

**Verbal Duelling in EkeGusii:
A Cognitive Interpretation of Wrangle Discourse**
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In this paper, we examine wrangle discourse in EkeGusii, a Kenyan Bantu language, from a cognitive perspective. A verbal combatant confronts an opponent in a war of words. This picture is usually contemporaneously reciprocal with spontaneous switching of roles. Our focus is on the use of impolite language in the form of insults from the assaulter's point of view, and we proceed to analyze data elicited through native speaker intuition and introspection. We aim to demonstrate the robustness of related theories within the cognitive enterprise, including conceptual metaphor, metonymy, mental spaces, blending and disintegration, in accounting for linguistic data. Most of the research on EkeGusii is limited to conceptual metaphor, yet it is fairly shy of engaging theoretical apparatus in data analysis. Notably, the language of insults in the sense of combat has received little attention in EkeGusii language, a crucial part of cultural examination that may inform future investigations. We explore the misconceptions associated with disability, explore the analysis of sarcastic and ironic language in the light of blending theory, and show the essence of looking beyond conceptual metaphor. Our findings reveal that wrangle discourse can be described elegantly by engaging an amalgam of conceptual metaphor, metonymy, mental spaces, integration, and disintegration.

Keywords: verbal duelling, conceptual metaphor, metonymy, integration, disintegration

1 Introduction

Verbal duelling lies in the realm of impolite language, which according to Culpeper (2011) is conspicuously subjective and variable. It is here considered as a spontaneous, unaesthetic and confrontational war of words between two people or parties, which serves as a prelude to, or the aftermath of a physical combat or as the combat on its own merit, whether both parties are actively engaged, or one remains passive. This view is opposed to 'flyting' in which, among the Scots, insults were exchanged in rituals, tailored poetically, in form of verse between the 5th and 16th centuries, with a view to entertaining the public (Guarienti 2019). Verbal duelling herein is a kind of verbal contestation characterized by overtones of violence, raised emotions, aggressiveness and absence of structure, boasting, taunting, threats, and a general indecorous nature. Either contestant is a likely loser of social dignity, that is 'face' (see Culpeper 2011), thereby, becoming a potential attraction of communal sanctions and consequences such as a rebuke and other forms of punishment by a council of elders or other senior people. This further damages their face. Goffman (1967: 5, as cited in Culpeper, 2011: 24) defines face as "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact. Face is an image of self-delineated in terms of approval of social attributes." In Culpeper (2011: 39), citing Spence-Oatey's (2008: 13-14) definition of sociality rights, we find this clarification of face: "In other words, face is associated with

personal/relational/social value, and is concerned with people's sense of worth, dignity, honour, reputation, competence and so on ...”

As Culpeper (2011) observes, apart from other emotions like fear and sadness, the situational antecedents of anger include violated expectations, reduced power or influence, illegitimate interference, interruption of activity and so on, so that one party feels it is illegitimate, wrong, unfair, or contrary. Such may lead to heated arguments over trivial or grave issues that evoke anger and trigger serious relationship challenges expressed via language. Such disagreements may continue over a long time and end up creating language scenes of much linguistic interest as they reveal complex cognitive processes. In Culpeper's view (2011), emotion concepts should be understood as schema-like. The parties involved in verbal duelling employ all manner of emotional language, but the specific kind of discourse selected by the two parties displays a form of verbal violence, so that the words and expressions are intended to intimidate, warn, scare off or just vex the other party with a goal, such as attracting a physical fight, or compensate for the lack, or loss of it. Either party desires coming out or being perceived as victorious, whether actively engaged or not. van Dijk (2008: 59-60, as cited in Culpeper, 2011) notes that mental models do not objectively represent discourses they are about, but rather the way language users variably interpret or construct such events, for instance as a function of different personal aims, knowledge or previous experiences, or other aspects of the context. Therefore, the language of insults in verbal duelling is highly subjective, a matter of appraisal, a speaker's interpretation.

Far from celebrating wrangles among the speakers of EkeGusii, research into such language may help shed light on the structure of human thought, especially the metaphoric aspect, and conceptual structure in general. A cognitive perspective of how users ascribe meaning to expressions such “*esese eye*” [esese eje] (dog you) ‘you are a dog,’ or ‘bitch’ unveils the aspects of emotional language, as revealing conceptual structure; that speakers view certain body parts negatively and find them appropriate for insult, that speakers use nonsense terms as insulting expressions, that animal labels are perceived as appropriate for insults, and attract a lot of annoyance on the part of the addressee, and even occasion an actual fight. We learn that disability is viewed as a weakness, that female gender references and certain age terms are used as insults, including misconceptions of biological processes, and plants. In this paper, we reveal the conceptual nature of metaphorical, metonymic, and cognitively integrated wrangle discourse, and demonstrate the applicability of conceptual theories. While the phrase *verbal duelling* has been used here, the technical meaning that may include oral and written communication has deliberately been narrowed down, thereby limiting the meaning of the phrase to combats whose arsenals are oral expressions.

2 Situations, motivation, and functions of verbal duelling

While it is impossible to exhaust the situations in which verbal duels may occur, a few of those that occasion verbal duels should be highlighted. Disagreements may arise in drinking joints, at home between husband and wife, between neighbours as a result of trespasses of domestic animals, over boundary disagreements, or as conflict carry-overs from children to parents. They may occur at places of work such as tilling grounds, tea buying centres, water collection points, *matatu* termini, and in many other situations. More interesting are disagreements fueled by superstition, suspicion, fear, or misleading information from witch doctors and sorcerers. Others are occasioned by doubts, wild imaginations, and other forms of grapevine.

As noted, insulters engage in verbal duels with a view to, among other objectives, showcasing their wit, might, and uniqueness, and pronouncing superiority. They use verbal assaults to threaten and dare opponents with a view to intimidating them, or coercing them into actual physical confrontations. Verbal duels are also used for purposes of revenge and mockery, settling of scores, especially as a cover of cowardice. Most importantly, verbal duels are used as substitutes of actual physical blows, dealt enemies with a view to inflicting psychological pain, which in turn threatens or damages the opponent's face. Wrangles can be traded in face-to-face oral engagements, through go-betweens, or even via modern media like mobile supported voice calls. However, our focus remains on verbal assaults traded orally in the local communal set-up, such as across the fence between neighbours, and in face-to-face encounters.

Apart from the seamy side of wrangles, verbal duelling is an important aspect of a people's language and culture. Disagreements are part of human life. Through duelling, behaviour is corrected. Insulters condemn laziness, gossip, idle talk and blabber-mouthing. Combatants speak against social deviations such as witchery, sorcery, prostitution, sexual exploitation, incest, child labour, satanism, idolatry, cultism, and spell-casting. Though they may have no tangible evidence to support their claims, social misconduct is revealed and condemned in verbal duels. Wrangles reveal perceptions that have hitherto been unsaid, and define social relations. Insulters parade their social manners and help others know how to relate with them. For instance, users of taboo words and other profanities portray themselves as lacking in social wisdom and dignity, which is impolite for decent people. Duelling reveals the extent of social bias, insensitivity and stigma that is culturally and erroneously associated with forms of disability such as stammering, hearing challenges, impotence and so forth. This informs the need for intervention by social workers, educators and other stakeholders to change attitudes towards people living with disabilities.

3 On impoliteness and insults in EkeGusii

Collecting data on arbitration discourse and following Culpeper's (1996) impoliteness theory, Onyancha (2021) handles a pragmatic analysis of impolite forms and strategies in EkeGusii. The concept of attacking face without mitigation is what stands out in this pragmatic study, with a few examples of data being relevant to our cognitive engagement in this discussion. Onyancha reveals that arbitrators in councils of elders use direct abuses such as *nobochinga obwate* 'you are being stupid,' and other profanities such as *nyoko enyuma* 'you look like your mother's ass' (our translation). Other expressions related to human sexuality seem to have scaled off their euphemistic value. For instance ...*genda seino orarinu kabisa* '...go back to your maternal home and have enough sex,' and *genda ebaa noo oraakwe emete esaine* 'go stay in a tavern, that's where men may quench your libido' (our translation), have words like *orarinu* 'be climbed,' and *oakwe emete* 'be given sticks' both of which are metaphorical for 'having sexual intercourse,' which now sound profane. Such language alluding to prostitution is deliberately used during arbitrations to damage the addressee's face as a form of rebuke. Departing from this pragmatic pursuit of impoliteness, we pursue a direction of conceptual metaphor, metonymy and blending, with a rich exploration of data, limited to verbal combat in a contexts that remain unpredictable, with events unfolding spontaneously, in an unstructured fashion, handled deliberately or otherwise.

