

# Conceptual Metaphors and Perception Verbs in GĩKũYũ

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## **Abstract**

This paper examines the polysemy that exists in the semantic field of perception verbs in Gĩkũyũ which is a Bantu Language of the Niger – Congo group spoken in Kenya. These verbs do not only convey the meanings that are related to the physical perception of each sense modality but they are extended to express varieties of meanings in other semantic fields. The paper also examines the link between the concrete and the abstract meanings within perception verbs in GĩKũYũ through conceptual metaphor.

**Keywords:** Perception verbs, Conceptual metaphor, Gĩkũyũ, extended meaning.

## 1. Conceptual Metaphor and Perception Verbs

The Study of metaphor dates back to ancient Greece. One of the ancient philosophers who studied metaphor is Aristotle (384-322 B.C). Aristotle in his book poetics cited in Lan (2003) defines metaphor as consisting in giving one thing a name that belongs to something else; the transference being either from genus to species or from species to genes or on grounds of analogy.

In the Traditional Approach, metaphor is defined as a poetic and novel expression in which a concept of a word is used beyond its lexical meaning to reveal the same concept. This approach holds the view that metaphor happens at the word level and it is a linguistic issue.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) in their work 'Metaphors we live by' furthered the research on metaphor where they viewed metaphor as a conceptual phenomenon which is persuasive in everyday life not just in language but in thought and action and our ordinary conceptual system in terms of which we think and act is fundamentally metaphorical in nature (1980).

Metaphor is not just the notion of similarity and comparison between the literal and the figurative meaning in an expression but according to cognitive linguistics it is an across domain mapping where there is a source and a target domain (Kovecses, 2002). Cognitivists see metaphor as a central feature of human language and an important source of meaning extension.

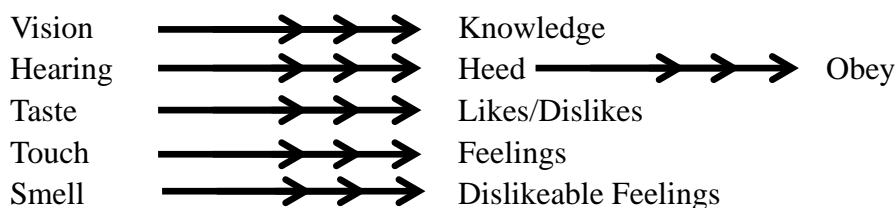
Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that the transference of metaphor in meaning is realized by constructing mappings between two domains. Radden and Dirven (2007) point out that mapping is the projection of one set of conceptual entities. The most common source domains in metaphorical mapping are animals, human body, plants and buildings and the common target domains are emotions, morality, life and death, politics and human relationships (Kovecses, 2010).

The human mind is also a common target domain and there are various systematic metaphorical mappings that have to do with our thoughts. According to Kovecses (2002) the human mind is an abstract concept so for better understanding we use metaphors. In our minds some of the metaphors that are used relate to perception. In the field of perception, senses such as vision and hearing are very pervasive in metaphoric use (Asa Bryndis, 2013).

Conceptual Metaphors and perception verbs are integrated into the pioneering MIND-AS-BODY theory by Sweetser (1991). In this theory, Sweetser argues that the vocabulary of physical perception shows systematic metaphorical connections with the vocabulary of internal self and internal sensations. She further asserts that these connections are not random correspondences but they are highly motivated links between parallels of analogous areas of physical and internal sensation.

Sweetser also proposes that metaphor is the cognitive device that is used as the structuring means to link the physical prototypical domain to more abstract domains. She gives the metaphorical correspondences between the five physical perception and their abstract source

domains for English perception verbs which is summarized by Ibarexte – Antunano (1999) as follows:



From the above summary, it can be seen that the metaphorical mappings that Sweetser gives for the perception verbs are fewer. However, the current study shows that the GĩKũYũ perception verbs have a much larger metaphorical scope than what is proposed by Sweetser. Sweetser also argues that meaning extensions shift towards more abstract domains but this study also shows that in some cases, the GĩKũYũ perception verbs have meaning extensions that remain physical.

