

# Metaphor as an object naming tool in the Mfantse dialect of Akan

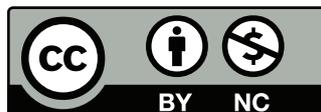
*Sokota so wɔ hwen* ‘A sandal also has a nose’

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## Abstract

This article discusses the use of metaphor in Akan (Mfantse) object names from an onomasiological point of view. Metaphors in naming have received little attention in the Akan literature on naming, but they play an important role in the formation of new object naming units among the Akan (Mfantse) people. They draw on resemblances in salient features such as SHAPE, TACTILE, GUSTATORY, FUNCTION, PROJECTION and ARRANGEMENT. They also draw on how the Mfantse people perceive and conceptualize certain features in their environment. The article concludes that in the naming of referents, metaphor is used to economize naming forms and to achieve effability in situations where literal description fails. It is used as a basic naming tool and is not only a creative venture in Mfantse. The article contributes to the study of names by dealing with the various principles in object naming, whereas most previous studies of names in Akan and related languages have dealt primarily with personal names, which are created using different principles.

**Keywords:** object names, Mfantse dialect of Akan, image metaphor, ineffable features, naming strategies



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**About the author**

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## 1 Introduction\*

In marine biology, image, behavioural and functional resemblances between fishes and entities in the environment of English speakers trigger fish names such as *seahorse* (Hippocampus), *sea wasp* (an alternative scientific name for jellyfish (*Chironex fleckeri*)) and *archerfish* (Ureña and Faber 2010). Similarly, geometric, functional, gustatory and tactile resemblances between entities play an important role in the naming of everyday objects in the Akan (Mfantse<sup>1</sup>) language.

In many African societies, a personal name indicates features of the bearer's behaviour (and sometimes physical appearance) and can point to the name-bearer's past, present, and future accomplishments (see e.g. Sarpong 1974; Madubuike 1974, 1994; Zawawi 1993; Obeng 1998; Agyekum 2006). Research on African naming practices has discussed the typology of personal names at length. However, most of the literature on naming in African societies is based on issues surrounding personal names; it is rather silent on the role metaphor plays in the naming of objects. Outside the African context, the role of metaphor in naming has received somewhat more attention. For example, Benczes (2006) deals with metaphor and metonymy in naming, but restricts her analysis to N-N compounds. Benczes' study classifies metaphorical mapping as a creative endeavour. However, from the onomasiological perspective, Kos (2019) argues that metaphors are more than just a creative venture: they are also a basic or inherent part of naming processes in the languages of the world.

For the most part, studies on Akan naming neglect the role metaphor plays in the naming of objects. Through a semasiological approach, this study is a step towards filling that gap, aiming to offer an onomasiological viewpoint on this role. It aims to show, focusing specifically on the Mfantse people, that among the Akan, metaphor is instrumental in fulfilling basic naming needs, achieving economical expression, and remedying ineffability in instances where a more literal description might fail to achieve the same aim.

As noted by Clark and Clark (1977, 515), “[l]anguage does not exist in a vacuum. It serves, and is moulded by, other systems in the human mind.” In this study, we demonstrate that the environment and the experiential realities of the Mfantse people serve as grounding for the naming of referents in their environment. Agyekum (2003, 54) adds that “[e]very language is capable of expressing certain ideas, perceptual experiences, social relations, scientific and technological facts. Its lexical items are influenced when it is exposed to other cultures.” In this article, we examine how metaphor is employed for naming purposes when newly introduced physical items require new lexical items to cover the concepts being introduced.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: Section 1.1. introduces the Akan dialects and their speakers. A discussion of previous literature and relevant theoretical issues follows in Section 1.2. The methodology of the study is discussed in Section 1.3. In Section 2, we discuss the use of metaphor, and its motivations, in object naming practices among the Mfantse people. A conclusion on the role of metaphor in Akan naming follows in Section 3.

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<sup>1</sup> Abakah (1998) uses the term Mfantse in place of Fante for the reason that the speakers of this dialect refer to themselves as “Mfantsefo” and to the dialect as Mfantse. I agree with his assessment; thus, I use the term Mfantse, although Agyekum (2010) refers to the dialect as Fante in his overview of Akan.

## 1.1 The Akan dialects and their speakers

The people who produce the subject matter for this study are the speakers of the various dialects of Akan. The Akan language belongs to the Kwa group of languages and has several dialects, including Agona, Akuapem, Akwamu, Akyem, Asante, Assin, Bono, Buem, Denkyira, Fante, Kwahu, Twifo, and Wasa. The ethno-linguistic designation “Akan” is used in this article to describe the people who speak one or more of the various dialects of the Akan language as their native language (see Agyekum 2010). This study is based on the Mfantse dialect of Akan.

In the words of Abakah (1998, 95),

*Mfantsefo* or the Mfantse people occupy the southern part of Ghana, bounded on the south by the Gulf of Guinea, on the east by the Ga, on the west by the Ahanta, and on the north by the Wasa, Denkyira, Assin and Akyem. ... the Mfantse linguistic community include Oguaa, Nkusukum, Abora, Ekumfi, Enyan, Gomua, Asebu, Kwamankese, Komenda, Edina, Abrem, Sekondi-Takoradi metropolis and their satellite towns and villages.

