

AKAN AND HEBREW PROVERBS ON POVERTY: METAPHORIC CONCEPTUALISATION

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Abstract: *This paper examines the metaphorical structure of poverty in Akan (a West African language) and Hebrew (a Semitic language) within the framework of the Conceptual Metaphor Theory. The study explores how poverty is expressed in the Biblical Book of Proverbs and compares the conceptualisation of poverty by the Akan people in their proverbs to those in Hebrew. The aim is to establish whether the two languages manifest cross-linguistic or cross-conceptual similarities concerning understanding poverty. The data reveal similarities between Akan and Hebrew concerning the metaphoric conceptualization of poverty.*

Key Words: Akan, Conceptual Metaphor Theory, Metaphor, Old Testament, Poverty.

Introduction

There has been in-depth research on beliefs regarding the causes of poverty, as well as studies on beliefs concerning wealth.¹ There has been substantial research on wealth and poverty beliefs.² However, few researchers have analysed the Akan concept of poverty.³ Scholars such as Yankah and Agyekum have extensively researched Ghanaian proverbs.⁴ However, neither of them has given attention to viewing proverbs on poverty from the point of a new conceptual metaphor.

¹ M. Hunt, "Religion, Race/Ethnicity and Beliefs about Poverty," *Social Science Quarterly* 83, no. 8 (2002):10-31. W. Oorschot and L. Halman, "Blame of Fate, Individual or Social? An International Comparison of Popular Explanations of Poverty," *European Societies* 2, no.1 (2000):1-28. J. Kluegel and E. Smith, *Beliefs about Inequality: Americans' View of What is and What Ought to Be* (Hawthorne: Aldinede Gruyter, 1986).

² S. Stephenson, "Public Beliefs in the Causes of Wealth and Poverty and Legitimation of Inequalities in Russia and Estonia," *Social Justice Research* 13, no. 2 (2000): 83-100. See C. Asiedu, V. A. Dzokoto, D. Wallace, and E. C. Mensah, "Conceptions of Poverty and Wealth in Ghana," *International Journal of Business and Social Science* 4, no. 8 (2013):18-28.

³ K. Agyekum, "The Ethnosemantics and Proverbs of *Ohia*, 'poverty' in Akan," *Legon Journal of the Humanities* 28, no. 2 (2017): 23-48. See also Asiedu et al. "Conceptions of Poverty," 18-28.

⁴ Kwesi Yankah, "Proverbs: The Aesthetics of Traditional Communication," *Research in African Literature* 20, no. 3 (1989): 325-346. See also K. Agyekum, "An Akan Oral Artist: The use of Proverbs in the Lyrics of Kwabena Konadu," *Research Review of the Institute of African Studies* 21, no. 1 (2005):1-17.

According to Agyekum,⁵ proverbs are interpretations of traditional wisdom based on elders' experiences and socio-political life. This is also true of the proverbs of the Hebrew people. Agyekum adds, "Akan proverbs are aesthetic devices of vitality in speech and the salt of a language, without which the taste of the 'language dish' is not felt."⁶

Tempies discusses poverty in the Biblical Book of Proverbs but does not discuss its associated metaphorical conceptualizations.⁷ These studies have not considered Akan proverbs from the perspective of conceptual metaphors. By exploring poverty in the Book of Proverbs in the Hebrew Bible, this article adds to the scanty research concerning the similarities between Hebrew and Akan proverbs on poverty using the Conceptual Metaphor Theory. An exploration of these proverbs is essential as it can explain why the grim perception of poverty by Akan Christians may gravitate towards the prosperity gospel preached in most Ghanaian churches.

Akan proverbs about poverty mirror their concept of prosperity. As is true of proverbs from the Hebrew culture, Akan proverbs are a repository of cultural values and social norms. The Akan would say: *Ti koro nkɔ agyina*, "one head does not constitute a council" (cf. Prov. 15:22 and 24:6). Akan elders gleaned their proverbs by keenly observing other people and animals. It is incumbent upon the Akan child to learn wisdom from proverbs, hence the proverb: *ɔba nyansafɔ, wobu no bɛ, na wɔnka no asem*, "A wise child is spoken to in proverbs, not in prose." Among the Akan, a person's actions are thought to reflect the parents' character. This is expressed in the proverb, *sɛ abofra anse oni a, ɔsɛ ɔsɛ*, "If a child does not after the mother, s/he takes after the father." This proverb agrees with the Biblical proverb: "Train up a child the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6). The translation in the Twi Bible is *Kyerɛ abofra ɔkwan a ɔmfa so, na sɛ onyin nso a ɔremfi ho*.