4 Data elicitation and analysis

Apart from minimally cited cross-reference examples, data herein is basically generated via introspection, an approach described by Talmy (2018) as that in which the linguist looks inside his own mind for his own assessments of how far something may be called salient. According to Talmy, various aspects of language can register at a first level of consciousness, such as the meanings of lexical items. At the second level we access selected parts of the first level, volitionally so. Leaving alone what following Talmy might be called the online mode of accessing language in which an ongoing discourse is analysed, we preferred, in Talmy's language, offline excerptive introspection, where a rehearsal of something resembling full blown forms of language happens in the mind. Talmy defends this approach as being the mainstay of much linguistic analysis, as opposed to contextualist approaches. The meanings of language items can only be accessed via introspection and not via corpus work or other method. Introspection and professional intuition are considered related approaches, ignoring any technical difference between them. Mansurovna, Nishonova & Kyzy (2020) have highlighted a battery of researchers who defend introspection and intuition as being inevitable in linguistic investigation. For instance, most recently, Namrata, Satsangi and Gosh (2024) have successfully applied native speaker intuition to elicit data in Bangla and Hindi. Regarding analysis, all data herein is qualitatively analyzed. Mainly, a description from a cognitive theoretical perspective is pursued in the light of contemporary approaches to metaphor, metonymy, and conceptual blending.

5 Conceptual metaphor, metonymy, and blending

Associated with George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980), conceptual metaphor is concerned with perceived resemblances between a source domain and a target domain. Conceptual structure is mapped onto abstract domains. A is taken as B, where a source, B, is used to describe a target, A. The target domain is understood in terms of the source domain. Linguistic expressions that are metaphorical in nature are reflections of an underlying conceptual association (Grady 2007). In the endeavour to successfully describe and upset a perceived opponent, an insulter uses a source whose features or traits are more salient to describe the opponent whose traits are considered abstract, especially to himself, which abstract nature is shown to have been demystified by the speaker by use of the source domain, which entails an insult. Such a metaphorical link between two domains consists of distinct correspondences or mappings as shown in Figure 1. Conceptual metaphor equally has an experiential basis. In an insult like *esese eye* 'you are a dog,' the dog is considered the more salient source to describe the person whose traits are abstract so that the target understands how the speaker perceives them. If the dog, usually a bitch, is understood by both the speaker and the hearer (target) as being sexually indiscriminate, fond of stale leftovers, being beastly, dirty and so forth, so the insulter successfully paints a picture in the addressee's mind, hence the vexation.

Like conceptual metaphor, metonymy is conceptual in nature. Panther and Thornburg (2007) describe it as a cognitive phenomenon, as opposed to a figure of speech. In metonymy, A stands for B, where A is associated or contiguous to B. Metonymy is referential in nature. As clarified by Evans and Green (2006), in metonymy a salient vehicle activates and highlights a particular target. In the event that a speaker uses part for the whole, such should particularly be called **synecdoche**, a literary term, which is here considered metonymic in nature in the

linguistic sense of meaning (See Ruwet 1975). Lakoff (1987) argues that metonymy and synecdoche are instances of the same phenomenon. Mendoza (2000) refers to synecdoche as source-in-target metonymy. Kovecses and Radden (1999: 21) define metonymy as “a cognitive process in which one conceptual entity, the vehicle, provides mental access to another conceptual entity, the target, within the same cognitive model.” A speaker would possibly use a reference such as *amaiso* ‘eyes’ to refer to someone so that the eyes stand for the person. Therefore, synecdoche has its basis in metonymy since the eyes are associated with, and are part of, the person. But the question is how do eyes become more salient to stand for the whole individual as the target? What features in the eyes are more salient? This will be addressed in §7.1. The interfacing of metaphor and metonymy, metaphonymy, by Goosens (1990), and the metonymical basis of metaphor by Bercelona (2003), and Taylor (2003), both cited in Evans & Green 2006: 318-321), appear clearly attestable in verbal duelling in EkeGusii, as explained in §7.

Conceptual blending or integration by Fauconnier and Turner (1993) is a development from the conceptual metaphor and the mental spaces theories. It complements the conceptual metaphor approach in accounting for what conceptual metaphor may not. The new idea lies in its creation of emergent structure so that apart from a third generic space, a fourth mental space is created from two input spaces projecting new information that is found in neither of the inputs. Such makes it possible to account for negative assessment so that a metaphorical reference such as ‘*The surgeon is a butcher*’ can be explained as a blend of the skills of a butcher and those of a surgeon to have an incompetent surgeon described as exemplified in Evans and Melannie (2006). Conceptual metaphor may not account for this negative assessment in its two-domain function where a source domain is used to explain a target domain. §8 and §9 demonstrate the function of blending in Figures 3, 4 and 5, with insight from Pálincás (2014; 2018).

6 Metaphorical references

Pálincás (2014; 2018) comes up with an alternative approach to the analysis of metaphor, so that the source and target concepts are blended first before mappings are established. The only challenge posed by this approach is a blend that does not materialize into an input space as would be expected, in line with blending theory as explained by Turner (2007). We, therefore, propose to use the traditional approach first, where links are established between the two concepts. In these metaphors, only relevant and salient features will map onto the target. Irrelevant features may not map. Whether metaphorical or metonymic, the diagram in Figure 1 represents mappings from the source to the target (here used for metaphoric mappings), bearing in mind that metonymic references may also be construed as metaphoric, depending on the conceptual structures of the verbal assaulter (see §7). The insult *amabi aya* [amaβi aja] (faecal matter you) ‘shit,’ is here illustrated for metaphorical mappings, where faecal matter is taken as a source to define the target, explained on the basis of metonymy in §7 below.

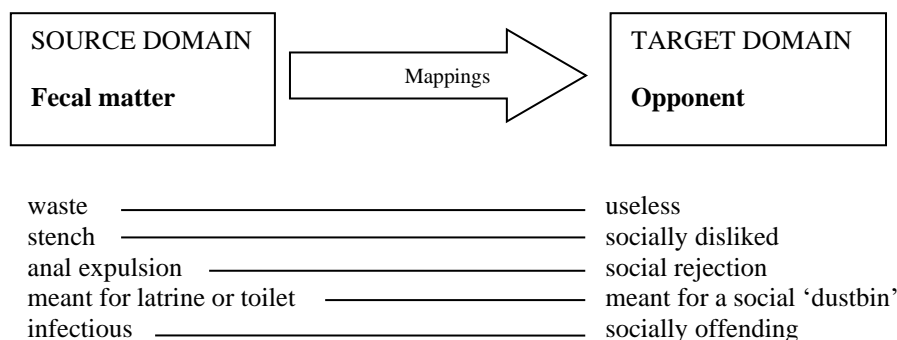


Figure 1 A metaphoric analysis of the insult *amabi aya* (faecal matter you) 'shit'

6.1 Animal metaphors

As noted above, verbal duelling can be equated to a physical combat; verbal offensives are the equivalent of actual blows. The insulter's objective is to inflict pain and psychological harm, and eventually occasioning defeat of the opponent. The insulter appeals to animal references as the source domain that helps interpret the abstract target. The insulter, therefore, appeals to concepts that favour his or her perception of the opponent. The undesirable features of the source domain explain the perceived features of the opponent who, on perceiving the mental picture of how he or she has been perceived, gets deeply hurt. For instance, the bird *ebaraara* 'egret' is known to be noisy, *ensoti* 'vulture' is known to be a consumer of rotten flesh, *esese* 'a dog' is known to be a consumer of unclean leftovers, and bitches are known to be sexually indiscriminate hence uncleanliness. *Embeba* 'a rat' is a destructive rodent, *enkuru* 'tortoise' is a slow and helpless animal, while *enyakuemia* 'owl' symbolizes bad omen such as death. Domestic animals such as *eng'ondi* 'sheep', *eng'ombe* 'cow', and *embori* 'goat' all represent a lack of wit, vulnerability, and dependence. Any preferred insult comes in the form 'you=X,' interpretable as 'you (X)', where X stands for the animal reference. By selecting the animal metaphor, the speaker highlights certain aspects of the addressee while ignoring the less salient, supporting the view that human beings think in metaphorical terms, as explained by Evans and Green (2006). Animal references in EkeGusii have equally been attested by Onchoke and Wen (2017). In the same vein, Goro (2014:67) presents an animal-related Kiswahili insult *nguruwe* 'you pig,' hurled from a conductor to a passenger in Nairobi city. The conductor draws mappings between a pig and a lady who, in the passenger's appraisal, was so plump that she could not allow other passengers to squeeze in on her seat in a *matatu*.¹

