

# The Animal-morality nexus in Malawian Chewa, ethnic Zhuang and French proverbs

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## Abstract

Metaphoricity in the world's oral literature thrives through human interaction with nature. From this interaction emerges the aspect of animality, which is vital in our moral interpretation of proverbs. The paper explores how the Chewa in Malawi, the ethnic Zhuang of China and the French deploy animal metaphors in proverbs to navigate morality in the society. Through metaphors, certain animals in selected proverbs represent diverse moral experiences, such as unity of purpose, courage and bravery, virtue and life's fluctuating seasons. These experiences emerge as common themes in the proverbs under study from across the three societies. In the article, the proverbs are generated from multiple sources. The Chewa proverbs are sourced from the author's own knowledge as a native Chichewa speaker. The ethnic Zhuang proverbs are entirely drawn from Zhou's (2016) publication on Zhuang proverbs. For the French proverbs, the author relies on both his knowledge in French/francophone studies and other oral sources. With the aid of Lakoff and Johnson's Conceptual Metaphor Theory, the paper discusses the possible interpretation of the animal metaphors in the proverbs and their applicability within the context of human morality.

## Keywords

*Animality,  
Chewa,  
French,  
metaphor,  
orality,  
proverbs,  
Zhuang*

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## Introduction

Animality in folk literature has thrived amongst humans for millennia, recurring in various subgenres of lore to express a range of human experiences. One critical sub-genre that has survived cultural (r)evolutions is the proverb. Kayange (2014, p.220) describes the proverb as “a special type of sentence/speech act whose meaning requires the consideration of a link between the literal/non-literal meaning and the way the utterance is used in a given context”. Globally, it remains an indispensable part of orality, its use still permeating the socio-cultural spheres of the society’s various ethnicities. Through the lessons they advance, proverbs are a critical component of a people’s identity. Thus, our customs, morals and history serve as principal material for a great number of proverbs (Jovanovic, 2015). What renders them more appealing to the human race is their metaphoricity. The subject of a proverb is often a representation of entities we sometimes may not want to confront directly (Min & Thida, 2020). Consequently, humanity’s proximity to the animal world has rendered the use of animal metaphor relevant in the sociocultural engagement espoused within proverbs. Korse (2008) highlights the role proverbs play through their characterization of certain animals to depict our well-known habits. The universality we discover in the deployment of animality in proverbs brings our attention to animal metaphors in the proverbs of three entirely different cultures: the Chewa of Malawi, the ethnic Zhuang of China, and the French.

Among the Chewa, proverbs exist as collective repositories of cross-generational wisdom and the embodiment of the society’s philosophy of life (Kamwendo, 2022). The proverb springs from an ages-old rich culture of oral literature. Overtime, the proverbs have proliferated to various cultures across Malawi, owing to the status of Chichewa (the language of the Chewa through which the proverbs are uttered) as a national lingua franca and the sociocultural interactions between the Chewa and other Malawian ethnic groups. Likewise, proverbs “form an essential distillation of the Zhuang history, tradition, philosophy, and most importantly, its legacy” (Zhou, 2016, p. 6). The Zhuang, officially recognized as the largest national minority of China, primarily occupy the area

across the Sino-Vietnamese border (Chaisingkananont, 2014). The French also have an oral culture that preceded and co-exists with their rich written literature. Just like the Chewa and the Zhuang, the French boast of proverbs that deal with all aspects of humanity. Thus, French society has proverbs on gastronomy, marriage, gender, emotions et cetera (Moy, 2019; Kogout, 2017). The French proverbs have become relevant world over due to the position of influence that France occupies through both colonial history and contemporary existence of the Francophonie, especially in francophone Africa.

This paper explores the utilization of animal metaphors to navigate morality within society through the proverbs of the Chewa, the Zhuang, and the French. It demonstrates this usage by highlighting how certain animals in selected proverbs represent diverse moral experiences, such as unity of purpose, courage and bravery, virtue, and life's fluctuating seasons. These are common experiences that emerge from the proverbs under study in all the three societies.