The Akan and all other Ghanaians see poverty as grossly loathsome. This is why the prosperity gospel appeals to many Christians in Ghana. Many Pentecostal and Charismatic churches organised prayer

⁵ Agyekum, "An Akan Oral Artist," 9.

⁶ Agyekum, "The Ethnosemantics," 30.

⁷ Frederick Tempies, "A Study of Poverty and Prosperity in the Book of Proverbs" (MTh Thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1980).

meetings regarding prosperity and teaching services on becoming prosperous.⁸ Some even hold deliverance sessions on delivering members from the “spirit of poverty”. Help is often sought in churches from the prophets to ensure victory over the spirit of poverty.

Akan Concept of *Ohia* (Poverty)

For the Akan, life is a journey, and one must be able to move ahead or up freely without restrictions. Hence, prosperity is defined in such terms as *nkɔsɔɔ*, forward movement, *mpɔntu*, increase, and *yiyedi*, goodness.⁹ The main Akan word for poverty is *ohia*. *Ohia* is the negation of everything thing that means prosperity in Akan. Anything that restricts or limits the forward movement, promotion, and pleasurable journey in life is understood as poverty. Hence, the Akan terms *ahohia* and *ahokyere*. Poverty is seen as an evil expressed in the Akan proverb *Ohia nye adepa*, “Poverty is not a good thing.”

In some traditional contexts, ancestors and *abosom* (divinities) in various shrines are appealed to help businesses prosper.¹⁰ The fear and hatred for poverty and the craving to overcome it are expressed in the prevalence of *sakawa*, which is the engagement of the youth in internet fraud and *sikaduro* (money-making rituals) to gain material wealth.

There is also the fatalistic explanation for poverty, where one's predicament is due to adverse conditions or situations over which he or she has little or no control. In Ghana, like many African countries, there is the belief that poverty is caused by demons and malevolent spirits, which include witchcraft. Several people attribute poverty to vicarious generational and ancestral curses on families. It is common to hear people blaming a jealous close relative with an evil spirit for their poverty. There is the belief in the *ɔyɛfo* (the evil-doer), the *ofie nipa* (family member), responsible for one's predicament.

⁸ Paul Gifford, *Ghana's New Pentecostalism. Pentecostalism in a Globalising African Economy* (London: Hurst, 2004).

⁹ The *yīye* expressions of prosperity includes *yiyedi*, literally, eating good (Josh. 1:7), *yiyesi*, meaning, “to arrive at a place of goodness” (3 John 2), *yīyeye*, literary, “becoming good” (Psa. 1:3, Isa. 54:7).

¹⁰ J. S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion* (London: Heinemann, 1975).

One may have to look at the Akan worldview, society, and cultural beliefs to understand the Akan sociocultural concept of poverty, its type, and its characteristics.¹¹ One way to study Akan's poverty concept is by exploring their proverbs.

For the Akan, poverty is universal as expressed in proverbs: *Se ehia oburoni a, san epo*, "If the white man becomes poor, he crosses the ocean." Another proverb is *Ohia nni aburokyiri a, anka oburoni remmshata ne ntama wo abibiman mu*, "If there were no poverty in the white man's land, he would not have come to dry his cloth in Africa. It is assumed that the white man's country is abundant. Therefore, for him to travel from overseas to Africa in search of wealth means poverty prevails in his country too. Poverty is no respecter of persons. It is cross-racial and cross-continental.

This paper explores some proverbs on poverty in the Hebrew Bible and the translations of these Hebrew proverbs in the Twi Bible. Metaphor, a cognitive tool, exists in spoken language and religious texts. In this paper, the proverbs in Akan and Hebrew provide a new field for studying metaphors. I have analysed the proverbs using the conceptual metaphor theory.

Metaphor in Cognitive Linguistics

In recent years, literary studies have examined metaphor as a stylistic device. However, cognitive linguistics involves the strategies underlying creative and everyday usage. The literary view of metaphor defines it as a figure of speech that compares two subjects. However, with cognitive linguistics, metaphor is a conceptual phenomenon relating to what happens in the mind.

The Conceptual Metaphor Theory, propounded by Lakoff and Johnson,¹² defines metaphor as "understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another."¹³ According to cognitive linguistics, each mapping involves a set of correspondences between the respective entities in each domain. In this, we map one conceptual domain

¹¹ Agyekum, "The Ethnosemantics," 28.