The Akans are predominantly farmers, practising both fishing and crop farming.

## 1.2 Theoretical issues and literature

This study discusses the use of metaphor in naming from an onomasiological point of view through a semasiological approach. Firstly, we consider how the Mfantse people employ metaphor to fulfil basic naming needs, to form economical naming units and achieve effability in otherwise ineffable situations (i.e. an onomasiological point of view). This is achieved through the strategy of relying on one-to-one image mappings between lending objects (source domains) and objects being named (target domains) (i.e. the semasiological approach), which helps to avoid literal descriptions that are too lengthy. Simply put, we analyze the principles that underpin the construction of metaphorical naming units for objects, as well as the elements that function as source and target domains in the construction of metaphorical naming units. Through the onomasiological and semasiological approach, we delve into and have a full view of how the Mfantse people perceive, conceptualize, and coin names of objects.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 5) state that “the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” (see also Semino 2008, 1; Agyekum 2013, 3). A metaphor states that X is Y while, in actuality, X is not Y (see Agyekum 2010). The use of metaphors to communicate various thoughts and ideas is sometimes regarded as being the richest level of language creativity (see Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Semino 2008; Agyekum 2013). The present study shows that apart from being an area of rich linguistic creativity, metaphor plays a vital role in the basic process of naming entities. In the naming process, entities (X) are said to be other entities (Y) by virtue of their shape, gustatory and tactile resemblances.

According to Lakoff (1993), a one-to-one conventional mental image mapping triggers a class of metaphor that Lakoff terms “image metaphor”. Put simply, in image metaphors, the image of one entity is mentally mapped onto the image of another entity, as, for example, in the case of Akan *boredze don* (lit. ‘plantain bell’) ‘plantain bud’. The entities that are compared contrast in an actual sense but are visually similar. Image metaphors are “one-shot” metaphors because they “map only one image onto one other image” (Lakoff 1993, 229). In the Akan ex-

ample mentioned here, the image of a plantain flower bud is mapped onto the image of a bell, based on the visual resemblance between the two objects.

Image metaphors differ from what Lakoff terms “conceptual metaphors”, which portray one idea or conceptual domain in terms of another. For example, the conceptual metaphor LOVE IS A JOURNEY triggers metaphorical expressions such as ‘*Our relationship has hit a dead-end street*’ and ‘*We can’t turn back now, we’re at a cross-roads*’ (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). Image metaphors map the image of a concrete entity onto the image of another concrete entity, while conceptual metaphors map an abstract concept onto a concrete concept. The metaphors considered in this article are image metaphors: concrete objects are named based on their sensory similarities to other concrete objects.

In the discussion of the notion of “image metaphor” in this article, we expand Lakoff’s conception of purely visual similarities to include other kinds of resemblances. We follow Ureña and Faber’s (2010) proposal that image metaphors should encompass all metaphors triggered by sensory perceptions, including not only vision but also senses such as olfactory, gustatory and auditory. We also follow Grady (1997, 1999), who suggests that what he classifies as “resemblance metaphors” can be motivated either by physical analogy on the one hand, or by behavioural or functional similarities on the other. The latter type of analogy is grounded in motion and dynamicity, because it is based on a collection of event images. That is, the image of an object (target domain) is perceived in an event as performing a task like another object (source domain). This event image triggers the mapping between the source object and the target object in the naming process. The difference between Lakoff’s and Grady’s approaches lies in the fact that Lakoff takes into consideration only static visual images like shape and colour, whereas Grady also includes other (dynamic) traits such as agility and swiftness.

The onomasiological model, propounded by Štekauer (1998) and expanded by Grzega (2007), will serve as the background for discussing the use of metaphor in the naming of referents among the Mfantse people. Onomasiological studies start with a concept and ask how that concept is named in a particular language. These studies investigate the various components that come together to form a naming unit. Therefore, an onomasiological structure is a unit that expresses how a given people perceive and conceptualize a given referent.

According to Štekauer (1998) and Grzega (2007), the perceptual, onomasiological, and onomatological levels, as well as many others, all influence how an onomasiological structure is realized. We focus on the levels mentioned only because they are most relevant to this study.

At the perceptual level, extra-linguistic referents are analysed in terms of more general, “global” features and more specific, “local” features of concepts (Grzega 2005, 77; Kos 2019, 148). According to Grzega (2007, 6), “referents are ushered into an already existing cognitive category while local features help to distinguish each referent by comparing the overall image of the referent with other images in the mind” (see also Kos 2019, 149).

In Akan, for example, if a speaker encounters an unfamiliar entity which projects from a surface (global feature), the speaker may automatically classify the newly found object into the mental category of NOSE in the mind. For instance, the toe strap on a sandal is called *sokota no hwɛn* (lit. ‘footwear’s nose’). This name is triggered by the projection of the toe strap out of the sole of the sandal. The speaker may use its shape (local feature) to distinguish it from its co-referents in the same cognitive domain. This mapping qualifies as a WHOLE FOR WHOLE mapping. It is worth noting that not all parts of the onomasiological structure may be expressed linguistically and that folk taxonomy has nothing to do with scientific structures (Kos 2019).