### **Animality as a mirror for human morality**

The existence of animal proverbs in the Malawian, Chinese and French societies signifies animality as a point of reflection for humankind. Our curiosity has allowed us to project animal character onto human behaviour to allow easy analysis, criticism and advice on matters that may be complex to engage with in open conversations. Just as other literary forms have been characterized by animality inferences so that we “can better perceive, through animal behaviour, real or supposed, passions, vices, madness, or, on the contrary, wisdom and generosity that can guide our lives, and perhaps invite us to become better” (Palizhati, 2017, p. 193), orality has established itself as an equally important portal for the same. Palizhati (2017, pp. 193-194) further notes that:

On trouve aussi dans les proverbes, une expression de la sagesse populaire. Ils se réfèrent souvent, eux aussi, à des animaux pour transmettre leur message. Et chaque pays, ou chaque peuple a sa façon de traduire cette expérience retenue par la tradition, de transmettre ce qu'il a retenu de son passé.

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(Proverbs are also an expression of popular wisdom. They too often refer to animals to convey their message. And each country, or each people has their own way of translating this experience retained by tradition, of transmitting what it has retained from its past).

From the close interrelationship between language and culture, proverbs become a reflection of human values. They are sayings “that reflect people’s beliefs, attitudes, and values, and thus are an important carrier and mirror of cultural heritage” (Weng, Zhang, Kulich & Zuo, 2020, p. 1). They offer an important set of values for members of a culture, representing and reinforcing what is most important to a particular society (Zhang, 2016). Deploying proverbs in our sociocultural engagements paves the way for honest conversations on human character and other traits without a heightened possibility of provoking any direct outbursts. Hence, we see proverbs that are a representation of various spheres of life emerging as central in the orality of a people due to their convenience in the knowledge exchange process.

In the context of animal metaphors as mirroring the society, what then should be our understanding of morality? The importance of understanding morality first is reflected in the juxtaposition of the concept with the proverb throughout various studies on the latter (Kamwendo, 2022; Palizhati, 2017; Zhou, 2016; Jovanovic, 2015). Pablos (1997, p. 79) equally makes an interesting observation about proverbs and morality:

Manifestation de l’oralité de la culture populaire, les proverbes sont des façons simples d’exprimer des notions de base pour la société contemporaine, à travers le fait quotidien et son interprétation morale.

(A manifestation of the orality of popular culture, proverbs are simple ways of expressing basic notions for contemporary society, through the everyday fact and its moral interpretation)

The moral interpretation emanates from the understanding that all ethical values of a people are reflected through their language, which conveys the ethics in

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proverbs, sayings, phraseological units, and catchphrases (Madmarovaet al., 2021). It is within this article's understanding that the moral aspect of the proverb enjoys prominence in various contextual human interactions.

### **The Conceptual Metaphor Theory**

To contextualise the exploration of animality and morality in the selected proverbs, the author relies on the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). Advanced by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) in their book *Metaphors We Live By*, "one of the core tenets of the theory is the claim that metaphors ground abstract knowledge in concrete, first-hand experience" (Madsen, 2016, p. 881). In CMT, the metaphor is systematically grounded in human cognition. This implies that one common metaphorical concept leads to a variety of linguistic expressions and different metaphorical concepts form a coherent network which underlines both human speech and thought (Liu, 2013). Metaphors may therefore be regarded as "our principal vehicles for thinking, conceptualizing and understanding our physical, social and inner world" (Kondowe, Ngwira & Chibambo, 2020, p. 62).

The theory posits that concepts are systematically governed in relation to other concepts. As such, we must consider metaphors as tools linking two conceptual domains: the source domain (SD) and target domain (TD) (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Thus, the metaphor is

a mapping of the schematic structure of the source domain onto that of the target domain, and metaphorical mappings are not arbitrary but are grounded in our bodily experience. Once a metaphorical mapping is set up, it will then impose its structures on real life and be made real in different ways (Liu, 2013, p. 1845).

As argued by Kobia (2016, p. 219), the implication is that each metaphor consists of two mental representations. Thus, "the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 5).

