

Body parts and their metaphoric meanings in Mwan and other South Mande languages ¹

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Metaphors of personification and anthropomorphous metaphors

Any language is anthropocentric, and in any language there are metaphors that perceive objects, animate or inanimate, as persons. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson speak about personification metaphors as a major metaphor type. These metaphors present objects as persons, mostly “on the basis of our own motivations, goals, actions, and characteristics” (Lakoff & Johnson 1981, 34). The surface representations of these basic metaphors are, for instance, the following expressions: “inflation *has attacked* the foundation of our economy”, “his theory *explained...*”, “this fact *argues...*” etc.

Lakoff and Johnson also mention that there is another type of personification metaphor, which they consider marginal for the European culture, namely, metaphors which regard objects as having a human body: “There are well known expressions like the *foot* of the mountain, a *head* of cabbage, the *leg* of a table, etc. These expressions are isolated instances of metaphorical concepts, where there is only one instance of a used part (or maybe two or three). Thus the *foot* of the mountain is the only used part of the metaphor A MOUNTAIN IS A PERSON. In normal discourse we do not speak of the *head*, *shoulders*, or *trunk* of a mountain, though in special contexts it is possible to construct novel metaphorical expressions based on these unused parts. In fact, there is an aspect of the metaphor A MOUNTAIN IS A PERSON in which mountain climbers will speak of the *shoulder* of a mountain (namely, a ridge near the top) and of *conquering*, fighting, and even *being killed by* a mountain. <...> The point here is that there are metaphors, like A MOUNTAIN IS A PERSON, that are marginal in our culture and our language; their used part may consist of only one conventionally fixed expression of the language, and they do not systematically

¹ The current study is a part of the project SUBJ 062156.00 supported by the Swiss National Foundation for Scientific Research.

interact with other metaphorical concepts because so little of them is used. This makes them relatively uninteresting for our purposes but not completely so, since they can be extended to their unused part” (Lakoff & Johnson 2001, 54-55).

It seems incorrect to formulate the basic metaphoric concept represented in “the *foot* of the mountain” as A MOUNTAIN IS A PERSON. A mountain is not personified; it is pictured not as a person with “motivations, goals and actions” but as an object whose “body” consists of the same parts as the human body, as having the same physical constitution. Expressions of this type are rare both in English and in Russian, though they do not coincide in details. Neither “the *foot* of the mountain” nor “the *head* of cabbage” have exact parallels in Russian. “*Podnozhije gory*” (the *foot* of the mountain) is connected etymologically with *noga* ‘foot’, but “the *head* of cabbage” has as a correspondence the word *kochan* with this specialized meaning (*kochan kapusty*), which can be applied metaphorically to the human head (A HUMAN HEAD IS A HEAD OF CABBAGE). Russian seems to like these upside-down metaphors when parts of the human body are viewed as objects: *krysha poehala* ‘he has gone crazy’, lit. ‘his roof has gone away’ (A HEAD IS A ROOF); *gorshok ne varit* ‘he is stupid’, lit. ‘his pot does not cook’ (A HEAD IS A POT), which usually carry pejorative meanings. Such is not the case with *the head of cabbage* though.

It is not characteristic of European languages to present objects as having human bodies. However, it is a common thing in the languages of West Africa. Expressions of this type represent basic metaphoric concept of animals, plants and inanimate objects as having the same physical structure as humans. At the same time they are not personified, as in European languages. While Europeans tend to ascribe human thoughts, feelings and emotions to objects and abstract notions, Africans view everything as having the human body. Thus, it is necessary to distinguish METAPHORS OF PERSONIFICATION and “ANTHROPOMORPHOUS” METAPHORS.

Anthropomorphous metaphors in South Mande languages

As an example I present data of the Mwan language and of other South Mande languages. The conceptual basis of these languages seems typical for languages of the area.²

² Metaphors of this type seem to be widely spread among African languages. I can point out an interesting article by Antonina Koval where the isomorphism in the structure of TREE and HUMAN is shown for Pulaar-Fulfulde (Koval 2008).

Body parts and their metaphoric meanings in South Mande

The South Mande languages (SM) generally regard humans and animals (including birds, reptiles, insects, mollusks and so on) as having the same body parts.

