated with the *ye* verbs in the data relates to emotional disturbances. When someone undergoes an ordeal or is suffering any illness, it is stated that one has eaten illness or ordeal. The conceptual metaphor interpretation is that the person is emotionally suffering which is an abstract notion in the case of illness but the ordeal is physically.

The examples in 25 - 27 support the claim made above.

25. E he mii ye

    3SG POS self PROG eat

    (He / She is ill)

26. E e ye kpla

    3SG PROG eat (skin) disases'

    (He / she is suffering from skin infection)

27.   Akwei ya - ye aka

    Akwei MP eat ordeal

    (Akwei underwent an ordeal)

6. Idiomatic Expression of ye 'eat' verb with Postposition

Some of the interpretations become so much conventionalized, when they are considered as idioms. The idiomatic expressions of the verb *ye* may be derived in many ways. These include attaching a postposition and an NP. All these expressions with additional meaning are still related to either the physical or mental representation. They are usually discontinuous ie *Ye* + X. Let us consider the various interpretations in the section below.

In Gã postposition are locatives that often come after locative NPs. There are, however cases where postpositions occur without a dependent NP. A null object is thus created. There is a feature of null object in the syntax of the Gã language. *Ye* 'eat' is combined with postpositions to give some idiomatic expressions as; *ye + sɛɛ* "eat+back"; *ye+ nɔ* "eat+on" ; *ye+ mli* "eat +in".

        V   <NP> Postposition
        Ye <NP> Postposition

    Some examples of these postpositional usages are discussed below. The use of the postpositions gives the *ye* verb new dimensions of meaning.

6.1   *Ye + ……nɔ "eat on" …... fulfilled/controlled / govern*

    It is used when somebody is rulling as a leader or one is trying to control himself in a serious situation in order not to offend the partner.

28. Kofi   ye e- he nɔ

    Kofi eat-Past 3SG POS self LOC on

    (Kofi controlled himself)

29. E ye Dede nɔ

    3SG eat-Past Dede LOC on

    (He/ She controlled Dede)

30. E ye maŋ lɛ nɔ

3SG eatPast country Det LOC on

(He governed the country)

31. E ba - ye nɔ

3SG MP come eat+Past LOC on

(He came to rule)

32. E ye e- shiwoo lɛ nɔ

3SG eat-Past 3SG promise DET LOC on

(He/She fulfilled his/her promise)

6.2 Ye + …… naa "eat edge" bargain/dressed gorgeously

This expression is used when someone has dressed gorgeously attending a wedding or any important function. It is also used to bargain over the price of an item when buying. The examples illustrated below support the claim made below.

33. Aku ye mama lɛ naa

Aku eat-Past cloth DET LOC edge

(Aku bargained for the cloth)

34. Aku ye naa kɛ - tee kpeemɔ

Aku eat-Past edge COP go wedding

(Aku dress gorgeously to the wedding)

The expression in (30 and 33) has a different structure. For the expression to mean "rule", "dressed gorgeously" the constituent structure of the whole *Ye* construction is represented as V+ Postp (Locative) made up of a Verb followed by postposition i.e. *ye+naa*. Whilst in (31 and 32-35) the structure is V+NP+Postp i.e. *ye mama naa…..* or *ye eshiwoo nɔ*. The expression in (33) implies that the person is looking beautiful in her dressing.

6.3 Ye + sɛɛ 'eat back' Succeeded/Cheat

35. Kofi ye e - tsɛ sɛɛ

Kofi eat 3SG POS father LOC back

(Kofi succeeded his father)

36. Kofi ye lɛ sɛɛ

Kofi eat 3SG LOC back

(Kofi cheated on him)

6.4 Ye + mli 'eat in /inside' Watching/Admiring.

This expression is used when someone is watching something secretly. The examples below attest to the claim made above.

37. E ye mli dani e kɔ shika lɛ

    3SG eat LOC inside before 3SG take money DET

    (He watched before he took the money)

38. Ayi ye mli e ha gbekɛyoo lɛ

    Ayi eat LOC inside PERF give girl DET

    (Ayi admired the girl)

This expression (38) is used when one is free from slavery. It is assumed that when you are working for someone you do not have the freedom to manage certain things on your own. Therefore when you are no more under the person the expression is used.

39. Ado ye e he kɛjɛ nyɔŋ shishi

    Ado eat 3SG POS self from slave LOC down

    (Ado gained independence from slavery).

7. Conclusion

I have analyzed the different interpretations that the verb *ye* employs in the Gã language. The study reveals that the verb conveys a wide range of both physical and metaphorical meanings apart from the prototypical physical sense perception, and that many of these extended meanings are found to pertain to the Gã culture. With the cognitive approach used, the meanings are motivated and grounded more or less directly in experience, in our bodily, physical and social/cultural experiences. These are coupled and elaborated by structures of imagination such as metaphor. The metaphorical meanings reflect the socio-cultural experiences of the people. Hence, the metaphors associated with the *ye* 'eat' verbs show a conceptual ideas from target domain to the source domain. The lexical patterns of the language are linked with the cognitive experience of the people. In the case of perception, the verb is extended and shifted into the mental realm. The more they move away from the physical realm, the greater the realizations. The shift and extensions give rise to polysemous and metaphoric realizations.

I propose that a future research should compare the Gã language to other two or three

unrelated languages to find out whether conceptual polysemy can explain why and how conceptual mapping occur in certain way and direction. This might help us to understand and clarify the reason for changes of meanings.

Acknowlegdment

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