6.2 Plant and animal product metaphors

Bitter herbs are used to refer metaphorically to people whose character is perceived as socially unpalatable. As insults, this domain is minimally used, but for gossip, it is a little richer. One example used in verbal combat is *entir'eye* [entir'eje] (bitter herb you) 'you are a bitter herb,' used by a verbal assaulter to explain the abstract character of an opponent, perceived as unfriendly, uncooperative, and deviant, among other contextually-sanctioned traits. Sometimes, an insulter may use the reference *aye nekiogokia bosa* [aje nekiɔɔkia βosa] (you are an overstayed potato mere) 'you are a mere sprouted potato.' The source concept here is a

¹ A term referring to a public service vehicle in Kenya.

sweet potato tuber that has overstayed its harvest, begun sprouting, lost taste, and is, therefore, useless as it is about to rot. This implies that the target addressee is socially unpalatable, useless, and dispensable. In the insult *esike eye* [esike eje] (dung you) ‘you are cow dung’ the insulter draws mappings between the waste form of cow dung and the addressee, implying the uselessness of the addressee. Of course, cow dung is traditionally used to smear mud-walled houses, but it is perceived as waste that can only be used such terminally beyond which it has little value. In contrast, positive mappings are drawn between ripe fruits and women in examples such as *ensobosobo* ‘wild berry,’ *enyanya* ‘tomato’ and *egesukari* ‘sweet potato’ as documented by Onchoke and Wen (2017), especially to refer to girls perceived as ‘sweet and juicy’, to express men’s lusts.

6.3 People related metaphors

Insults based on people metaphors reveal gender, age and birth-related stereotyping. Metaphoric insults like *nyoko* [ɲɔkɔ] ‘your mother,’ imply that the addressee is a copy of his bad mother; the addressee is the mother incarnate. Otherwise, on logical assessment, no one should be hurt for being likened to their mother in such imagery. Beyond this, there is a cultural notion that holds women at a low status (See Onchoke & Wen 2017), which motivates the pain experienced by the addressee, and possibly attracts a countering of the insult by throwing it back to the ‘sender,’ to mean ‘you are your mother too’ (see detail in §9.4). Gender bias overtones are also expressed in *egesagan’eke* [eyesayan’eke] ‘you are an uncircumcised girl,’ and in *omokungu oyo* [omokunɲu ojo] (you woman) ‘you are a woman.’ The former is meant to insult older women who feel pained for being humiliated with overtones of immaturity and lack of wit, and is even worse when used for men of any age, which renders them downgraded for being associated with a ‘weaker sex,’ women. While *omoisi oyo* [omoisi ojo] (boy you) ‘you are an uncircumcised boy,’ is the opposite of *egesagane* ‘uncircumcised girl,’ it is exclusively used for hurling abuses at males. Although the two references have the neutral meaning of ‘baby girl’ and ‘baby boy,’ in verbal duelling, the tone used inflicts pain, stirs anger and effects humiliation, depending on context and tone. When *omoisi oyo* is used for an older man, it inflicts so much pain, and if unbearable, a fight may ensue, or hatches a permanent grudge and permanent between the ‘warring’ parties. The insult *ekerentane eke* [ɛkɛrɛntane eke] (illegitimate child you) ‘you illegitimate child’ attributes total illegitimacy to the addressee hence ascribing a low social status of estrangement and exclusion, whether real or imagined. The addressee feels lowered and greatly humiliated, especially because matters of birth and biological origins are sensitive and difficult to ascertain, hence making one suffer the psychological pain of alienation. The insult further carries connotations of an ‘immoral mother,’ or questionable ‘fathering,’ which deprives one the social confidence afforded by a sense of legitimacy. The negativities associated with these human references are the origins of the links established between the source concept and the target concept, in this case the addressee. Figure 1 (above) could therefore be used to show how mappings are metaphorically drawn.

6.4 Metaphorical insults based on superstition and negative conduct

A verbal combatant may also prefer to draw mappings between the spiritual world, or people whose actions are viewed as suspect, and the opponent, who is an ordinary community member. People of the kind of witches, sorcerers, spell castors, night runners, cult members, muggers,

robbers, prostitutes, and criminals, are conceptualized as odd, deviant, evil, suspect and socially excludable. Drawing mappings from such people to attack the addressee in a quarrel, therefore, pains the target who is associated with such connotations. Common insults include *omorogi oyo* [omoroyi ojo] (witch you) ‘you are a witch,’ *omokengi oyo* [omokenji ojo] (spell caster you) ‘you are a spell caster,’ *omonyamesiira oyo* [omonyamesi:ra ojo] (charm caster you) ‘you are a charm caster,’ *esaitani eye* [esaitani eje] (devil you) ‘you are a devil,’ *enyachieni eria aye* [epatjieni eria aje] (fiend that one you) ‘you are a fiend over there,’ *riray’eri* [riraja eri] (prostitute you) ‘you are a prostitute,’ and *richambasi eri* [ritfambasi eri] (criminal you) ‘you are a criminal.’ Even when the allegations are imaginary for the purpose of insult, the mappings are imposed on the references so that the target is ‘punched’ so hard, resulting in overwhelming emotional torment. Since both the assaulter and the target have shared knowledge and experiences, both know the impact of such metaphorical insults, and the social implications thereof. In other cases, neighbours end up believing such claims and associations. Metaphorical mappings relating to evil forces as source domains are attestable even in Kiswahili, a language of Eastern Africa. This is exemplified by Lumwamu (2019) who cites an example in political rhetoric relating to the international criminal court being referred to as *shetani* ‘evil forces,’ drawing devilish mappings between the court and the satanic world.

6.5 Nonsense metaphors

Pejorative insults, whether diminutive or augmentative, achieve contextually-determined meanings, and may have no accurate translation equivalents in English, but may be perceived as unpleasant things, objects, birds or animals. Mappings are drawn between the negativity of the references and the person targeted, therefore, the abstract domain. Such insults include *egekuguuche eke* [egekuyu:tʃe eke] (bagworm you) ‘you are a bagworm,’ mapped from the ugly bagworm casing, *ekeguy’eke* [ekeyuje eke] (nasty little bird you) ‘you are a nasty little bird’ (referring to a little bird that destroys wheat), *egent’eke* [eyento eke] (something nasty you) ‘you are a nasty little something,’ *egesinkome eke* [eyesinkome eke] (skunk you) ‘you are a skunk’ (to refer to a smelly animal of the skunk family), *rikwerenderi* [rikuerende eri] (big something you) ‘you a big ugly something’ (a nonspecific, pejorative, augmentative of something ugly), *embitiri eye* [embitiri eje] (bad, dull, unchanging person you) ‘you are a dull thing of a person,’ *embosete eye* [embosete eje] (a quiet something you) ‘you a quiet something’ *embiribiri eye* [embiribiri eje] (goat droppings you) ‘you are pellet of goat droppings (used as a count noun),’ *ribundu eri* [riβundu eri] (a huge dweeb you) ‘you big ugly dweeb,’ *ekemongir’eke* [ekemongirɔ eke] (type of brew you) ‘you are some smelly little brew.’ Evidently, mappings are drawn between a human being and things that make little ordinary sense.