LIMBS IN SM LANGUAGES

Terms for human forelimb in South Mande languages³
and their metaphorical meanings (in brackets)

	shoulder	from shoulder to elbow	from elbow to hand	hand	palm
Mwan	<i>gbēpààlōŋ</i> (wing: <i>gbēlōŋ</i>)	<i>gbē</i> (foreleg, side, manner, branch)			<i>kòò</i>
Dan- Gweta	<i>gbā</i> (wing)		<i>kò</i> (foreleg, manner, -ty)		
	<i>gbè</i> (chicken shoulders)				
Dan- Blo	<i>gbā</i> (wing of bird, insect)	<i>gbîr</i> (foreleg, branch)	<i>kò</i> (foreleg, fore tentacle, branch, manner)		
Guro ⁴	<i>bε la pá</i>	<i>bε</i> (handful, sleeve)		<i>bε laá</i> (wing)	<i>bε leè</i>
Beng	<i>bàŋ</i> (wing)		<i>wō</i> (side)		

The Mwan language has two words for the front limb: *gbē* and *kòò*. Their distribution is close to English *arm* and *hand*, but it is not the same. In fact, *gbē* designates the whole limb while *kòò* refers only to a *palm of the hand*. Thus, items like ‘finger’ (*gbēnè bē*), ‘nail’ (*gbē srò*) or ‘finger ring’ (*gbēmā pībēnē*) refer to the notion *gbē*. The term for ‘shoulder’ (*gbēpààlōŋ*) also seems to be derived from this word.

Other South Mande languages conceptualize the human forelimb in a somewhat different manner. Dan and Tura (closely related languages), and Beng divide the human forelimb into ‘shoulder + arm from shoulder to elbow’ and

³ The data on Gban, Yaoure and Mano are too scarce to make any suggestions.

⁴ The absence of any diacritical sign indicates the mid tone in the Guro orthography.

‘arm from elbow to hand + hand’. The sense SHOULDER is included in the first term, while designations of FINGERS are part of the second one. In Dan-Gweta there is also a term for the limb as a whole (ARM + HAND): Dan-Gweta *gbè*.

Dan-Blo divides the front limb into three parts: SHOULDER (*gbā*), ARM FROM SHOULDER TO ELBOW (*gbîr*) and ARM FROM ELBOW TO HAND + HAND (*kò*).

The table shows that there are three terms referring to the forelimb in South Mande languages: *GBELEXE⁵ (Mwan *gbē*, Dan-Gweta, *gbè*, Dan-Blo *gbîr*, Guro *bε*), *KO (Mwan *kò*, Dan-Gweta *kò*, Dan-Blo *kò*, Beng *wō*) and *GBELANG (Mwan *gbēpààlōŋ*, Dan-Gweta *gbā*, Dan-Blo *gbā*, Guro *bε la pá*, Beng *bàŋ*).

Terms for shoulder *GBELANG and arm *GBELEXE seem to be derivatives from one and the same root *GBE; this connection is still obvious in Mwan and Guro (Mwan *gbēpààlōŋ* – *gbē*, Guro *bε la pá* – *bε*). Supposedly, this form has contracted into *GBAN in Dan, Tura and Beng⁶. In Dan-Blo, this term designates also ARMPIT. So it can be said that *GBAN may have the meaning of the whole shoulder part of the body.

Guro, just like Mwan, has one term for the whole arm: *bε*. Both FINGER (Guro *bε wélé*) and SHOULDER (Guro *bε ba bōgòlò*) are derived from this term.

While the term for SHOULDER historically seems to be related to the term ARM, the term HAND (or «arm from elbow + hand»), *KO, is presented in all SM languages except for Guro, where it was replaced by terms derived from *GBE.

Generally, the conceptualization of human forelimbs in South Mande languages is as follows: the forelimb is regarded by Dan-Gweta, Dan-Blo and Beng as having two parts, a) the part nearer to shoulder (sometimes including SHOULDER), and b) the part nearer to fingers. The borderline is often the ELBOW (Dan-Gweta, Dan-Blo, Beng, Tura). Mwan has shifted the borderline further down so that *KO designates in this language only the PALM of hand. Guro distinguishes between HAND and PALM, but both terms are derived from *GBE.