Animality in relation to morality in the Chewa, Zhuang, and French proverbs is therefore best understood from the CMT perspective, considering that the metaphoricity we encounter is a direct result of the human-nature interaction which is central to the theory. Through CMT, we gain understanding of how the animal actions are mapped into moral interpretations of the proverbs. Thus, the animals in the proverbs represent the source domain through which other human experiences are conceptualised as target domain (Yakub, 2019).

For proverbs that do not have exact equivalents when translated into English, the author opts for literal translation to maintain the concept of animality. Therefore, the reader from outside any of the three cultures gets to understand the meaning and where necessary draw from their own cultural repositories existing proverbs that share similar meanings to those in the aforementioned cultures through explanations that follow each proverb. This translation choice enables the analysis to carry the peculiar cultural experience of the three societies without any alterations. This is particularly the case with the Chewa and French proverbs. The Zhuang context presents a different case because both the original and English translations of the proverbs are generated from Zhou (2016).

## Methodology

The article relies on both primary and secondary data. For the presentation and interpretation of the Chewa proverbs, the article draws from the author's own experiences of orality as a Chichewa native speaker. As a non-Chinese speaker, the author also relies solely on translation of the Zhuang Chinese people's proverbs in Zhou Yanxian's *Two Thousand Zhuang Proverbs from China with Annotations and Chinese and English Translation* (Zhou, 2016). For the French proverbs, the article draws from the author's own knowledge as a researcher in French and Francophone studies and other French oral sources as well as various available repositories of French proverbs such as Sylvie Moy's *100 Proverbes français les plus courants et leur signification* (Moy, 2019) and Vladimir Kogout's *Le monde animalier dans les expressions et proverbes français* (Kogout, 2017). The proverbs are analysed within the framework of Lakoff and Johnson's Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980)

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through carefully selected common themes drawn from the chosen proverbs in all the three cultures.

In the analysis, the article uses two Chewa proverbs and two Zhuang proverbs under each of the four themes (sections), translating into eight proverbs for each of the two cultures. Although the author initially intended to maintain this as the uniform representative sample of the animal proverbs that were easily available across all the examined oral cultures, the French proverbs fell short of one proverb under two themes, implying the use of six proverbs instead of eight across the four themes/sections, two under two themes/sections and one under the other two themes/sections (courage and bravery; virtue). Thus, the paper uses a total of twenty-two available proverbs from the three cultures.

The choice to focus on proverbs within the three societies is informed by the need to explore diversity of cultural expressions and traditions across continents (Africa, Europe and Asia) with the intention of contributing to a broader understanding of the universality and cultural specificity of proverbs as a form of traditional wisdom and communication. By selecting cultures that span different geographical regions and linguistic backgrounds, the article sheds light on commonalities in the use of animal proverbs as vehicles of morality. Thus, a comparative analysis of the Chewa, French, and Zhuang proverbs helps in discerning patterns and trends in how cultures conceptualize and convey shared human experiences. The analysis isolates various common themes that emerge across the selected proverbs, all attesting to the existence of an animality-morality nexus. These include unity of purpose, courage and bravery, virtue, and lessons from life's fluctuating seasons.

### **Unity of purpose**

Analysis of the connection between animals and morality in proverbs of all the three cultures reveal a projection of unity in animality onto human behaviour. There are various proverbs that refer to animal conduct pertaining to the aspect of unity. The animality that touches on unity then becomes a critical component of

an inevitable comparison between the animal and humans. The concept of unity emerges clearly in various Chewa proverbs that target inculcation of the same on its society. This is best exemplified through the following proverbs:

1. Chimvano cha mavu choning'a pamimba (wasps' unity in narrowing waists).
2. Chiswe chimodzi sichiumba chulu (One termite does not mould a mound).