6.6 Disability-related metaphors

Modern society advocates disability-sensitive language as all humans are equal, and any of us could face a challenge of disability or mental incapacity at any stage in the course of life. However, in the yesteryears of the Gusii community, like across the rest of Africa, disabilities were viewed as curses and punishments from God (or gods) for certain evils revisited on later generations or descendants of certain families, and were attributed to witchcraft and such other causes. In their study, Ntabo, Nyarigoti and Githigia (2018) highlight metaphorical conceptualization of mental incapacity, insanity and disability in EkeGusii pop songs. The

metaphors include *omonto nobochara* ‘a human being is foolishness,’ *omonto nobobarimo* ‘a human being is insanity,’ and *omonto noborema* ‘a human being is disability.’ These metaphors evidence stigma and marginalization. A richer discussion with models of disability is presented in Senzokuhle (2016). Following this unfortunate state of affairs, insults were coined around human disability, to place target opponents where they belong, courtesy of ignorance and misleading traditional beliefs. In Africa, the language used to refer to people living with disabilities was highly prejudiced, so much so that such people were viewed as ‘consequences’ of evil who deserved attack, even harm, as reiterated by Senzokuhle (2016).

Regardless of the misconceptions, people in verbal combat appeal to these metaphorically motivated references to assault and humiliate the opponent, even when they do not suffer any form of disability, with a view to highlighting a certain trait which, in their view, is better represented by connotations of disability. Verbal combatants are more comfortable using them on people without disability more than on those that actually live with such disabilities. This is out of a belief that whoever teases people with disabilities is bound to court the ‘curse’ and have it revisiting them or their family members. A verbal assaulter who feels that the opponent cannot look at things from his point of view may refer to them as *omotino oria* [omotino oria] ‘you are deaf,’ which means ‘you don’t understand things.’ To cite a known weakness, the speaker may use the extreme *ekerem’eke* [ekereṃa eke] ‘you are crippled.’ To disagree with the opponent, the assaulter may prefer *omotur’oyo* [omotu:ro ojo] ‘you are a confused one’ or *omouk’oyo* [omoukə ojo] ‘you are blind’ to mean the opponent cannot see things from the assaulter’s point of view. For an opponent deemed slow in meeting certain expectations, the insulter may use the diminutive *egesogor’eke* [eyesoyora eke] ‘you are a little limper,’ or use *rimam’eri* [rimama eri] ‘you are a stammerer/dumb,’ to insinuate general weakness or slowness, say in speech. The assaulter may also appeal to insults that attack the opponent’s private life with references like *riteb’eri* [riteβeri] ‘impotent.’ He may also relate the opponent to witchcraft by uttering the reference *rimay’eri* [rimajeri] ‘you are a bewitched dumb one,’ based on no premises at all. Even light-skinned opponents may be insulted by words alluding to albinism such as *omosot’oyo* [ɔmosɔsɔtojo] (albino you) ‘you are albino.’ To counter an opponent, an insulter draws metaphoric mappings between disability and perceived weaknesses on the opponent, to demystify certain perceived traits. In the case of albinism, multiple mappings are evident since the African skin complexion is generally believed to be dark, whereas for the light-skinned opponent, he is associated with an albinoid whose complexion is comparable to the orange colour of the *Coca-Cola* Fanta drink. Further, the light-skinned person or albinoid is perceived as ‘odd,’ hence an abstract target domain only demystified by the noun *omosota* [ɔmosɔ:ta] to mean an ‘orange person.’

While disability is not expected to function as a source domain for negative mappings, unfortunately, it still used in the modern day, of course, among indecent people. Speculating from a psycholinguistic perspective, words of disability seem to be subconsciously linked with culturally motivated negative connotations, so that speakers tap on them as alternatives for insults, mockery, pejoration, and related prejudices or stereotypes (see Grady’s 2007 hint on the neural theory of language). It may be argued that the cultural grouping of people has the ‘normative’ on the one hand, and ‘odd,’ on the other, a most unfortunate scenario. This revelation should be a point of departure towards the sanitizing of communal attitudes and perceptions of people living with disabilities. Surprisingly, verbal assaulters appear oblivious to the fact that they could face disability any time in life. Possibly, such people are emotionally tuned out of the *Gusii* folk wisdom, tailored in sayings such as *toseka ekerema* ‘never poke fun at one living with a disability,’ or *oborema nigoro bore* ‘disability is on your way up.’ As

Senzokuhle (2016) posits, beliefs and myths that are positive regarding disability should be promoted to counter discriminatory beliefs.

7 Metonymic insults

Following Evans and Green's (2006) discussion, conceptual metonymies are motivated by communicative and referential requirements. Citing Johnson and Lakoff (1989), Evans and Green define metonymy as a relationship where one entity stands for another because both coexist within the same domain. As clarified in the light of Kövecses and Radden (1998: 39, cited in Evans and Melannie 2006: 312), it is a cognitive process in which one conceptual entity, the vehicle, provides mental access to another entity, the target, within the same domain, or idealized cognitive model. Ungerer and Schmid (2006) define metonymy as that in which links are established between the source and target concepts based on a contiguity relationship and the mapping scope must sanction the links. A metonymic representation of insults such as *enyum'eye* [epumeje] (anus you here) 'ass' is shown in Figure 2 below. The following sections explore various categories of vehicles through which an insulter accesses the addressee, tailored in form of insults, where again the aim is to vex the target and outshine them in the verbal duel. It should be noted that verbal duelling damages face either way; unless one of the participants takes a low profile to allow the insulter stand out as unwise, uncouth, and uncultured, so that the target wins on social sympathy, and perhaps, secures a chance to pursue a communal suit where the insulter may be arraigned.

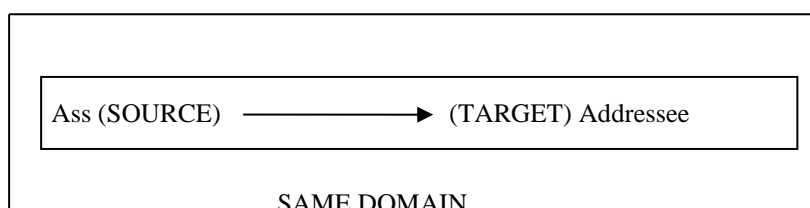


Figure 2 A metonymic representation of the insult *enyum'eye* [epumeje] (anus you here) 'ass'

7.1 Taboo body part insults

The insult *chingeti echi* [tʃinɣeti etʃi] (testicles you) 'you are testicles' is meant to use this body organ to access a male target in the metonymic sense. The testicles are part of the male addressee and represent the person. The target is, therefore, reduced to the body organ. The same works for *ekemincha eke* [ekemincha eke] (prepuce you) 'you are a prepuce', and *embor'eye* [ɛmbɔrɔ eje] (penis you) 'you are a penis.' For female targets, insults include *ember'eye* [ɛmbɛrɛ eje] (vagina you) 'you are a pussy', *engend'eye* [ɛɣende eje] (clitoris you) 'clit,' or *egesono eke* [ɛɣɛsɔneke] 'you are a clit'. Non-selective insults include *enyum'eye* [epumeje] (anus you here) 'ass', *obooya boria aye* [ɔβɔja βoria aje] (pubic hair over there, you) 'you are pubic hair.' It should be noted that these insults can be applied across board with a higher effect, especially when a male target is assaulted with female-organ insults, in which case such becomes metaphorical, that is, equating a male with a female sexual organ, causing an even higher degree of vexation, from a cultural perspective. More importantly, metonymy and metaphor intersect here because the assaulter's mental organization may vary from one to another; one may use a body organ to insult another because it is part of that person, or one may use the insult metaphorically. We prefer the label metonymy in the general sense since body organs are part of a human being. Culpeper (2011: 230) presents a police-suspect

interactional excerpt in which the officer uses a metonymic abuse, “*I’ll stick your stinking ass in jail right now.*” The insulted cab driver pursues a suit against verbal abuses, indicating the extent to which the insults were hurting. This attests to the cross-cultural nature of metonymic abuses.

One more question has to be addressed. Why is it that certain body organs negatively conceptualized? It never happens that a verbal assaulter can insult with organs such as the invisible heart, or lungs, the visible face, or hair. Culturally, private parts and certain orifices are perceived from a taboo perspective, which places a social embargo on their use, or mention in public. These are words that parents do not utter to children, but all the same, they learn them very early as they grow. One extremely vexed if they are metaphorically or metonymically insulted with such words as a degree of negativity is associated with them unlike organs like the heart. This kind of perception seems universal. Several other communities around the world associate these taboo organs with a degree of social offensiveness as indicated in Culpeper (2011).