¹² G. Lakoff and M. Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

¹³ Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors*, 5.

to another. That is, there is a mapping from what Lakoff and Johnson have termed a “source domain” to a “target domain.” The conceptual metaphors are further categorised into structural, orientational, and ontological metaphors according to their different cognitive functions.¹⁴

Structural Metaphor

In structural metaphors, one thing is understood in terms of another. The metaphors are of the category of 'X is Y.' For example, in the case where the conceptual domain of *argument* is structured in terms of *war*, war is considered the source domain, which is mapped onto argument, the target domain. Thus, mapping knowledge from the domain of war onto the argument domain permits us to reason about one in terms of the other.¹⁵ This metaphor underlies an expression such as "He defended his argument."¹⁶

Oriental Metaphor

While the structural metaphor is about structuring one concept according to another, the orientational metaphor instead arranges a whole system of concepts in terms of one another. By orientation metaphor, we are referring to metaphors that project spatial orientation onto abstract concepts. These metaphors include up-down, front-back, in-out, on-off, deep-shallow, central-peripheral, far-near, etc. Note the examples *prosperity is up*¹⁷ and *more is up, less is down*.¹⁸

The conceptual domain "up-down" and "inside-outside" are spatial domain concepts in the material world. However, the metaphors based on these conceptual domains may vary in different cultures. This is true of the example of the Akan, where *death is up* (climbing a ladder), while in the Biblical Hebrew culture, *death is down* (going down into a pit).

¹⁴ Z. Kövecses, *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 33.

¹⁵ G. Lakoff, "The Contemporary Theory of Metaphor," in *Metaphor and Thought*, ed. A. Ortony, 202-51 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 207.

¹⁶ Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors*, 48.

¹⁷ Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors*, 16.

¹⁸ Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors*, 14.

Ontological Metaphor

Some experiences and concepts need to be treated as discrete substances or entities. These could be used for categorising, grouping and identifying them.¹⁹ Ontological metaphors involve how we view concepts such as ideas, events, emotions, activities, and what have you as entities and substances. An example is the metaphor “inflation is an entity,” which has to do with the experience of rising prices.²⁰

Personification

As a subtype of ontological metaphor, personification allows us to make sense of phenomena in human terms.²¹ Thus, in personification, besides the abstract concept being structured by using a physical object, it is also specified as being a person. This aids in understanding various experiences having non-human entities in terms of human motivations, characteristics, and activities. For example, "Inflation is eating up our profits."²² Chateris-Black observes that personification is a "linguistic figure in which an abstract and inanimate entity is described or referred to using a word or phrase that in other contexts would be used to describe a person."²³

Consider the Akan proverb, *sika ne øhene*, "Money is king," ‘money’ is characterised as a king possessing features of a master, a ruler of others. This proverb indicates the superior status the Akan society attributes to money. In this type of personification, a human quality is ascribed to a non-animate object, money. Another example is the famous Akan proverb, a line in Slim Young's song, *sika frø mogya*, literally, "money calls blood." In Akan's thought, *mogya*, "blood," is also a synecdoche for a person.²⁴ Thus, the proverb means "money attracts relatives." In this example, money is featured as a human

¹⁹ F. H. Al-Hindawi and W. S. Al-Saate, "Ontological Metaphor in Economic News Reports: A Pragmatic Approach," *Arab World English Journal* 7, no. 4 (2016): 155-174.

²⁰ Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors*, 23.

²¹ Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors*, 34.

²² A. Dorst, *Metaphors in Fiction: Language, Thought and Communication* (Oisterwijk: Vitgeverij Box press, 2011), 290.

²³ J. Chateris-Black, *Politicians and Rhetoric: The Persuasive Power of Metaphor* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 61.

²⁴ Part of the body for the whole body. In the Akan understanding of the constitution of a person as a tricotomy, the human being is composed of *kra* (soul), comes from God, the creator, *sunsum* (spirit) from the father and *mogya* (blood) comes from the mother.

being who draws relatives closer to himself or herself. This type of personification explains the type of human action category. The opposite is the proverb *ohia ye adammɔ*, "poverty is madness," which indicates how poverty as a "mad person" repels relatives and stays on the fringes of society.