The first proverb (1) propagates unity and cooperation in the society as a metaphorical emulation of wasps' conduct. The proverb arises from the Chewa's observation of wasps' unique anatomical structure. Their narrow waists set them apart in the animal world. However, this uniqueness appears in all types of wasps, inciting reflective moments in the mind of the observer. The uniformity in appearance may in human context be translated as emanating from a consensus in the wasp society on their appearance, because that is how human societies operate, on agreed norms and values. Thus, the wasps' narrow waists are the source domain and are projected onto unified human conduct which is our target domain. Similarly, the second proverb (2) presents to the reader the concept of unity by highlighting that a termite, alone, cannot achieve what is often attainable through collective effort. The proverb's underlying message is that a healthy cooperation/unity leads to attainment of satisfactory results. Famed for their mounds, we thus fathom out termites' ability to build such impeccable structures in spite of their small size. In this context, the termites' act of building a mound is the source domain whose meaning is projected onto the target domain: human collective action.

Likewise, the ethnic Zhuang of China also have some animal proverbs they draw from when in need of imparting morals pertaining to unity. Consider the following examples:

3. Aeu hag dinzrwi dab rongz, gaej hag roegraeu guh rongz. 要学蜜蜂起巢, 莫学斑鸠做窝 (Learn from the bees making their hive together, not from the turtledoves making their own nests alone).



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4. Cijaeu caezsim guh, duzmoed buen Daisanh. 只要齐心干, 蚂蚁搬泰山 (When ants work together, they can move Mount Tai). (Zhou, 2016)

In example (3), the proverb underscores the need for unity in a society by imploring people to observe how bees collectively operate. The unity that manifests in bees is very evident through their collective efforts when making the hive. This proverb originates from the Zhuang society's observation of the bee numbers that are involved in the making of a hive, unlike turtledoves which often do the work in pairs: a male and a female. Actions of both the bees and the turtledove as the source domain are metaphorized and projected onto human behaviour (the target domain) to valorise unity and criticize individualism. This sense of unity is equally evoked in example (4) which rests on how we can attain great feats through collaborative work. In the proverb, the ants' collective efforts are brought into the picture. The proverb arises from the Zhuang's knowledge of both ants' work and Mount Tai, the latter a mountain of historical and cultural significance in Tai'an and the highest point in Shandong province, China (Zhou, 2016). While it is, at the literal level, impossible for the ants to move the mountain, the proverb points to the Zhuang's admiration of the ants' collaborative work ethics, the source domain. The people who are the proverb's target domain then infer from the ethics for application in the human context.

Like both the Chewa and the Zhuang, the French also resort to animality in their quest for moral advocacy as regards unity. There exist several proverbs in the language that point to unity of purpose, a trait that humans as the target domain apply on their own projection of the concept when they want to advise/encourage each other on unity. Consider the two proverbs below:

5. Les loups ne se mangent pas entre eux (Wolves do not eat each other).

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6. Une armée de fourmis peut triompher d'un serpent venimeux (An army of ants can triumph over a poisonous snake).

Proverb (5) sends across a message of unity and support even amongst the deviant in society. This deviancy emanates from our understanding that in the French cultural context, the wolf is synonymous with savagery and debauchery (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1982). The proverb, therefore, implies that even the society's dishonest people, whether adversaries or not, do not harm, but instead support each other (Moy, 2019). This is on the realization that they belong to the same social entity. Here, the wolves' actions (the source domain) are metaphorically likened to those of humans (target domain). The moral interpretation in this context induces in people a sense of responsibility in fostering unity, considering that even the wolves of the society know its importance. Similarly, proverb (6) is a clear demonstration of what a weak entity can achieve through collective action. Despite the size of an ant making it insignificant when pitted against the snake, a group of ants can easily defeat the latter regardless of how dangerous and venomous the snake might be. Thus, through collective effort which is a manifestation of unity, no task becomes insurmountable. In this context, the proverb maps the concept of the ants' ability to defeat a venomous snake but only as a group (the source domain) onto human experiences of collective action in accomplishing complex tasks (the target domain).

### **Courage and bravery**

In the three societies, a projection of courage and bravery onto human conduct also features prominently in various social discourses. Consequently, there are proverbs in which animality is also projected onto human experiences with the purpose of inspiring courage and bravery. The moral of courage and bravery is very evident in various Chewa proverbs such as the following:

7. Kanthu n'khama phwiti adakwatira njiwa (Through hard work, a robin married a dove).

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8. Chakometsa ntchentche, inachilimika kuuluka (What makes a housefly better is its persistence in flying).