⁵ Forms given in capital letters and with an asterisk are not exactly proto-forms but could be considered as “phonetic keys” for groups of cognates; they are given according to the etymological dictionary of the Mande language family (Vydrin ms).

⁶ No information on Yaure, Gban and Mano.

It is interesting to note that the lower limb is conceptualized as a single unit by all South Mande languages; none of them distinguishes between LEG and FOOT. All of them use historically related terms, *K'EN: Mwan *gāā*, Guro *gàè*, Yauré *cḕ*, *kḕ*, Wan *cḕ*, Dan-Gweta *gḕ*, Dan-Blo *gḕ*, Tura *gḕ*, Beng *gā*, Gban *gḕ*.

METAPHORIC SHIFT OF THE TERMS FOR LIMBS IN THE SOUTH MANDE LANGUAGES

The terms examined above are used for naming the limbs of animals (mammals, birds, reptiles, insects and so on) in all the South Mande languages. Animals are seen as having the same pairs of limbs: ARMS+HANDS and LEGS+FEET.

In Mwan, the extremities of animals are also named as the corresponding human limbs. Mwan uses the term *gbē* (ARM+HAND vs PALM) to denote front extremities of all kinds of animals. FRONT EXTREMITIES, for Mwan speakers, are the pair of limbs which are nearest to the head. When speaking of insects, spiders or centipedes which have more than two pairs of limbs, Mwan speakers refer to the first pair of limbs as *gbē*; all other pairs are called *gāā* FOOT+LEG, no matter how many of them the creature in question would have. The term *kòò* is never used for the extremities of animals.

The situation about denoting forelimbs of animals is somewhat more complicated in other South Mande languages. The way of denoting forelegs and paws of animals in the languages whose data are available are shown in the table above (see metaphoric usage is brackets). Dictionaries of different languages point out specific meanings that correspond to the general view of animals and humans as having the same set of parts of body. Dialects of Dan represent the forelimbs of animals mainly as *KO. The dictionary of Dan-Kla mentions the following meanings of *kò*: 'hand', 'tentacles of scorpion', 'branch of tree', 'chair arm', '-ty (in compound numbers from 30 to 90)', and 'time (instance or occasion)'. The dictionary of Dan-Blo presents practically the same set of meanings: 'hand', 'front leg or paw of animal', 'front tarsus of insect', 'tentacles of scarab', 'branch of tree', and 'manner'.

While the front limbs of non-flying creatures are in all cases connected with the notions ARM or HAND, the wings of flying creatures (prototypically birds, but also flying insects) are represented as SHOULDERS. Dan-Gweta distinguishes between 'wings of chicken' and 'chicken shoulders (food)'. The only exception is found in Guro where WING is presented as HAND. It has to be

noted that Guro is the only language which uses derivatives from the unique stem *GBE for parts of forelimbs.

Certain languages attribute the possession of ARMS or HANDS also to trees, so branches of a tree are conceptualized as limbs (Mwan, Dan-Blo, Dan-Kla, Gban). However, the word for BRANCH in Dan-Gweta differs from the word for ARM; BRANCH here is conceptualized as branching or furcation (Dan-Gweta *gbèj̄* ‘branch of tree’, ‘tributary of river’, ‘bifurcation of road’, as well as ‘gap between furcated objects’, cf. *t̄j̄ gbèj̄* ‘valley between mountains’).

Names for human limbs are applied not only to the extremities of animals but also to parts of inanimate objects. In Mwan, *gbē* has the following meanings: 1. ‘hand+arm of a person’; 2. ‘foreleg or forepaw of an animal’; 3. ‘branch of a tree’; 4. ‘side of an object (e. g. of a house)’; 5. ‘manner, way’. Other South Mande languages give the following meanings of terms in question (reflexes of both *GBELEXE and *KO): ‘sleeve of cloths’ (Guro, Wan); ‘chair arm’ (Dan-Kla); ‘side’ (Mwan, Guro, Beng, Gban); ‘manner, way’ (Mwan, Dan-Blo, Tura). Tura shows another way of the extension of the meaning – *KO means also ‘propriety, possession’ in this language.