The Akan and Hebrew Languages

Akan refers to an ethnic group in Ghana and La Côte d'Ivoire. Their language also referred to as Akan, comprises 13 dialects, including Mfantse, Asante, Akuapem, Akwamu, Akyem, Agona, Assin, Twifo, Denkyira, Kwawu, Wassa, Buem and Bron. The Akan language belongs to the Kwa group of the Niger-Congo language. Over 80% of Ghana's population speak Akan as a first and second language, including native and non-native speakers. The language is studied from primary through secondary to tertiary levels of education in Ghana. A form of the Akan language is also spoken in South America, especially Jamaica and Surinam, where Akan names and folktales are common. Foreign universities that study Akan include Ohio University, Ohio State University, Harvard University, Boston University, The State University of New Jersey, University of Pennsylvania, Indiana University, Michigan University, University of Wisconsin-Madison, University of Florida, and the University of Hong Kong.

Data and Analysis

The sources from which the data were gathered include the Twi Bible, the Hebrew Bible, discussions with native Twi-speaking people who know Akan proverbs, and articles published by Akan scholars. The songs from which I gathered for the internet (YouTube), data were *Aboa Ohia* composed by Samuel Owusu and Slim Young's song *Sika fre mogya*. I relied on data from Agyekum for some Akan proverbs.²⁵ For biblical references, I consulted the Hebrew Bible for the Biblical proverbs, the Greek Septuagint (LXX), and the Akuapem Bible (1964).

I grouped the data into significant metaphorical mappings in order to analyse them. Having grouped them, I described the metaphoric structure of poverty in Akan. I compared it with the mappings in the data for the Old Testament—Hebrew and their translations and their

²⁵ Agyekum, "The Ethnosemantics," 23-48.

translations in the Twi Bible. Kövecses proposes a methodology regarding identification and description.²⁶ I employed this methodology for comparative analysis. The proverbs on poverty in this paper are analysed using the conceptual metaphor theory. I have presented all the conceptual metaphors in upper cases and all Akan expressions in italics.

The Conceptualisation of Poverty in Hebrew

The three common Hebrew words for poverty used in the proverbs being examined in this paper are *rêš*, *maḥsōr*, and *dal*. The word *rêš* means poor, lack, and need. It is derived from the primary root word *ruš*, meaning "to be destitute." In the Proverbs, *rêš* is the absence of material wealth (Prov. 30:8) and misery or an unpleasant experience (Prov. 10:15; 31:7). The LXX uses the term *penia* to translate the Hebrew *rêš*. The term *maḥsōr* is found in Prov. 11:24; 16:11; 22:16 and 24:34. It means "need" or "poverty."²⁷ Other meanings include 'want' and 'lack.' The verbal concept of *maḥsōr* is "lacking or deficient in something."²⁸

There is also *dal*, a term derived from the verb *dālal*, which means "to hang, to be low, to be feeble." The Arabic meaning of "to dangle" provides insight into the Hebrew meaning of *dal* since both languages are Semitic. The term *dal* could mean "thinness" in physical appearance and weakness in physical strength (2 Sam. 13:4). Figuratively, it means "to be oppressed, dry up, be emptied, to fail, and not be equal." Obviously, a decrease in resources for sustenance does reflect an individual's loss of weight and strength. However, it also means 'leanness' in the supply of resources or humiliating helplessness before one's oppressor.

After studying the Hebrew words *rêš*, *dal*, and *maḥsōr*, in the Book of Proverbs,²⁹ I observed that poverty could be defined as "a state that exists when a person is destitute of wealth and of material good to the

²⁶ Z. Kövecses, "Metaphor and Culture," *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Philologica* 2, no. 2 (2010): 197-220.

²⁷ Francis Brown, S. R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs (eds.), "מחסור," in *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), 34.

²⁸ Tempies, "A Study of Poverty," 6.

²⁹ Tempies, "A Study of Poverty," 13.

extent of lacking even the necessities of life." In Prov. 13:18, poverty and shame are a duo that visits anyone who refuses instruction.

In this section, I discuss metaphors stemming from the conceptualisation of poverty in the Bible's Old Testament. Here I consider relevant Hebrew verses in the Book of Proverbs and their translations in the Akuapem Twi Bible (1964). These metaphors are grouped into three categories. There are Structural Metaphors: 'poverty is bondage,' and 'poverty is ill-health.' There is also the Orientational Metaphor: 'poverty is outside/periphery.' A careful look at two Hebrew proverbs suggests that poverty can be conceptualised as a human being. Hence the Ontological Metaphor: 'Poverty is a person.'

Poverty Is Bondage

[1] Prov. 22:7.

HEB: 'āšîr bārāšîm yimšōl; wə'ēbed lōweh lə'îš

ENG: The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is a slave to the lender

TWI: *ɔdefo di ahiafo so, na ɔdefemfo ye nea ɔde fem akoa*

The poor person's obligation to the rich lender forces the former to be a bondservant to the latter. The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is a slave to the lender. Hence, 'poverty is slavery.'