## 2. The Semantic Field of Sense Perception

Perception verbs have been studied from various approaches in linguistics. Examples of these are: grammaticalisation Heine et al (1991), complementation Horie (1993), semantic change Sweetser (1990), metaphor and polysemy (Ibarexte – Antunano, 1999). In semantic studies, the semantic field of perception is classified into five categories. These are: vision, hearing, touch, taste and smell. There are many verbs that are related to these senses. Among them are see, look, hear, feel, touch, listen, smell and taste. Many linguists have studied the complexity of the perception verbs with regard to the semantic role of the subject involved (Ibarexte – Antunano (1999). Viberg (2008) proposed the following structure for English perception verbs:

Table 1. The basic model of English Perception Verbs Adapted from Viberg (2008)

Sense Modality	Experience	Activity	Phenomenon Based
Vision	See	Look	Look
Hearing	Hear	Listen	Sound
Touch	Feel/Touch	Touch/Feel	Feel
Taste	Taste	Taste	Taste
Smell	Smell	Smell	Smell

According to Viberg’s model perception verbs can be categorized into three groups. These are:

**A.** Experience group – The verbs in this group refer to an uncontrollable state and the subject is a passive observer of the action (Viberg, 2008, Ibarexte – Antunano, 1999) as illustrated by the sentence below:

**i.)** Peter saw the birds. (Viberg, 2008)

**B.** Activity group – this group refers to controlled circumstances and the subject is an active agent in the process as illustrated in the following sentence:

ii.) Peter looked at the birds (Viberg, 2008)

In the above two groups, the subject of the perception verbs is a living being with mental understanding.

C. The third group is the phenomenon based which takes the stimulant as a subject and the verbs are based on the source itself (Viberg, 2008 & barexte – Antunano, 1999). This is illustrated in the following sentence:

iii.) Peter looked happy

In the above sentence, Peter; the subject is the stimulus of perception.

### 3. Gĩkũyũ Perception Verbs

In Gĩkũyũ, the field of perception has the following semantic fields: ‘ona’ vision. ‘igua’ hear, ‘hutia’ touch, ‘mũnungo’ smell, mũchamo’ taste. The Perception verbs in Gĩkũyũ refer to verbs such as ‘kũona’ to see, ‘kũigwa’ to hear, ‘gũthikĩrĩrĩa’ to listen, ‘kũnũngĩra’ to smell/sniff, ‘gũcama’ to taste, ‘kũhutia’ to touch and ‘kũigwa’ to feel. These verbs are extended from the physical perception domain to have other meanings in different domains. To explore the perception verbs in Gĩkũyũ, Viberg’s classification is adopted as illustrated in the table below:

Table 2. The basic model of Gĩkũyũ perception verbs.

Sense Modality	Experience	Activity	Phenomenon Based
Vision	Ona (See)	Rora (Look)	Oneka (Look)
Hearing	Igua (Hear)	Thikĩrĩria (Listen)	Igwĩka (Sound)
Touch	Hũtia (Feel/Touch)	Hutia (Touch/Feel)	Igwĩka (Feel)
Taste	Nungĩra (smell)	Nungĩra (Smell/Sniff)	nungaga (Smell)
Smell	Cama (taste)	Cama (Taste)	Camaga (Taste)

From the above model, Gĩkũyũ perception verbs also can be categorized into three groups. These are: the experience, activity and the phenomenon-based groups. These groups are illustrated here below:

#### 3.1 The Experience Group

The following sentences illustrate the experience verbs in Gĩkũyũ:

- i.) a. Mũthoni onire andũ  
Mũthoni she saw people  
Mũthoni saw the people.
- b. Mũthoni aigwire inegene  
Mũthoni she heard noise  
Mũthoni heard the noise.
- c. Ndaigũa kindũ rungu rwa gĩtanda  
I felt something under the bed  
I felt something under the bed.

- d. Irio itiracama cumbĩ  
Food does not taste salt  
The food does not taste salt.
- e. Aigwire gũkĩnunga thigara  
He/she felt smell cigarettes  
He/she smelt cigarettes.