The message at the centre of the two proverbs is courage and determination. In proverb (7), the courage and bravery appear in the context of a task that looks almost impossible to accomplish. The robin is a very small bird as compared to the dove which is both bigger and beautiful. The Chewa also understand that these two birds cannot crossbreed. However, the proverb places them in a union to metaphorically emphasize how courage and bravery through hard work can be rewarding. The robin marrying the dove as the source domain is thus projected onto the human need for courage and bravery (target domain) to attain desired goals. The second proverb (8) conveys a message of one's ability to achieve through persistence and determination – critical attributes of courage and bravery. A housefly is a detestable insect often associated with dirt, rot and filth. As such, a non-scientific perspective over its existence attracts the need for its avoidance and, where possible, extermination. Yet, in the proverb, we learn that the housefly may also have an attribute that advantages it over other insects/animal entities: flying. This status is in comparison with other insects/animal entities that are equally a nuisance to humans. However, the proverb projects the flying as an activity that emerges out of the housefly's determination. Thus, the human admiration focuses on this persistence. In this context, it is the brave and courageous acts of persistence that reward the housefly with the unlikely human admiration. The housefly's persistence is the target domain, mapped onto the need for people to develop persistence (the target domain).

Likewise, the Zhuang also possess a vast repertoire of proverbs that stimulate courage and bravery as observable in the following proverbs:

9. Duzyiuh mboujlau bya sang, bouxak mboujlau cungq mid. 苍鹰不怕山高, 勇士不怕枪刀 (An eagle does not fear high mountains, a warrior does not fear guns and knives).

10. Mbouj guh gaeqnumh ndoj laj ranz, aeu guh daihnyanz  
hwnj mbwn sang. 莫做小鸡躲屋檐, 要做大雁飞高  
天 (Be a wild goose flying high in the sky, not a chick  
hiding under the eave). (Zhou, 2016)

Proverb (9) conveys the need for people to face any existing challenges head on. It emerges from the Zhuang's observation of how eagles traverse high mountains. To the Zhuang, the eagle always strives to conquer heights that stand in its way. This is an act of courage the Zhuang people want to project onto the self in their society. Thus, they metaphorize the eagle's act in the proverb, drawing parallels with human actions right from within the saying. Similarly, proverb (10) conveys a message about taking initiative, embracing challenges, and striving for growth rather than staying in a comfort zone. A wild goose is known for its ability to soar high in the sky, traversing great distances, hence symbolizing a person who is ambitious, adventurous, and willing to explore new opportunities. On the other hand, a chick hiding under the eave refers to someone who seeks shelter, safety, and familiarity. Just like a young bird that stays close to its nest, this person prefers to stay within their comfort zone and avoid challenges or risks. As such, the contradictory conduct of the two entities as our source domain is projected onto human behaviour and the need to embrace courage or bravery.

The projection of courage and bravery onto human behaviour is also recurring in French proverbs. For example, proverb (11) below invokes the need for courage and bravery before one attains what they desire. The idea is for one to suffer in their quest for something valuable:

11. Le miel est doux mais l'abeille pique (honey is sweet  
but bees sting).

The proverb exists from the French people's knowledge of honey's sweetness, yet its harvest requires braving bees. In this context, the whole proverb appears as the source domain from which meaning is mapped onto the need to suffer before attaining anything worthwhile (the target domain). While on the

surface reference may be to the taste only, understanding the various uses of honey also brings us to the universality of acceptance for the need to suffer for it. Bee stings are very dangerous, yet because of the cognizance of honey's importance, people often expose themselves to this danger for honey harvest.