Poverty Is Ill-Health

[2] Prov. 21:13

HEB: 'ōtēm ɔznô mizza'āqat dāl

ENG: whoever shuts his ears to the cry of the poor

TWI: *nea osiw n'asɔ fi ɔbrefo sū ho no*

This biblical proverb instantiates the metaphor that 'poverty is pain.'

Poverty Is Outside/Periphery

[3] Prov. 14:20

HEB: gam-lərə'ēhū yiśśānê rāš

ENG: Even the poor is hated by their neighbour

TWI: *ohiani de, ne yɔnko po tan no*

[4] Prov. 19:4

HEB: wəḏāl mērê'hū yippārêḏ

ENG: but the poor is separated from his friend

TWI: *ɔbrefo ne ne yɔnko ntam tetew*

Poverty isolates. Those who are hated are left outside the circle of those who hate them.

[5] Prov. 19:7

HEB: kāl 'āḥê-rāš šenê'uhū, 'ap kî mārê'ēhū rāḥāqū mimmennū

ENG: the brothers of people with low incomes do hate him. How much more do his friends go far from him.

TWI: *Ohiani nuanom nyinaa tan no, na mpen ahe na ne nnamfonom ne no ntam rempan*

The examples [3], [4], and [5] instantiate the orientational metaphor 'poverty is outside,' and 'poverty is periphery.' In [4] and [5], 'poverty is separation' unto the periphery. In [4], the LXX uses *ptōchos* in translating the Hebrew *dal*, whereas in [5], the LXX translates the Hebrew word *rāš* as *ptōchos*. The Greek word *ptōchos* refers to "an individual who crouches," a beggar. It refers to one who is low in substance and weak in natural strength. The meaning of *ptōkos* suggests the metaphor 'poverty is down.' In [4], Prov. 19:4, the Akan translates the Hebrew word *dal* as *ɔbrefo* (an exhausted struggler) and [5], Prov. 19:7, *rāš* is rendered *ohiani* (poor person) in Akan.

Poverty Is a Person

[6] Prov. 6:11

HEB: ūbā-kimhallêk rēšekā; ūmahsōrəkā kō'îš māgēn.

ENG: your poverty will catch up with you like a highwayman, and your need

like a shield carrier.

TWI: *wo hia beto wo se ɔkwanmukafo ne w'ahokyere se ɔkyemku-rafo*

[7] Prov. 24:34

HEB: ūbā-miḥallêḵ rēšekā; ūmaḥsōrəkā kə'îš māgên.

ENG: so shall your poverty come [like] a highwayman and your need like a shield carrier.

TWI: *wo hia nam so beba se odwowntwafo, ne w'ahokyere se okyemkurafo*

In [6] and [7], poverty is conceptualized as a person, literally, 'îš, "a man." The Hebrew *ḵimhallêḵ* should be rendered "as one that travels," or "one who walks to and fro." It is derived from the verb *hâlak*, which invariably means "to go" or "to walk." It is rendered in the LXX as *hosper kakos hodoiporos*, literally, "as an evil traveller." The piel (an intensive form of the verb) means "to walk vigorously," "to walk with speed," or "a swift and irresistible traveller who suddenly attacks his victim." This may refer to a visitor or a guest whose primary intention is to bring harm to the host. The Latin Vulgate says *grassator*, "a highwayman." Thus, it may not be accurate to translate the piel participle *m'hallêḵ* as a robber. The Latin Vulgate translates *kə'îš māgên* (like a man of the shield) as *quasi vir armatus*, like one-armed, who attacks his enemy with such force that his victim cannot resist. Such is how a defenseless sluggard is, standing before poverty. Thus, the Hebrew anthropomorphizes poverty – 'poverty is a human being,' specifically, 'poverty is a man.'

In [6], the Hebrew word *rēšekā* is translated in the Twi Bible as *okwanmukafo*, "highwayman" in Prov. 6:11. In [7] the same Hebrew word is rendered *odwowntwafo*, literally "robber," or "plunderer" in Prov. 24:34.

Conceptualisation of Poverty in Akan

This article discusses two common words for poverty in Akan: *ohia* and *ahokyere*. The more often used word, *ohia*, means "need" or "lack." It is an expression of distress, a discomfort that limited or total lack of resources brings. *Ohia* denotes a state of deprivation within the experience of an individual or community.