7.2 Taboo biological products

Certain products of biological processes, fluids and excretions are metonymically used for the target addressee, amounting to very annoying insults. Such products associated with human beings include *obotoka* [ɔβɔtɔka] ‘smegma’ or ‘whitish vaginal dirt’, *risuri* [risuri] ‘fart’, *amasinyoro* [amasijɔ:rɔ] ‘urine’, *amamira* [amamira] ‘mucus’, *chinkene* [tʃinkɛ:nɛ] ‘maggots’ and *amabi* [amaβi] ‘shit.’ All these body products are associated with a degree of profanity or obscenity. Uttering them is grossly impolite. When an assaulter in a verbal duel selects such words, they imply an invasion of the target’s privacy, a lack of respect for the target, and a reduction of the hearer to the reference, a strategy of degrading their worth. The addressee’s image is reduced to being equal to the referent. However, such insults are normally counterproductive. A verbal combatant who uses them automatically bargains on his sense of self-worth, dignity and social rating. Decent people hardly use them no matter how much they might be annoyed. The use of such expressions is likely to attract a public whipping for lacking expected social decency. In agreement with Culpeper (2011), embarrassment is a collective experience. Therefore, such insults are a preserve of private quarrels, for the use of children in the absence of adults, and other socially deviant people like drunkards. In fact, the pursuit of such a discussion for academic purposes can easily and harshly be criticized, by some native speakers, or the simple minded.

7.3 Neutral body parts

Certain body parts are never associated with any social inappropriateness, yet they are used for insults in verbal duelling. Once again, part of a person is used to represent the person metonymically, especially when the insulter appraises the part as unattractive, disproportionate, dysfunctional, abnormally protruding and so forth. Such insults include *amain’aya* [amainaja] ‘you merely teeth,’ *emerond’eye* [emerondeje] ‘you merely legs,’ *amais’aya* [amaisaja] ‘you merely eyes,’ *amat’aya* [amataja] ‘you merely ears,’ and *omotw’oyo* [omotuojo] ‘you are a mere head.’ The basic concept in metonymy relating to more salient features applies in these insults, only that these parts are portrayed as too salient, to the extent of perceived negativity. It is easier for an insulter to use ears for an insult simply because they are a little more noticeable than other body parts. What pains the addressee is the fact that he

is not wholly appreciated, but that a part of him or her is singled out for a negative remark. The part is used as a point of access to the addressee.

8 Conceptually blended insults

Blending theory is associated with Fauconnier and Turner (1980) and other later proponents. Principally, mental spaces are integrated to come up with a blend of emergent structure. Coulson (2005) describes the meaning of a mental space as a partition of working memory that contains a very simple, dynamic cognitive model of some aspect of the discourse event. To comprehend a single event, therefore, speakers will severally set up multiple models of the same object to capture the different characteristics in different contexts. Fauconnier (2007) explains that mental spaces shift attention to and fro, back and forth between previously constructed spaces. Between two or more spaces, links or mappings are established. Fauconnier further explains that through the access principle, an expression which names or describes an element in one mental space can be used to access a counterpart of that event in another space. Blending is an extension of the mental spaces theory in which spaces are integrated, that is, blended, as explained in the next sub-section.

8.1 *Elliptical swear expressions*

In blending theory (see Evans & Green 2006; Turner 2007; Grady 2007) two spaces serve as inputs, creating a generic space, and a blend which accounts for emergent structure not found in the input domains. Consider an example of a swear expression ... *'ndie esese* '... I'll fuck a dog.' Preceding conditional information has been omitted in this expression, but to a native speaker, it can be contextually understood. Examples include *gokombua* *'ndie esese* 'if you defeat me, I'll fuck a dog,' or *ingokwabera* *'ndie esese* 'if I forgive you,' I'll fuck a dog.' In this swear phrase, the first input space shows the speaker in an imaginary position of lovemaking with a human partner, and in the second input space, two dogs in sexual intercourse. These two spaces are integrated so that in the generic space there is a human male, and a bitch engaged in sexual intercourse especially in public, a big wonder since sexual intercourse in humans is exclusive, private, and sacred. The assaulter, usually a man, swears by the most heinous act afforded by the blend. In other words, the speaker swears that he will not lose lest the unimaginable happens, fucking a dog. Backward projection creates a sharp contrast between the lovemaking in humans and the man-bitch sexual episode which makes the whole scenario non-analogous. The same analysis applies to the expression ...*baba bori* '... my mother indeed' in which the swearer imagines the worst scenario being having his own mother for sex! The preceding ellipsis is a euphemism for this expression, understandable only to native speakers. The blend has clear emergent structure where the mother is placed in the unimaginable position of a sex partner.

Blending is also evident in the expression *nkoba bori* (lightning indeed) 'may lightning strike me,' in which the space of a person that grows to old age is blended with that of another whose life is cut short by being struck by lightning. In the generic space, the frame of a curse is painted, and in the blend, a good person suffers the curse of being struck by lightning. From the communal perspective, it is abnormal for one to be struck by lightning. The same is true for the alternative expressions *nyambara* 'the divider,' or *embarorane* 'may it strike me into halves.' Both are still elliptical since they imply ellipted information that alludes to lightning

as a power that strikes and divides into halves, only an imaginary scenario, far removed from reality.

8.2 Threats

Threats in verbal duels may still be explained as conceptual blends, especially favoured by the principle of selective projection (Evans & Green 2006). In this principle, not all structure is projected to the blend. In a first input space, the addressee is figured in a set of challenges like facing an opponent in a fight. In the second space, an object such as a stick is broken, a balloon or a ball is burst, a human being is shot, strangled, or even more strangely, a man is given an anal fuck, and so forth. In the generic space, a human being and an abnormal event are related. In the blended space, the addressee is perceived as a breakable object, a burstable balloon or ball, or he is strangled, maybe shot and exterminated. This scenario helps us envisage how the verbal assaulter in a verbal duel affords the use of threats such as *ngokobuna'nde* 'I will break you,' *ngokong'enta'nde* 'I will strangle you,' *nkogwata'nde* 'I will burst you,' *ngokorasa'nde* 'I will shoot you,' *nkogosenyenta'nde* 'I will crush you,' *nkogoswaga'nde* 'I will pound you,' and *nkogoteta baka* 'I'll fuck you hard.' By threatening, the verbal assaulter 'aids' the addressee to grasp the assaulter's potentially unfamiliar capabilities in a way that is familiar. That is, the insulter creates in the addressee's mind images of the appraisal he has made of the addressee. For instance, the assaulter uses the space of shooting with a gun to paint a scary picture of his potential to 'shoot,' and the addressee being shot. Death by a gun wound is considered familiar but the assaulter's abilities still remain 'abstract,' hence the clarification. It may be argued that the speaker appeals to implied metaphor, by drawing indirect mappings from a machine such as a gun, or a huge lorry to himself, to afford the blend of the addressee being shot, burst or crushed under the weight of a heavy machine.

8.3 Curse phrases

Sweetser (2000, as cited in Evans and Green, 2006), observes that rituals have a performative function, in line with Austin's (1975 [1962]) speech acts theory. It is in the same vein that curses in the Gusii family are perceived as capable of bringing about a desired state of affairs. In the Gusii community, words are actions; words are power, and words are a form of prayer to which unseen forces respond. In words, people invoke powers of blessing or evil in equal measure, and, therefore, any oral curses are believed to have the power to sanction forces of destruction upon one. After a quarrel, one of the warring parties is likely to call upon the clan elders to hold the offending opponent accountable of his or her utterances, and be compelled to apologize and withdraw the curses, lest they be attacked by the family of the opponent should any misfortune befall them. In fact, some families have had their property destroyed and even the one responsible killed when misfortune follows the addressee soon after the insulter's cursing utterances. The following curses may also be explained as blended concepts. The common ones include *chag'okue* 'may you die,' *chag'oumame* 'may you tumble head over heels,' *chag'endwari egoake* 'may illness strike you,' *egatokori'negetakonyora* 'what never consumed you, missed you so unfortunately,' *chag'ori'nyoko* 'fuck your mother,' and *chag'omayane* 'may you be confused.'