### 3.2 The Activity Group

The sentences below illustrate this group:

- ii.) a. Mũthoni arori andũ  
Mũthoni looked people  
Mũthoni looked at the people.
- b. Mũthoniathikĩrĩrie inegene  
Mũthonishe listened to noise  
Mũthoni listened to the noise.
- c. Mũthoniahũtirie gĩtambaya aigue ũrĩa kĩhana  
Mũthonishe touched cloth she feel how it is  
Mũthoni touched the cloth to feel how it is.
- d. Mũthoniacamire irio arore kana nĩnjega  
Mũthonishe tasted food she look whether it good.  
Mũthoni tasted the food to check whether it is good.
- e. Mũthoni anungĩrire magũta amenye ka nĩ ekũgũra  
Mũthoni she smelt oil she know whether she will buy  
Mũthoni smelt the oil in order to know whether she will buy.

### 3.3 The Phenomenon-Based Group

This group is illustrated by the following sentences:

- ii.) a. Mũthonionekaga emwega  
Mũthonishe looks she good  
Mũthoni looks good.
- b. Mũthoniaigwĩkaga emũnogu akĩaria  
Mũthonishe sounds she tiredshe speaking

Mũthoni sounds tired when she is speaking.

- c. Nyama ãno ãraigwĩka ã horo  
Meat this it feels it soft.  
This meat feels soft.
- d. Macungwa maya macamaga wega  
Oranges these they taste good  
These oranges taste good.
- e. Anungaga magũta ma gũkama.  
She/he smells jerry of to milk  
She/he smells of milking jerry.

#### 4. The Extended Meanings in Gĩkũyũ Perception Verbs

In this section I explore the physical and metaphorical meanings that these verbs convey apart from the literal meaning of physical perception.

##### 4.1 Vision

According to Ibarexte-Antunano (1999), vision is the most studied of the five fields of perception. This semantic field has been studied from various perspectives. Examples of these are: polysemy (Alma-Arvius, 1993), language acquisition (Landau & Gleitman 1985, Johnson, 1999).

In this section, I discuss the various extended meanings that are conveyed by the Gĩkũyũ vision verbs, ‘ona’ see and ‘rora’ look. The discussion follows Ibarexte – Antunano (1999) who organizes the extended meanings conveyed by these verbs into four groups.

These are: -

- A.) Group one comprises extended meanings which relate physical vision with the intellect or mental activity. In this group, there are various conceptual metaphors that are used to convey the following meanings: to understand, to foresee, to visualize, to imagine, to revise, to meditate. Here below I discuss the conceptual metaphors that are associated with Gĩkũyũ vision verbs. These are:

**FORESEEING IS SEEING:** The meaning expressed in this metaphor is that of mental vision and things that are yet to happen as in:

- iii.) Ndirona agĩcinda gĩthũrano  
I don’t see him/her win the elections  
I do not see him/her win the elections.

**VISUALIZING/JUDGING IS SEEING** as in:

- iv.) Ũrona ũndũ ũcio atia  
Do you see thing that how?

How do you see that thing?

### CONSIDERING IS SEEING:

- v.) Maramuona e murigo harĩ o  
They see him/her he/she burden to them  
They see her/him a burden to them.

### IMAGINING IS SEEING

- vi.) Kwa ihinda rĩa mĩaka itano ndĩramuona e ndagĩtari  
In period of years five I see him she/he doctor  
In five years', time, I see him/her a doctor.

This conceptual metaphor is associated with inner vision where we visualize or imagine hypothetical circumstances

### EXAMINING IS SEEING

- vii.) Ndorera macini ĩyo wone nĩkĩ kĩũru nayo  
Look for me machine that you see what is wrong with  
Check for me that machine you see what is wrong with it.

B). The second group relates vision to social relationships. There are various conceptual metaphors in this group that are used to convey meanings such as to meet, to pay a visit, to get on badly, to go out with, to accompany, to receive. In Gĩkũyũ the following conceptual metaphors are associated with this group:

### MEETING IS SEEING as in:

- viii.) a.) Tũonanĩre bara.  
We met on road  
We met on the road.  
b.) Ngakũona kĩroko  
I will see you morning  
I will see you in the morning  
I will meet you in the morning.

In "b", the meeting has to take place with an appointment. The second conceptual metaphor is **VISITING IS SEEING** as demonstrated in the following example:

- Ndathiĩ kũmũona thibitarĩ  
I am going to see her/him hospital  
I am going to visit him/her in hospital.