Ahokyere, a synonym of *ohia*, is a combination of two words, *ho*, "body," and *kyere*, "tightness," or "arrest." Thus, *ahokyere* means to be stifled or tightened up. A lack of physical materials drives an

individual to dire need. Thus, *ahokyere* is an expression of a lack of resources that results from limiting one's freedom. By the statement "*me ho akyere me*," the Akan is saying, "I am hard up." This could mean trouble, including emotional and financial distress or material lack. It is another indirect way of saying, "I lack the means" or "I have no money." It is a cry for help that expresses how dire a situation is. Among Akan speakers, it is common to hear the euphemistic expression for lack, *meda fam*, "I am lying on the ground." Such an expression instantiates the orientational metaphor 'poverty is down.'

In this section, I discuss metaphors stemming from the conceptualization of poverty in Akan. These metaphors are grouped into three categories. There are Structural Metaphors: 'poverty is eating,' and 'poverty is ill-health.' There are also Orientational Metaphors: 'poverty is down,' and 'poverty is outside/periphery.' Carefully examining some of the Akan proverbs on poverty reveals the Ontological Metaphor: 'Poverty is a living entity.' In such proverbs, poverty is conceptualised as an animal and a human being.

Poverty Is Eating

[8] *Ohia nam ye nwono* ("The meat of poverty is bitter").

Poverty is an edible thing, but it is bitter meat. It is a bitter experience, going through which is like eating. It is a cruel state of affairs.³⁰ From this Example [8], poverty is also conceptualized as an animal whose meat is edible. This implies that 'poverty is food/bitter meat.'

Poverty Is Ill-Health

[9] *Ohia ye ya* ("Poverty is painful").

[10] *Ohia ye adammɔ* ("Poverty is madness").

[11] *Ohia ma adwendwen* ("Poverty causes excessive thinking /worry").

The example [10] indicates that poverty is insanity. The example in [9] shows that 'poverty is pain.' Both examples indicate that 'poverty is an illness.' It is a mental case and also both bodily and emotional pain. It engages its victim in excessive thinking, anxiety, and despair. From [11], we get a hint of Akan's conceptualization of poverty as a mental

³⁰ Agyekum, "The Ethnosemantics," 36.

health disorder, which could refer to anxiety, depression, and psychosis, characterised by an impaired relationship with reality. Therefore, [10] and [11] indicate that ‘poverty is a pathogen’ whose host is human. The expressions in [10] and [11] indicate that "poverty causes mental ill-health," implying a state of need entered into in which one's experience of material lack negatively affects one's thinking.

Poverty Is Down

[12] *Sɛ ɛhia wo a, woka asempa mpo a, ɔmanfoɔ bu no nsenhunu* ("When you are poor, even when you say sensible things, it is considered nonsense by the people").³¹

[13] *Sɛ ohia hia wo a, ɔba kwasea mpo tu wo fo* ("If you are poor, even the foolish person advises you").³²

[14] *Ohiani bu bɛ a, yɛmfa* ("If a poor man quotes a proverb, it has no value").³³

[15] *Ohia yɛ animguase* ("Poverty is a disgrace").

In Akan's thought, poverty writes a person off as a no-hoper. It renders a person unworthy of any attention or recognition. It renders an individual *persona non grata*, unacceptable in society, and unwelcome in making any contribution.

In orientational metaphor, the orientational configuration indicated by the metaphor stems from how we experience our world through perception and emotion. From [12], [13], and [14], we notice that ‘poverty is down’ because it degrades and diminishes reputation. ‘Poverty is demotion:’ no one wants to listen to the poor person. His/her ideas, ideas, and proverbs are disregarded. He is not involved in family decision-making or public deliberations, especially concerning financial matters. It takes a lot of wealth to make one's word count in public, hence the Akan proverb, *Sɛ wonni sika a, wonni ano*, "If you do not have money, you do not have a mouth." From [14], poverty makes one inferior, relegating one to a less respected status or position.

The example in [14] shows disgrace and shame. Shame means to reduce to a lower standing in one's own eyes or the eyes of others. It is

³¹ Agyekum, "The Ethnosemantics," 31.

³² Agyekum, "The Ethnosemantics," 32.

³³ Agyekum, "The Ethnosemantics," 39.

an emotion and feeling of being debased, degraded, devalued, depreciated, demoted, humiliated, belittled, and depreciated in dignity and reputation. The word *animguase* is a compound word comprising *anim*, "face," and *gu ase*, "fall or pour down." Thus, *animguase*, literally "face falling," is derived from the human body posture when he or she is ashamed. When one is ashamed and feels disgraced, the face is down as such emotions cause people to bow their heads. The example in [15] instantiates the orientational metaphor 'poverty is down.'