To explain the blending in curses like *chag'oumame* 'may you fall head over heels,' the first input space has a human being in their upright and normal posture. The second input space has a container like a pot that has been overturned and, therefore, the contents are spilt. In the

generic space, something is overturned and its contents spilt. In the blend, the addressee is perceived as a container whose contents are spilt because he or she is suddenly overturned on tumbling. In the same vein, in *chag'okue* 'may you die,' the contrast is drawn between a normal person and a body in a coffin, leading to a generic space with a funeral, and a blend in which the addressee is being buried as a punishment. Across all the curses, contrasts are created between normal and abnormal situations as invoked by the curses, hence the emergent structures in the integrations.

8.4 *Pejorative epithets*

Pejorative remarks entail sarcasm. Coulson (2005) notes, that sarcasm is a form of irony which is recognized when the Gricean (1975) maxims of quality and relation are violated. However, Coulson (citing Gibbs, 1986) observes that there are many instances of sarcasm that are not captured by the traditional account of irony. Sometimes, verbal combatants make statements that are actually true, yet they imply insults. For instance, if an insulter's opponent has a big butt, he needs not to apologize for it (no apologies for our natural physique), yet the combatant may make an insult out of it, by saying *amanyonga amaneene* 'your buttocks are too bi..g,' hurting the target addressee. The insulter may say *gwankoreir'amagor'ebitega* 'see how bow-legged you are,' which could be true, and still leave the target hurt. Sometimes, a lady might become expectant while at their maiden home, especially before marriage, but the utterance *irera omonyene end'eyio* 'carry the pregnancy back to the owner' is interpreted as an insult to the addressee. One being in the family way is not a mistake, but an insulter who says *norarinwa* 'you are yet to be fucked' affords a very corrosive remark on the addressee who is portrayed as 'loose,' 'cheap,' 'gullible' and so forth. But why would such plain facts, for which one needs not apologize, succeed as insults in verbal duels? Following Coulson (2005), the combatant's tone, attitude and comparative appraisal of the target addressee (the opponent), strikes incongruence between the opponent's physique, looks, or status, and the expected 'norm,' against which the opponent is appraised, to paint the opponent as odd, unattractive, inappropriate and so on. Therefore, two incongruent spaces are blended; a *derrière* that is too big versus 'a medium and perceptually good looking one,' bowed legs versus unbowed legs, an expectant maiden versus a nonparturient one, and a loose versus a chaste woman. The success of such blending is detailed in Fig. 3 under §9.1 with a schematic representation of emergent structure in the blends.

8.5 *Conceptual disintegration and metaphor in rhetorical questions*

In this section, we explore six questions used by a combatant in a verbal duel, with a view to explaining their cognitive basis in relation to the sub-theories in cognitive linguistics. The mental spaces theory is yet to be examined herein. Fauconnier (2007) defines mental spaces as partial neuronal assemblies constructed as we think and talk for the purpose of local understanding and action. It is the integration of these spaces that will be further explored in §9 (below), but will be applied in explaining the following rhetorical questions usually intertwined with insults.

To achieve sarcasm, an insulter may ask *ninche nakobiaretie egesagane ekio obwate?* 'Is it me who fathered your uncircumcised baby girl?' This question paints a number of mental pictures. The first is that of 'failure' in sleeping with a man (who is not the speaker), and the second is 'failure' in giving birth which is evidence of public shame for the addressee. The

third is giving birth to a ‘baby girl’ who was socially perceived as ‘lesser’ than a baby boy (a form of stereotyping), and the fourth picture is the addressee having that child. These mental pictures are orally reenacted by the combatant to draw the attention of other hearers to a past clandestine, and embarrassing relationship, which should have been terminated, yet embarrassingly ongoing, apparently headed nowhere. For an insult, this attack is aimed at a married woman with a child out of wedlock, or an unmarried woman that has a baby premaritally. Motivated by the assaulter’s mudslinging agenda, scenes are replayed in the sentence with a derogatory tone, revealing some cultural weakness to humiliate the addressee. In Culpeper’s (2011) view, this may be considered face damaging.

Alternatively, the insulter can mock the addressee by asking *ookagete ng’a inche nyoko?* ‘You think I am your mother?’ This second question presumes that the addressee has confused the assaulter for his or her mother. In essence, the verbal combatant is saying ‘I am not your mother,’ to refer to the addressee’s presumed misconception that the insulter will stomach the addressee’s faults, or condone perceived nonsense (according to the speaker). The addressee’s mother is, therefore, painted wrongly by this question, courtesy of the disanalogy drawn between the speaker and the addressee’s mother. The speaker works against any mappings between him or herself and the addressee’s mother, already presumed on behalf of the addressee. The addressee is given room to imagine scenes such as ‘unlike me, your mother is such a pampering fool.’ The speaker presumably packs a blend on behalf of the addressee, and then unpacks the same imaginary blend for the addressee showing dissimilarities between himself or herself and the addressee’s mother, the concept of disintegration, or backward projection (Evans and Green, 2006).

The third possible question is *n’omanyete bori?* ‘Do you really know me?’ Again, the speaker makes a presumption on behalf of the addressee, that the addressee thinks he or she understands the speaker, but he is fatally wrong. By this question, the speaker alludes to some unknown qualities of himself, to which the addressee lacks access. The question works as a threat, to the extent that the addressee is deemed capable of drawing new mappings between the insulter and some hitherto unknown dangerous object, animal, evil powers, and so forth. The insulter implies images such as ‘I am as dangerous as a gun; I am a devil; I am a murderer, I am capable of killing you,’ and so forth. This succeeds only, and only if the addressee affords to perceive such a world of potential danger, or if the speaker assumes that the addressee has grasped a peculiar perception, a new blend, by dissociating the insulter from the person he has always associated him with.

The insulter may choose to ask *nkorerigereri’ore bono?* ‘Do you ever examine yourself?’ This question paints a grim picture of the addressee who is advised to relook at themselves, implying that he or she has a wrong impression of self. The insulter, therefore, destroys the addressee’s self-esteem by use of conceptual disintegration. The same applies to related questions such as *tokorerorera amabera?* ‘why don’t you sympathize with yourself first?’, *aya are bwoo tagosinyeti?* ‘Haven’t you failed to address your household challenges?’ and *otakorerwaria* ‘why not treat yourself first?’ The last statement is exhortatory in nature, implying that the addressee has failed to concentrate on a publicly worrying, and perhaps, embarrassing physical condition, which is subject to stigma, such as suffering a wasting disease like HIV/AIDS, to which the addressee’s attention is being drawn. That means that what the addressee thinks of self is not what people know; he or she is too sick to engage the insulter in a verbal duel. The blend is being disintegrated for the addressee to reveal dissimilarities between reality and the addressee’s presupposed wrong image of self.

9 Blending in counter-duelling expressions

9.1 *Sarcastic allusions*

Sarcastic statements are based on irony, saying the opposite of what is intended, but achieving ridicule with psychological pain occasioned on the part of the target addressee. Conceptual blending accounts for ironic statements in verbal duelling. Fauconnier and Turner (1980) present blending as having the potential to account for emergent structure not found in the input domains. This is why it accounts for counterfactuals. Following Pálincás (2018) and Coulson (2005), irony is considered a mode of thought in which two contradictory spaces are blended, the space of reality and the space of fiction. For instance, a verbal combatant knows that the opponent's mother has moral challenges, and knows that the opponent also knows the social-moral standing of his mother, and both know that this state of affairs is embarrassing. The combatant will go ahead to give a positive appraisal of the opponent's mother, facts well within the knowledge of both; the mother in question does not deserve favourable appraisal, and it is, therefore, meant to say the opposite of what has been said. To counter a corrosive remark uttered by the opponent, the combatant may, therefore, say *aye rende nyoko atakora boraya!* 'Lucky you, your mother does not engage in prostitution!' A counterfactual input space of a morally upright mother is blended with a reality space of a morally questionable mother, leading to a generic space in which the dignity of the mother is evaluated. The emergent structure will have a 'dignified mother' whose moral conduct is embarrassing as a result of engaging in prostitution. This scenario is represented in the blend in Figure 3 below.

The fictitious statement painting the said mother as a one that does not engage in prostitution is understood by the addressee as feigned against the harsh reality of public embarrassment caused by his mother's conduct. Emergent structure, as indicated in the blend, entails meaning that contradicts shared knowledge about dignified mothers or women. The new meaning of a 'dignified' and embarrassing mother is not in either of the input spaces, hence emergent.