### Proverbs against greed, for virtue

In the three cultures there also exist proverbs that encourage desirable virtues. Some of the virtues highlight the negative consequences of greed. Among the Chewa, there are several proverbs that allude to loss emanating from greed. For example, proverb (12) below prewarns of what one stands to lose once greed clouds one's mind:

12. Ichi chakoma ichi chakoma pusi anagwa chagada (Both [these] are delicious; the monkey fell on its back).

The proverb presupposes the existence of two fruits which a monkey finds delicious in a tree. The monkey is lured to both because of greed. In dividing its attention to grab both fruits as it climbs the tree, the monkey loses balance and falls on its back. This is from people's observation of monkey behaviour and their strong appetite for fruits. In this context, the greedy monkey becomes the source domain whose act is projected onto a greedy human bound to miss out on an important opportunity due to greed. We also encounter precaution against greed in the following Chewa proverb which even refers to fatal consequences for greedy individuals:

13. Dyera linapititsa ntchentche kumanda (Gluttony sent the fly to a grave).

This proverb originates from the Chewa's observation of a housefly's conduct. Its affinity to decaying organic filth leads to persistent attempts to feed on the source of any likeable smell. However, the feeding lasts as long as the smell itself, creating the impression of greed through perpetual dissatisfaction that often lands the housefly into trouble, mostly extermination. In this proverb, the housefly

is the source domain whose conduct is mapped onto a greedy human (the target domain) destined for negative consequences.

The Zhuang people also engage with greed through metaphor in various proverbs. Like the Chewa, the moral interpretation of their proverbs is directly linked to the dire consequences that result from the vice. Consider examples (14) and (15) below:

14. Duzbya maij gwn heih hwnj set, boux vunz dam gwn heih hwnjdang. 好吃的鱼易上钩, 贪心的人易上当 (A hungry fish quickly takes the bite, greedy people are easily tricked).
  
15. Vaiz maeuz nywj doeklak, vunz maeuz bak doeklaeng. 牛贪草落崖, 人贪嘴落后 (A greedy ox will/may fall off a cliff, a greedy man will/may fall behind others). (Zhou, 2016)

Proverb (14) is a warning for people to evade greed because of its repercussions. It metaphorizes greedy people (the target domain) with a hungry fish that quickly takes the bite off a hook (the source domain). This is very dangerous as the hook represents the end of a fish's life. Thus, the proverb draws the Zhuang people into possible reflection over repercussions of greed as they would unsuspectingly fall prey to other entities' evil intentions. The metaphor of a greedy entity recurs in the second proverb (15) which contains a lesson on a possible disastrous end arising from a decision informed by avarice. In the proverb, a greedy ox as the source domain is likened to a greedy man, the target domain. The former may, in pursuit of some green pasture on the edge of a cliff, end up falling off. Man, in the same sense, risks losing his integrity, reputation and even a future because of greed that may put him into different kinds of trouble.

Similarly, French culture also contains proverbs that speak against greed, in so doing mapping meaning from the proverbs and projecting it onto human morality. This is evident in the following proverb:

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16. La baleine n'avale jamais ce qu'elle ne peut pas digérer  
(Whales never swallow what they cannot digest).

The proverb (16) above serves as a cautionary metaphor within the discourse of prudent conduct, where the behaviour of a whale offers an allegorical lens through which to examine the perils of unchecked avarice. Within this figurative framework, the whale assumes the role of an emblematic entity, epitomizing considerable magnitude and appetite, while the act of digestion serves as an analogue to the assimilation and management of material acquisitions. Through the conduct of the whales (source domain), the proverb metaphorizes the need for humans (target domain) to steer clear of greed, using only that which is necessary.

### **Life's fluctuating seasons**

Proverbs are also full of moral lessons on changes that often happen in the course of life. As such, some of the animal proverbs in the three societies denote the fluctuating seasons in one's life: good and bad. There are a number of popular proverbs that refer to the concept of changing seasons among the Chewa. Consider the following examples:

17. Ntchentche inati mtsogolo moyo m'mbuyo moyo (A housefly said there is life in the future and life in the past).
18. Fisi ndi fisi sangasinthe mawanga (A hyena is a hyena, it can never change its spots).