This indicates the extent to which *ohia* (lack of money and other material things) makes one inferior and impotent.

Poverty Is Outside/Periphery

[16] *Ohiani nni adamfo* ("A poor person has no friend").

[17] *Ohiani ne osikani mmom nni agoru* ("The poor man and the rich man do not play together").

[18] *Ohiani ano nnuru dwam* ("A poor person's mouth does not reach public places").

[19] *Se ohiani nim nyansa a, eka ne tirim* ("A poor person keeps his wise ideas to himself").³⁴

The proverbs on the concepts about poverty among the Akan manifest a covert class system that marginalizes people experiencing poverty.³⁵ Poverty is characterised by such source domains as 'outside' and 'periphery.' The examples in [16]-[19] indicate how people experiencing Poverty are relegated to the periphery of society. These proverbs portray the inferiority an individual is subject to, owing to one's social status as a poverty-ridden person. Proverbs [16] and [17] indicate the withdrawal of attention and social recognition from people experiencing poverty. Prosperity maintains the individual inside, at the centre of society, while Poverty moves a person outside. Thus, 'poverty is social exclusion.' This instantiates the metaphor that 'poverty is outside' and 'poverty is periphery.'

Ostracism threatens the need for belonging and stable connections with others. The eroded need for belonging is poverty. In African

³⁴ P. Appiah, K. Appiah and I. Agyeman-Duah, *Bu Me Be: Proverbs of the Akan* (Oxfordshire: Clarke Publishing, 2007), 475.

³⁵ Agyekum, "The Ethnosemantics," 37.

society, poverty courts were rejected. Rejected by neighbours and relatives as unworthy of acknowledgement marks poverty. The idea of movement is based on the conceptual metaphor *change is motion*,³⁶ which is part of the general metaphor *change of state is change of location*.³⁷

The proverb and advise of people experiencing poverty are despised, as expressed in [18] and [19], thereby instantiating the metaphor that ‘poverty is a silencer.’ Such rejection and contempt threaten one’s self-esteem. People with low incomes have low self-esteem. They are not only ‘down’ but also ostracized, removed to the periphery; ‘poverty is ostracism.’

Poverty Is an Animal

[20] *Ohia na ema akanni ye aboa, anka enye saa na etee* (“It is poverty that makes the Akan person look like a beast, for that is not his/her nature”).³⁸

[21] *Aboa ohia* (“The animal poverty”).

[22] *Ohia na ema apete di bini, anka enye ne aduane a ape* (“Poverty makes the vulture eat faeces, for that is not the food it likes”).

Poverty reduces a person to the level of a beast. The fact that a poor person is alienated from society implies that people with low incomes are not even regarded as domestic animals but unwelcome beasts that one will ward off with stones and sticks. Example [20] suggests that poverty dehumanizes, turning a human being into an animal, in [21]. It dehumanizes its victim to look monstrous, like an animal in a human costume. Example [21] is a popular Akan saying which can pass off as a proverb; *ohia* is a dangerous animal, a grim predator. When it attacks its prey, it leaves it in so much pain (*ohia ye ya*, “poverty is pain”).

An Akan popular song could be summarised in the following lines:

Sɛdɛɛ ɛbɛyɛ nie: Aboa ohia, ɔde ne chain abɛto me kɔn mu, ɔde ne coat abɛhyɛ me,

³⁶ G. Lakoff and M. Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 52.

³⁷ Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh*, 179.

³⁸ Agyekum, “The Ethnosemantics,” 34.

ɔde ne nika abɛhyɛ me, ɔde ne kyɛ abɛhyɛ me, ɔde ne watch abɛhyɛ me nsa.

This means,

So has it happened that the animal poverty has put its necklace around my neck, it has put its coat on me,

it has put its shorts on me, it has put its hat on me, it has put its watch on my hand.

This saying is cited from one of the Ghanaian highlife songs by Samuel Owusu entitled *Aboa Ohia*. Poverty is *aboa*, an animal, yet it wears human clothing with accompanying fashion accessories. Poverty dehumanizes people to the point that people experiencing poverty are conceptualized as being dressed up in an animal's human-like costume. Thus, poverty possesses zoomorphic characteristics. Hence the conceptual metaphor 'poverty is an animal' and anthropomorphically as 'poverty is a grim costume dealer' who distributes human clothing and jewellery. One could also refer to the example [8], where poverty is conceptualized as an animal whose flesh is edible but bitter.