The hind limbs of animals are designated by the same term as human LEG+FOOT. Thus, Mwan *gāā* has the following senses: 1. ‘leg+foot of a person’; 2. ‘hind leg or hind paw of an animal’; 3. ‘leg of a bird’; 4. ‘leg of an object (e.g. of a chair)’; 5. ‘wheel of a vehicle’.

This “chain of meanings” is also characteristic for Guro, Dan-Gweta, Dan-Blo, Dan-Kla, Tura and Beng. The logical extension of the meaning includes ‘leg of bird’ (Mwan), ‘not-first pairs of extremities of insects and molluscs: spiders, centipedes, octopi, etc.’ (Mwan, Guro, Dan-Kla, Dan-Blo); ‘thoracic or abdominal fin of a fish’ (Dan-Blo); ‘stem of a plant’ (Beng); ‘root of tooth’ (Dan-Blo, Dan-Gweta); ‘leg of furniture’ (Mwan, Dan-Gweta, Tura); ‘wheel of a vehicle’ (Mwan, Guro, Dan-Blo, Dan-Gweta, Tura, Beng); ‘pedal’ (Wan); ‘foundation of a building’ (Guro, Dan-Gweta, Beng), ‘post, stilt (of a house)’ (Beng); ‘reason’ (Wan, Dan-Blo, Dan-Gweta), and ‘sense’ (Dan-Blo).

The meanings evolve from concrete bodily notions and metaphoric presentations of animals and inanimate objects as having human bodies to completely abstract notions such as REASON, MANNER or PROPERTY.

HAIR: PELT OR COIFFURE

South Mande languages distinguish HAIR ON THE HEAD (often *WUN) and BODY HAIR (in all languages: *KUA).⁷

In Mwan *wī* ‘hair on the head of a person’ also denotes: 2. ‘roof of a house’; 3. ‘top of any object that has a «head»’. The locative noun *wī* ‘on the head’ (usually referring to the manner of carrying things) is obviously derived from it.

Cīē refers to 1. ‘body hair’; 2. ‘beard and moustache’; 3. ‘eyelashes and eyebrows’; 4. ‘hair and fur of animals’; 5. ‘feathers of birds’.

FISH SCALE belongs to another category (Mwan *klōō*), together with BARK of tree, SKIN of snake or crocodile and SHELL of turtle, snail or egg.

The same pattern is found in other South Mande languages. *KUA has the basic meaning BODY HAIR: Mwan *cīē*, Guro *cēē*, Yauré *jé, cé*, Wan *kāī*, Dan-Gweta *kāā*, Dan-Blo *kāā*, Dan-Kla *kāā*, Tura *kūā*, Beng *céj*. Dictionaries register the following meanings: ‘beard and moustache’ (Mwan, Guro, Wan, Dan-Gweta, Beng); ‘eyelashes and eyebrows’ (Mwan, Dan-Blo, Tura, Beng); ‘armpit hair, hair on chest and back’ (Beng), ‘pelt, hair of animal’ (Mwan, Guro, Dan-Gweta, Dan-Blo, Dan-Kla, Tura); ‘hide of animal’ (Guro), ‘feathers’ (Mwan, Guro, Wan, Dan-Gweta, Dan-Blo, Dan-Kla, Beng); ‘bristle or hair of insects’ (Dan-Gweta, Dan-Blo), ‘quill of porcupine’ (Dan-Kla).

As we see, humans do not differ from the animal world, as they are viewed as covered by the same type of hair as other mammals, birds or insects. Animal “covers” are divided basically into *KUA and *KOLE. While *KUA refers to SOFT COVER, *KOLE (Mwan *klōō*, Guro *kōlē*, Dan-Blo *klāā*, Tura *kēlē*, Gban *klō*) means HARD COVER: shell of snail or turtle, scale of fish and hard skin of crocodile.

*WUN (Mwan *wī*, Guro *nwi*, Wan *mé*, Dan-Blo, Dan-Gweta *wī*, Tura *wōwō*, Gban *mlé*)⁸ has only one supplementary meaning: ‘coiffure (of different types)’ (Mwan, Guro, Dan-Gweta, Dan-Blo, Gban).