The third example in this category is **RECEIVING IS SEEING** as illustrated in the example below:

- ix.) Ingĩra ndagĩtarĩ nĩ agũkuona rĩũ  
Come in doctor will see you now  
Come in the doctor will see you now.

In this example, the person being visited has some expertise that the visitor needs. Another example in this category expresses the meaning ‘to get on badly’. Here a negative construction is used to indicate that the people involved do not get on well as demonstrated in the example below:

- x.) Mathũraine ona mationanaga  
They hate each other such that they do not see each other  
They hate each other such as they do not get on well.

### III.) The third group relates vision to reliability, certainty, and assurance.

The perception verbs in this category are used to convey meaning such as ‘to ascertain, to find out, to make sure, and to take care of. In Gĩkũyũ the conceptual metaphors in this group include:

#### **FINDING OUT IS SEEING** as illustrated below:

- xi.) a.) Rora nũ ũrĩnja?  
Look who is out?  
Look who is out?  
b.) Onanũ ũrĩnja  
See who is out  
See who is out.

The second metaphor in this group is **MAKING SURE IS SEEING** as demonstrated by:

- xii.) Onanĩ weka ũndũ ũcio wega  
See you have done thing that good  
See you have done that thing well.

The other example in this group is **TAKING CARE OF SOMEBODY/SOMETHING IS SEEING** as demonstrated by:

- xiii.) Nĩwe ũroraga nyina  
He/she who looks mother  
He/she is the one who takes care of his/her mother.

Gĩkũyũ also has other meanings which are conveyed by vision verbs apart from the ones discussed in the three categories. These are expressed by the following conceptual metaphors:

#### **EXPERIENCING/SUFFERING IS SEEING** as illustrated by:

- xiv.) Nĩonete ruo rũingĩ  
She/he has seen paina lot of



She/he has experienced/suffered a lot of pain.

The second one is **WITNESSING IS SEEING** as in:

- xv.) Ndarĩ ho nanĩ ndonĩre ũrĩa gwathire  
 I was there and I saw what went on  
 I was there and I saw what went on.

In the above example, the emphasis is on the person who is looking. This is a ‘passive’ witness of the event (Ibarexte-Anturĩano, 2002). The third metaphor is **REFERING TO IS SEEING** as illustrated by:

- xvi.) Hingurai ibuku rĩa mahoya mũroremũrango wa ikumi  
 Open book of prayers you look chapter of ten  
 Open the prayers book and refer to chapter ten.

In Gĩkũyũ also, **HAVING THE MONTHLY PERIOD IS SEEING** as demonstrated by:

- xvii.) Nĩrona mweri  
 She is seeing month  
 She has the monthly period.

This metaphor arises because in Gĩkũyũ it is a taboo to speak directly or openly of the reproductive organs and any discharge that comes out from them. In the case of the menstrual discharge that women receive every month, it is euphemistically referred to as ‘kuona’ to see.

The various extended meanings that are conveyed by vision verbs in Gĩkũyũ are summarized in Table 3 below:

Table 3. Extended meanings in vision in Gĩkũyũ

1. Intellect or mental activity group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To imagine</li> <li>- To visualize</li> <li>- To judge</li> <li>- To examine/to check</li> <li>- To foresee</li> <li>- To consider</li> </ul>
2. Social group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To meet</li> <li>- To visit</li> <li>- To receive</li> <li>- To get on badly</li> </ul>

3. Reliability / certainty group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To find out</li> <li>- To make sure</li> <li>- To take care of</li> </ul>
4. Other meanings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To witness</li> <li>- To refer to</li> <li>- To experience / to suffer</li> <li>- To have the monthly period</li> </ul>

#### 4.2 Hearing

According to Sweetser (1991), hearing is linked to interpersonal and internal receptivity or obedience. Allan (2008) also argues that hearing is linked to comprehension just like vision. Sweetser (1991) also claims that hearing is mostly a mental process unlike vision which is more a physical activity.

The different conceptual metaphors associated with hearing in Gĩkũyũ are discussed by using the perception verbs ‘igua’ (hear) and ‘thikĩrĩria’ (listen). In Gĩkũyũ, there are various conceptual metaphors related to hearing as indicated below:

**UNDERSTANDING IS HEARING** as in:

- xviii.) Nĩaiguaga mathabu  
 He/she hears mathematics  
 He/she understands mathematics.