Poverty is a miserable condition that downgrades a person ('down'). In example [22], it will be understood that poverty manifests in food. Poverty deprives its victim of a decent meal. People experiencing poverty eat unwholesome food as the vulture does.

Poverty Is a Person

[23] *Sɛ ohia soma wo a, ebeyɛ den na worenkɔ?* ("How can you refuse when poverty sends you on an errand?").

[24] *Ohia na ɛma ɔdehyɛ dane akɔa* ("It is poverty that makes a royal become a servant").³⁹

The Akan also conceptualizes poverty as an anthropomorphic entity. The examples of personification in [23] and [24] indicate that 'poverty is a person.' Specifically, 'poverty is a master.' However, in another sense, poverty can be conceptualized as a servant. The power of wealth is evident in the proverb, *Sika ne hene*, "Money is King." If lack of money means poverty, then poverty is a servant and a subject to the king. Thus, 'poverty is a ruler.' Again, another proverb says *Sika ne barima*, literally, "Money is a man." This means money wields

³⁹ Agyekum, "The Ethnosemantics and Proverbs of *Ohia*, 'poverty' in Akan," 34.

power. In that sense, this man must exert power over another person. Hence, 'money is a man,' but a powerful man.

Similarities in the Conceptualization of Poverty in Akan and Hebrew

This paper has examined the conceptualization of poverty in Hebrew and Akan, using the methodology by Kövecses. In Hebrew and Akan, poverty is referred to in terms of metaphor. Regarding source domains in the metaphoric conceptualisation, the linguistic evidence indicates similarities and differences.

Both languages share the source domains bondage, ill-health, down, outside/periphery, and a person. However, the source domains eating and an animal are exclusive to Akan, whereas bondage is the source domain identified in Hebrew proverbs.

The personification of poverty is evident in both languages. Both languages refer to the human person, where poverty is conceptualised in Hebrew as an armed man and Akan as a living entity wearing a man's clothing and jewellery. Hence, the metaphor, poverty, is an anthropomorphised entity.

The idea of exclusion is characterised by an outward movement from the centre, where those who are not poor are to the periphery. Similar in both languages are also proverbs that instantiate the metaphor 'poverty is outside/periphery.' Poverty dresses up in unwilling human victims with disgrace, dumbness, and insanity. *Ohia* enslaves humans and ostracizes them to the fringes of society, thereby making them aliens to their families and society. The metaphor 'poverty is down' is also found in both languages, where people experiencing poverty are demoted or lowered in reputation and honour.

However, the analysis of the poverty expressions in the proverbs of both languages reveals that there are also differences in the metaphoric conceptualisations. In both languages, 'poverty is a human being.' However, the Akan additionally conceptualizes poverty as an animal. Hence the metaphor 'poverty is a zoomorphised entity.'

Conclusion

In this paper, I have compared the general metaphoric conceptualization of poverty expressed in both Akan and Hebrew. The similarities in the conceptualisations may be attributed to the commonality in the human experiences and cognition of both the Hebrew people of the Bible and the Akan people today. The paper focused on conceptualizations of poverty as expressed in Akan proverbs and songs and Hebrew proverbs in the Old Testament. The analysis concludes that conceptual metaphor, a cognitive tool, can explain wise and difficult sayings. By employing it in this study, I suggest another approach for listeners and readers of proverbs to understand the abstract concepts veiled in them. The function of simplification and explanations that metaphor plays in proverbs have been unveiled in this article's discussion of metaphoric expressions. I have also demonstrated how the Conceptual Metaphor Theory can be employed as a hermeneutical tool for interpreting proverbs in the Bible.

The paper contributes to understanding the complex relations between the mundane experience of need and language from the perspectives of cognitive linguistics. There are also implications for language teaching. According to Lakoff and Johnson, conceptual metaphors are prevalent in everyday language. Many idioms and expressions in Akan and Hebrew are motivated by conceptual metaphors. Therefore, teachers of these languages can make the idioms and expressions easier by making students aware of how conceptual metaphors work in meaning-making.

It is also relevant to add that to fully understand why the prosperity gospel thrives so well in the minds of Ghanaians, one must first understand how the Ghanaian conceptualizes poverty. The grim conceptualization of poverty among the Akan explains their incurable abhorrence for poverty. It will be worthwhile exploring the Akan and Hebrew concepts of prosperity in the future to know how much such concepts complement the findings about poverty in this article.

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