In Mwan, “human hair”, i. e. HAIR ON THE HEAD, is also connected with the notion TOP. The locative *wī* ‘on the head’ (way of carrying things) is also used as a postposition with the meaning ‘on, on the top of smth’ (that has a “head”): *gōō é wī* ‘on the top of the mountain’. The similar locative noun exists in Guro: *nwi* ‘top (of tree, of head)’, ‘on the top of smth’.

⁷ Cf. French *cheveux* ‘hair on the head, coiffure’ and *poile* ‘body hair’.

⁸ It is interesting that Beng denotes ‘hair on the head’ as *nlūncéj* ‘pelt of the head’.

OTHER BODY PARTS IN MWAN

'Head' (*ngblō*), 'neck' (*blō*), 'belly' (*kpéé*), 'face' (*wlē*), 'eye' (*yrê*), 'ear' (*trê*) may be applied both to persons and animals (mammals, birds, reptiles and so on).

There are certain exceptions:

srò designates 'nails of humans' or 'claws' of all the animals except for birds which have *fêlà* 'claws of a bird of prey'.

Terms for the parts of human body are extended to the inanimate objects:

ngblō (lit. 'head') denotes 'bunch' or 'cluster (a cluster of palm tree grains)', 'head of a mountain';

lê (lit. 'lip') denotes 'antenna (of insects)'; 'edge (of a cutting instrument)'.

Some terms for body parts underwent grammaticalization and function as locative postpositions:

líí (lit. 'mouth') has the following meanings: 2. 'door', 'entrance'; 3. 'in, inside (a part is seen outside)', 'on (only a part of the object is on smth.)', e.g. *zī é líí* 'on the road' (lit. 'mouth of the road');

léé (lit. 'forehead') means also: 2. 'front side of something', 3. 'in front of', 4. 'before (temporal meaning)';

zātā (lit. 'back') means also: 'behind', e. g. *fé é zātā* 'behind the house';

zī (lit. 'buttocks'): 'backside of something', 'in the back';

kóó (lit. 'palm of hand') means: 2. 'with', 'at'; 3. indicates the possessor in a possessive construction (e.g. *fé dō ò ñ kóó* 'I have a house'); 4. marks the role of agent in a passive construction.

Metaphors of this type are not totally unknown in both English and Russian (e. g. Eng. the *back* of the house, Rus. *nos korablia* (lit. 'nose of the ship') 'prow').

As Lakoff and Johnson pointed out, in European languages these expressions use only a few parts of the corresponding metaphor. In Mwan, the opposite is the case; all parts of the metaphor A THING IS THE HUMAN BODY are used. Thus, in the metaphor A HOUSE IS THE HUMAN BODY, there are many parts used: a house in the Mwan language has HAIR (roof), MOUTH (door), BELLY (inside part), FOREHEAD (front part), and BUTTOCKS (backside).

Some designations of humans can also be applied to inanimate objects. The word *nè* (lit. 'child') denotes not only a young animal, but also any object of the size smaller than "normal" and is used in fact as a diminutive suffix.

Physical ("bodily") metaphors expressing mental activity, feelings and emotions are also very frequent in Mwan. *Kpéé* 'belly' is regarded as a container

for thoughts (the place of mental activity). Cf. the following expressions: *jā é níà* *ŋ kpéé* ‘I forgot this story’ (lit. ‘the story left my belly’). Feelings and emotions are located in the *zrū* (lit. ‘liver’): *zrū mā lē* ‘beloved woman’ (lit. ‘liver-at woman’).

The parallelism in the physical construction of humans, animals and inanimate objects is expressed in the usage of certain verbs which can be applied in European languages only to humans or animate objects. Thus, the verb *dē* ‘to kill’ is used in the following expressions:

kāā dē (to kill fish) – to fish

yī dē (to kill the sleep) – to sleep

pī dē (to kill a drum) – to play a drum

sē dē (to kill tooth) – to blacken teeth

These metaphoric expressions are not just set phrases but the only way to express the corresponding meanings.

The data presented show that conceptual metaphoric basis in the languages of West Africa (of which Mwan and other South Mande languages are typical examples) include an extensive anthropomorphous view of reality.

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