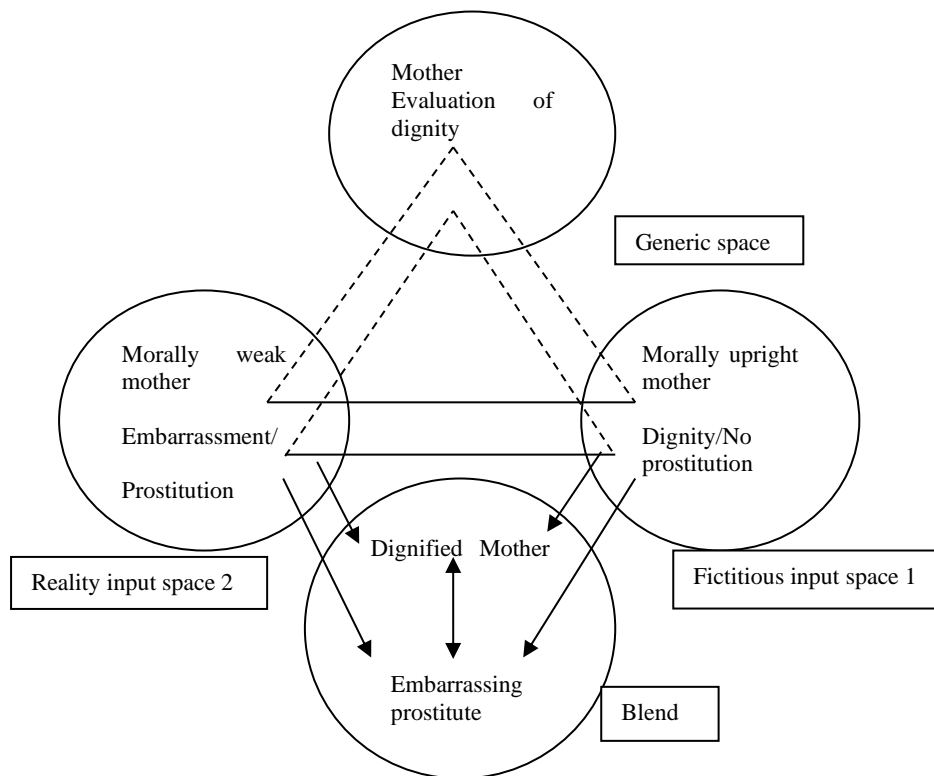


Figure 3. Blended representation of an ironic statement: *aye rende nyoko atakora boraya!* 'Lucky you, your mother does not engage in prostitution!'

It follows, therefore, that other ironic statements are elegantly represented by conceptual blending. Therefore, *abakeresto rende* 'so you are one of the Christians!' blends the images of pretentious churchgoers against that of genuine Christians, causing a clash of the two. The same applies to *gwatochiereire chikanisa* 'you go to church for us to see!', and *abarisia!* 'so you are one of the church elders!', which have similar interpretations of the ironic twist. The statement *naye gwatookire egekone* 'so, you are a new miracle around!' blends the image of someone who thinks they are a real miracle of a human being against ordinary human beings who are only travellers on earth and are up to no miracle, causing the irony of a 'miraculous mortal!'

9.2 Blending in surrender signal phrases

Conceptual blending is so robust that it highly permeates a wide range of data, thereby according it an excellent description, perhaps more than earlier theories would afford. Towards the end of a verbal duel, one of the combatants may signal a desire to pull out, comparable to pre-closing sequences in conversations (see Coulthard, 1985 [1977]). The difference is that these surrender phrases are still forms of insults, and the tone is still combative, though weakened. If this were graphically represented, then the falling action would take a concave shape. Our aim in this section is to argue for the relevance of conceptual integration in each of the phrases, whose foundation can only be traced back to irony as explained above. If a combatant says *koreatia* (keep hitting yourself) 'keep making noise', the literal meaning is the most relevant, which implies that there are two blended spaces; the space of normal people who don't 'hit' themselves (the calm), as opposed to the addressee who keeps 'hitting' himself

by making noise (engaging in the noisy quarrel). The phrase *noremaana* ‘keep finger-fucking yourself’ blends the image of a normal person that does not enjoy solo sex (self-penetration with their own fingers) against the odd one as exaggerated in the description. The sarcastic *okoro, gwantogeirie chigari* ‘you brag about your vehicles’ is intended to contrast presumed pride in motorcar ownership against anticipated humility. A combatant may still say *noraita* ‘you have a long way to go,’ presuming that the opponent is yet to struggle, a picture contrasted against that of calm and blessed people who do not strain to make ends meet. Normally, people do not insert sticks into their orifices. Regardless, an insulter sums up the opponent’s attacks as such, and says *korebet’ebite* ‘fuck yourself with sticks,’ which is a deviant input space contrasted against the normative. Sometimes, this statement is worsened with a specific extension as *norebet’ebite enyuma* ‘keep fucking your anus with sticks,’ which is a kind of hyperbole. All these blends will generate the expected generic and blended spaces, as it were. All these scenarios underscore irony as being a deviation from the norm.

9.3 Blended sympathy appealers

Sometimes, insulters will expect other hearers such as neighbours and friends, to be indirectly ‘invited’ to accord them support with their attention, and make a judgment in favour of the combatant who makes statements that appeal for sympathy, prior to the actual judgment day, just in case the two are to face a ‘communal court’ which may be formally or informally organized later on. The appealing combatant may still use statements that can best be accounted for by integration, since they strike a code of irony; the opponent engages in the opposite of expectation. A question such as *aba nobwo babatisire?* ‘Are these the baptized?’ implies that the opponent has contravened religious norms. Another appealer statement *eigwere bono* ‘hear it yourselves,’ invites other hearers to judge for themselves the character paraded by an insulting opponent, contrary to social norms. As Ungerer (2006) notes, there are lean mappings, that is, a smaller number of correspondences, that occur in examples of personification, which is comparable to apostrophe (an address to deities, the dead, or absent) as in *baba osirete!* ‘My late mother!’ In this interjection the combatant surrenders and resorts to appealing to his or her late mother, thereby ascribing her life.

To illustrate how blending theory should account for such scenarios, Table 1 below shows how the apostrophic interjection *baba osirete!* ‘My late mother!’ captures the opposite of what is expected, thereby simplifying the application of the approach, to demonstrate the ironic basis of such statements without replicating the cumbersome Figure 3 above. Excluding the generic space, emergent structure lies in the fact that the late mother is presumed to hear the speaker’s insults against her own child, leaving her shocked at the speaker’s lack of decorum. The blend reveals that the dead are still ‘alive’ in the world of the addressee, to accord their loved ones the deserved moral support (company) in tough situations.

Table 1 Blending in *baba osirete!* ‘my late mother!’

Input reality space 2	Blend (emergent structure)	Input counterfactual space 1
Speaker A insults addressee B Addressee B should not talk to a dead mother C	Addressee’s mother C is within earshot Addressee’s late mother C is shocked	Addressee B embarrassed in the presence of his late mother C Addressee B draws late mother’s C attention

9.4 Blending in echoed insults

Sometimes, an addressee is compelled (depending on situation, one’s self or social image, stress levels and so on, what Culpeper (2011) calls the situational antecedents of anger) to counter insults by assuming a ‘mirror’ role so that the insulter sees himself or herself in the target. By this, the addressee counters the insulter by redirecting the ‘stray’ insults back to the sender. Whether the insults are metonymic, metaphoric threats, or other forms, the addressee takes up the role of the addressor, thereby turning the insulter to be the hearer (roles are always switched in any form of communication), and lets the insults bounce back in expressions such as *oyi naye* ‘that is you,’ *ndoche mbwemanyete!* ‘How well you know yourself!’, *nigo ogokwana eki’ore* ‘you are only stating what you are.’ Alternatively, he may return the same metaphor as in *naye enkene* ‘you are the very maggot,’ or the threat, as in *ninche ndagwate* ‘It’s me that can burst you.’ But how do we account for such echoed insults? While from the perspective of the initial insulter we have pursued metaphor and metonymy (§6 and §7 above), it remains a different question of construal on the hearer, that is the target addressee who does not immediately generate the same metaphoric or metonymic mappings, but rejects his accorded description as packaged by the opponent, only to repackage the assaulter in the same branding envelope. Our argument here is that while the initial insulter draws links between some source concept and the addressee as the target concept, say metaphoric, metonymic, and so forth, the addressee has no similar pleasure. On the contrary, the addressee reads from a blend, which space he or she counters by cancelling it on themselves and claiming that the insulter is saying the opposite of the truth. In other words, the addressee turns the insulter’s statement ironic, implying that the insulter is using the abuse reflexively. As noted already, the best tool to account for irony is conceptual blending, as opposed to metaphor.