The Chewa's creation and understanding of proverb (17) emanates from their own observation of how a housefly carries itself around. It flaps its wings forwards and backwards, prompting reference to both the future (forwards) and the past (backwards) as reflection of the course of life for humans. Through this proverb, the Chewa teach the society the importance of treating each other with respect in daily interactions as we do not know what the future holds. One may be of some status today which may not necessarily be the same in the future. This

interpretation denotes the changing seasons in one's life, hence the need to be careful with any treatment of the other. Therefore, the housefly and its actions form the source domain that is projected onto human behaviour with respect to changing seasons (the target domain). On the contrary, proverb (18) is an allusion to rigidity of human character, even with the passage of time. It is often used when an entity defies society's expectation of a positive moral transformation that may come in the course of time. The hyena (the source domain) is used because in the Malawian society, it represents evil deeds (through stealing livestock in villages). Even if/when transferred to another spatial or temporal setting, the hyena's spots do not change. Thus, people who do not change their character even after being exposed to various conditions and times are the target domain, metaphorized through the hyena concept.

The concept of fluctuating seasons also enjoys recurring appearance in Zhuang proverbs. This is clear in proverbs (20) and (21) below:

19. Ndawdah miz raemx bya gwn moed, ndawdah raemx mboek moed gwn 河里有水鱼吃蚁, 河里水干蚁吃鱼 (When there is water in the river, fish eat ants; when there is no water, ants eat fish).
20. Ngwz dai ndok hau. 蛇死骨露 (A snake's skeleton appears after it dies). (Zhou, 2016)

Proverb (19) is an excellent example of the need to treat each other with respect because of how times change. The Zhuang use the relationship between fish and ants in the river (the source domain) to create an image that is projected onto the nature of human relationship in the society (the target domain). Those with power in the present may become vulnerable in the future, as do the fish when the river is dry. The second proverb (20) may equally be interpreted within the realms of diminishing power. The snake and the skeleton form the source domain of the proverb while vulnerability of an individual over the course of time is the target domain. The snake is fierce in nature and leads to panic when spotted.



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However, with time, it eventually dies. The skeleton that remains reminds people of the vulnerability of any entity, weak or strong, with time as the only constant in our existence.

Just like the Chewa and the Zhuang, the French also have numerous proverbs that depict the concept of changing times from various angles. From proverbs (21) and (22) below, we can tell how this concept emerges in French society:

21. Quand le rossignol a vu ses petits, il ne chante plus  
(When the nightingale has seen its young, it no longer sings).
22. Petit poisson deviendra grand (A small fish will become big).

In proverb (21), the society maps its own observation of the nightingale's behaviour for moral interpretation of human conduct. This proverb emanates from the French people's observation of how the nightingale stops its singing when it has hatchlings. Thus, the proverb is about personality change with passage of time. It contains a transfer of the nightingale's conduct (source domain) onto human behaviour, generating an interpretation that fits the moral realms of human society which is the target domain. This is applicable in contexts of change in behaviour, maturity, reasoning and other aspects that humans acquire in the course of time. In the second proverb (22), the small fish is the source domain whose meaning is mapped onto a person in a vulnerable position (target domain). The understanding is that the fry eventually matures into an adult with time. Hence the proverb is uttered to convey the inevitability of change in a person's status, which is a recurrence of the concept as observed in some of the Chewa and Zhuang proverbs. Thus, it invites the people towards reflecting on how they interact with or treat others in times of vulnerability (depicted through the smallness of the fish/fry) considering that times eventually change.

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## Conclusion

Our analysis of the Chewa, Zhuang and French proverbs points to a recurring deployment of animality that permits moral interpretation of the proverbs. In the proverbs, what is common is the society's projection of animal conduct onto human behaviour. The animals are at the centre of these proverbs because of the commonality they share with the people in their work ethic, courage and virtue, as well as a depiction of life's changing seasons. Hence, the Chewa, the Zhuang, and the French all turn to animal character to inculcate upon themselves various morals through carefully woven proverbs. The proverbs are created in such a way that upon interaction with any of the entities, the logic of the nexus between animality and morality becomes evident. Thus, all the aspects of life as presented through animality in the selected proverbs occur within the confines of human morality. Framed within the Conceptual Metaphor Theory, the article has largely relied on the concepts of source and target domain to highlight how meanings are mapped from the proverbs with animality and projected onto human character.

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