The second metaphor is **KNOWING/BEING INFORMED IS HEARING** as illustrated by:

- xix.) Nĩndĩraigwire rũgano rũo  
 I heard story that  
 I heard that story.

In this example, the implication is that the hearer now has the information that he gathered from the speaker.

The second category of metaphors in Gĩkũyũ are those related to heedfulness/obeying as demonstrated by the following metaphors:

**OBEYING IS HEARING** as illustrated by:

- xx.) Igua aciari aku  
 Hear parents yours  
 Hear your parents.  
 Obey your parents.

In this example, the speaker requests attention and heedfulness from the hearer.

**PAYING ATTENTION IS HEARING** as in:

- xxi.) Thikĩrĩria mataro ma mwarimu  
 Listen instructions of teacher  
 Listen to the instructions of the teacher.

The metaphors in this category demonstrate how hearing in Gĩkũyũ goes beyond the physical task of hearing but the hearer also has to pay attention (Ibarexte-Antunano, 2002).

Apart from the conceptual metaphors in the above categories, Gĩkũyũ also has other metaphors associated with hearing. These are:

**HAVING AN AGREEMENT IS HEARING** as illustrated by:

- xxii.) Nĩmaiguana  
 They have heard each other  
 They have had an agreement.

The other example expresses the meaning to get on badly. Here a negative construction is used to indicate that the people involved do not get on well as demonstrated by:

- xxiii.) Andũ acio matiguanaga  
 People those they do not hear one another  
 Those people do not get on well.

In the last example, hearing is associated with emotion /pain as demonstrated in

**FEELING IS HEARING**

- xxiv.) Ũraigua atĩa?  
 You hearing what/how?  
 What are you hearing?  
 How/what are you feeling?

Beyond the prototypical meanings expressed by the verbs in this sense, these verbs also have extended meanings in different fields. Here below I give a summary of these meanings:

Table 4. Extended Meanings in Hearing in Gĩkũyũ

1. Internal receptivity	- To understand - To know / to be informed
2. Heedfulness	- To obey - To pay attention/ to heed
3. Other meanings	- To have an agreement - To get on badly - To feel (related to pain/emotions)

### 4.3 TOUCH

According to Sweetser (1991), the sense of touch primarily relates to emotions and feelings unlike vision and hearing which are connected to the intellect. In Gĩkũyũ, there are various metaphors that are associated with touch. The first one is **AFFECTING IS TOUCHING**.

This metaphor deals with the abstract side of touch which refers to the emotional side of the person in question as in:

- xxv.) Ndwari yake nĩrahutirie mũno  
Sickness his/her me touched very much  
His/her sickness touched me very much.

The other metaphors are:

**DEALING WITH SOMETHING IS TOUCHING** as in:

- xxvi.) Ndikũhutia ithomo rĩu  
I will not touch reading that  
I will not touch that reading.

**CONCERNING IS TOUCHING** as in:

- xxvii.) Cira ũcio ndũnahutia  
Case that did not touch me  
That case did not touch me.  
That case did not concern me.

**INSPIRING IS TOUCHING** as in:

- xxviii.) Kĩhunjio kũ nĩkĩahutia mũno  
Sermon that has touched me very much  
That sermon has touched me very much  
That sermon has inspired me very much.

There are also other meanings associated with touch in Gĩkũyũ. These are: to partake of something, for example food or drink. This is what Ibarexte-Anturĩano (2002:109) refers to as dealing with something superficially. This meaning is illustrated by:

- xxix.) Kuma arũara ndahutagia njohi  
From he got sick he does not touch beer  
Since he got sick, he does not touch beer.

Another meaning associated with touch in Gĩkũyũ is **HAVING THE HABIT OF STEALING IS TOUCHING**. Here, the construction has a reduplicative verb in order to

indicate this habit as demonstrated in the example below:

xxx.) Nĩ mũndũ wa kũhutahutia

He/she is person of touching touching.

He/she has a habit of stealing.

Touch is also used to express the meaning to collide head on as in:

xxxi.) Ngari icio nĩcĩahutania

Vehicles those have touched each other

Those vehicles have touched each other

Those vehicles have had a head on collision.