On account of the preceding argument, the only successful way in accounting for echoed insults in verbal duels is by following Pálincás’ (2014) approach of allowing the development of a blend between the source and target concepts, and using this resultant blend as one of the input spaces which blends with a second input space which counters the target’s initial branding. Two sharply contrasted spaces are blended to achieve the ironic twist in the echoed insult. The reuse of the metaphoric blend into the integration system is what may not have been clarified in Pálincás’ work hence the difficulty in applying it at the immediate metaphor level. Figures 4 and 5 below demonstrate the development from mappings to the blending in echoed insults. In Figure 4, the insulter draws mappings between the source and the target as shown, which affords him the insult. The addressee picks the end product, the insult, as a blend from his reality frame which he counters by hurling it back to the insulter. This allows two opposite ideas to blend in the same space, thereby working as does irony, or sarcasm, as shown in Figure 5. It should be noted that our discussion is focused on how blends are formed out of metaphor, or metonymy. Otherwise, blends in threats and other insults will still have the same blends countered in a similar fashion.

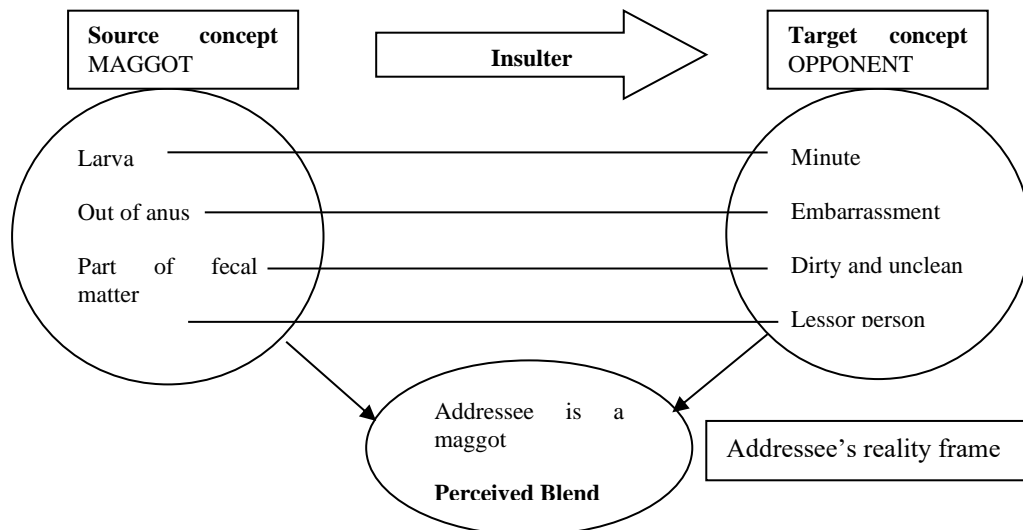


Figure 4 Metaphorical mappings, and blend for *enkene* eye [enkɛ:neje] 'maggot'

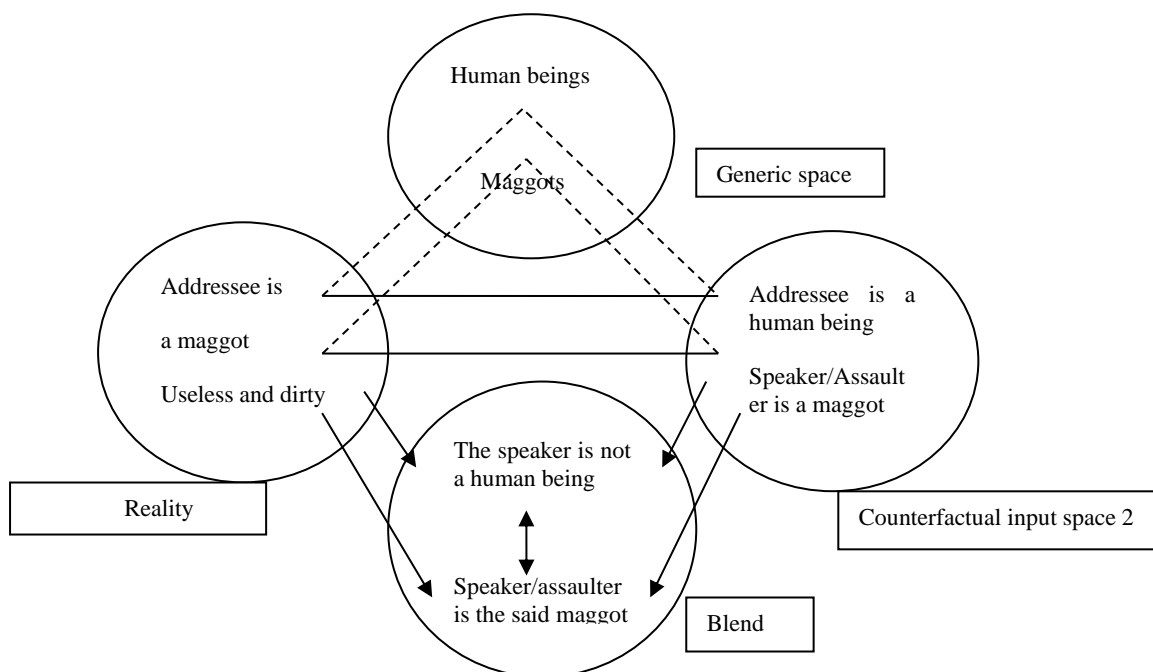


Figure 5 Blended representation of the echoed insult *naye enkene!* [naje enkɛ:nɛ] 'you are the very maggot!'

Though his study is approached not from a cognitive perspective, Goro (2014:69) cites an example of insults thrown back at a conductor from a passenger in Nairobi City. Part of the excerpt presents a conductor using an insult in Kiswahili, *malaya wewe* 'prostitute,' but the female addressee retaliates with the same insult: *...nani malaya? Ni wewe malaya!* '...who's the prostitute? You are the very prostitute!' Evidently, such echoed insults are cross-cultural.

10 Concluding remarks

Verbal quarrels involve other varied forms of language that we have not discussed. For instance, related to echoed insults are dismissive interjections which serve as a form of blocking against a combatant's insults, usually uttered as responses in denial, or trivialization of what an insulter says. Examples include *mmmh!*, *ahaaa!*, and *ghhhh!*, which may be treated as forms of echoes or otherwise, on which we do not take immediate commitment. Pretenses are also used to help the addressee mitigate the insulter's oral blows by purporting to have missed an insult. An example is *inaki?* 'what?' for which the conceptual framework has not been engaged. Daring utterances are part of duelling. We have not aligned them within the cognitive framework, and so deserve investigation. Examples include *suka* 'make a move,' *tema* 'try,' *kuna onye kore omosacha* 'touch if you are a man,' and *iroora anga!* 'I dare you, say it again!' However, it is highly speculated that such daring expressions are implicational of threats and/or provocations which may still be accommodated within blending, as explained under §9.2. The kind of facial expressions, bodily movements and other nonverbal behaviours coupled with oral insults in situations of anger and quarreling are a very promising linguistic venture. In the same vein, the prosodic structure of wrangle discourse in EkeGusii deserves description. Generally speaking, the language used in verbal combats will vary from one context to another, and of course, from one language to another. We have attempted to delve into a form of language that has not been thoroughly examined in EkeGusii, and demonstrated the extent of applicability of the conceptual framework beyond metaphor, and the co-functioning of metaphor and integration. Even conceptual metaphor, to which most scholars seem attracted, is minimally engaged in the description of data, which scenario we have attempted to navigate for the purpose of realigning linguistic investigation with relevant theoretical apparatus as opposed to letting research boil down to a traditional literary analysis of metaphor.

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