The extended meanings expressed by touch go beyond physical contact as indicated by the table below:

Table 5. Extended Meaning of Touch in Gĩkũyũ

- |   |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- To affect</li><li>- To inspire</li><li>- To deal with</li><li>- To concern</li><li>- To partake of something</li><li>- To have the habit of stealing</li><li>- To collide head on</li></ul> |
|---|

#### 4.4 TASTE

According to Sweetser (1991:243), taste is the most subjective and personal sense. Allan (2008:49) further states that the sense is personal as it is only the taster who is involved in the task of choosing what to taste. In Gĩkũyũ, taste has fewer extended meaning as compared to the already discussed senses. There are two conceptual metaphors that are associated with taste. These are:

**EXPERIENCING IS TASTING** as demonstrated by:

xxxii.) Nĩacamite rũo

He/she has tasted pain

He/she has experienced pain

The second metaphor in Gĩkũyũ is **HAVING SEX IS TASTING**. To express this meaning, the construction has a reduplicative verb as in:

xxxiii.) a.) Endete gucamacama

He likes to taste taste.

b.) Endete gucamwo camwo

She like to be tasted tasted.

In the above examples, the meaning expressed goes beyond having sex, to indicate that the person involved has a habit of having sex with many people. Besides that, the gender aspect is brought out whereby in “a”, a male is the subject of the verb, so he is the one who has the habit, whereas in “b”, the female is the one who has the habit. From the above analysis, it can be seen that Gĩkũyũ has very few extended meanings expressed by the sense of taste. These meanings are summarized in the table below:

Table 6. Extended Meanings of Taste in Gĩkũyũ

- |  |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To experience pain</li> <li>- To have the habit of having sex with many people</li> </ul> |
|--|

#### 4.5 SMEL

According to Caplan (1973), Viberg (1984) and Sweetser (1990) as cited in Ibarexte-Antunano (1999), the sense of smell is generally considered a weaker source domain for metaphoric meaning in comparison to other senses.

To analyze the extended meanings for this sense, the verb ‘kũnungĩra’ (to smell/sniff) is used. These meanings are illustrated here below:

xxxiv.) Ngui nĩ kũnunganungagĩra kũndũ guothe ãgĩcaria ngũkũ

Dog was to sniffing sniffing place everywhere looking hen

The dog was sniffing everywhere looking for the hen.

In the above example, the meaning of the verb smell is still physical, because the dog was actually physically smelling the ground and following the trail left by the hen. In Gĩkũyũ to express this meaning the verb used is reduplicative (kũnunganungĩra). The other examples are metaphorical.

The first metaphor is **MINDING OTHER PEOPLE’S BUSINESS IS SNIFFING** as in:

xxxv.) Endete kũnunganungĩra

He/she likes sniffing sniffing

He/she likes to poke his/her nose into other people’s business.

He/she likes to mind other people’s business.

The verb is reduplicative in order to express this meaning.

The second metaphor is **COMING CLOSE TO ONE ANOTHER/HAVING A HEAD ON**

COLLISION IS SMELLING/SNIFFING as in:

xxxvi.) Ngari icio nĩcianunganĩra

Vehicles those have smelt / sniffed each other

Those vehicles have had a head on collision.

In the above example, the verb is used to express the meaning to come close to one another as in having a head on collision. From the above analysis, it can be seen that in Gĩkũyũ, the sense of smell has very few extended meanings. These meanings are summarized in the table below:

Table 7. Extended Meanings of Smell in Gĩkũyũ

- |  |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- To mind other people's business</li><li>- To come close to one another / to have a head on collision</li></ul> |
|--|

## 5. Conclusion

From the data analysis, it can be seen that metaphor is highly pervasive in the semantic field of sense perception in Gĩkũyũ. The sense of vision has more extended meanings followed by hearing and touch whereas smell and taste have very few extended meanings. In some cases the perception verb is used in a reduplicative manner in order to express the extended meaning. Verbs from different senses also have the same extended meaning, for example, 'kũhutania' To touch each other and kũnunganĩra' to smell each other when they are extended to mean that vehicles have had a head on collision and the verbs 'gũcama' to taste and 'kuona' to see when they are extended to mean 'experience' or 'suffer'.

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