At the onomasiological level (an input to onomasiological structure), global features (as in the given example PROJECTION) become an onomasiological base while the local features (as

in the given example SHAPE) become an onomasiological mark. Here, the language user chooses which features to express and which features not to express in the onomasiological structure (Kos 2019). At the onomatological level, the features perceived form part of their linguistic expressions. The features may be expressed directly (if the feature is literally expressible) or indirectly (i.e. metaphorically (or metonymically)). In the example *mpoboa no hwen* (lit. ‘foot-wear’s nose’) ‘toe strap’, the feature PROJECTION is expressed indirectly (i.e. metaphorically).

The naming strategies described above do not cater for “salient features [that] would simply be too long to be expressed literally or would resist literal expression” (Kos 2019, 152). For instance, in Mfantse the toe strap is named *sokota no hwen* to avoid the literal name *sokota ne fa beebi a wɔdze nam hyɛ mu* ‘the part of the sandal where we put our foot to wear it’. Due to this shortcoming of naming strategies in their core mandate of naming natural organisms, Kos (2019) modified Štekauer’s model further by suggesting that onomasiology in word formation should also consider metaphor (and metonymy), since these can be used as tools to achieve “economical expression and effability in instances where literal description might fail to do so” (Kos 2019, 146).

We utilize Kos’ (2019) major modifications to Štekauer’s (1998) onomasiological model to analyse metaphors in Mfantse naming. We consider the names of referents and parts of referents ranging from farm products to components of household tools and machines. Through this approach, we aim to examine the ways in which Mfantse speakers employ metaphor to name objects. We further consider the applicability of Benczes’ (2006) claim that metaphorical naming is a creative venture.

Our goal in this study is to find out how ordinary Akan (Mantse) people understand their environment and how this common understanding can help to explicate linguistic phenomena in context. Therefore, rather than incorporating any official scientific classifications, we observe folk taxonomies regarding the concepts being named, rooted in local understandings of basic features perceived through their visual, gustatory and tactile agents. This is in line with the cognitive linguistic approach, which centres on experiential reality.

### 1.3 Data collection methodology

This paper uses a qualitative research design. This approach is deemed appropriate for this kind of research because it allows for interaction between the interviewer and the interviewees. The study participants were twelve farmers, four each from Gomoa Asebu, Ajumako, and Mfantse Nyankomase in the Central Region of Ghana. Some data came from my native speaker knowledge, verified by the aforementioned informants. Farmers were deliberately recruited because some metaphors for object names are particular to farming. They further contributed to data collection for names of objects that are not related to farming. The communities were selected because of the languages spoken therein and the occupations that dominate their communities. Four farmers were chosen from each of the three communities in order to cross-check the authenticity and uniformity of the data collected, especially the data relating to farming.

The method used for collecting the data was a semi-structured interview. The farmers were interviewed individually. The “free recall task method”, in which informants are asked to recall as many objects as they can, is often used to gather information on lexical items (see Agyekum 2002). This type of interview allowed the researcher to probe and ask the informants more questions for further clarification, and to explain questions to the informants when they needed further details. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis.

## 2 Motivation for the use of metaphor

In this section, we consider the features that trigger metaphors in the naming of various concepts. The features may vary depending on the object in question. As noted above, Kos (2019, 152) suggests that metaphor is employed to name an object with salient features that are “simply too long to be expressed literally or that would resist literal expression altogether”. Metaphor is also employed in situations where multiple features of an object are condensed into a single expression for naming purposes. Furthermore, as Kos (2019, 152) notes, metaphor “enables us to form naming units with greater economy”.

### 2.1 Expressing ineffable features

Onomasiologically, objects are named by virtue of their most salient feature. In this section, we discuss various names that are triggered by salient features that are difficult or impossible to express in words in Akan (Mantse), showing that the Mfantse people employ metaphor to express features which cannot be expressed literally, in order to achieve economy of expression.

#### 2.1.1 Object names triggered by SHAPE

Among the many salient features considered in naming objects is SHAPE. A one-to-one shape mapping between the source units and target units triggers the names of objects. Agyekum (2003) and Levinson and Majid (2014) discuss linguistic codability (a literal expression) and indirect conveyability (a metaphorical expression) in the Akan and English languages, respectively. According to these studies, concepts that cannot be expressed literally (i.e. are not codable) in languages can be conveyed indirectly (i.e. metaphorically).

In the words of (Agyekum 2003, 61),

[g]eometric terms like line, curve, angle, square, oval, triangle, rectangle, hexagon, and rhombuses do not have exact lexical equivalence in Akan. It must not be construed that the Akan do not conceptualize shapes. They have their own ways and means of looking at them.

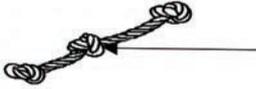
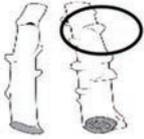
We deduce from the above assertion by Agyekum (2003) that, to a high degree, SHAPE resists linguistic codability in Akan. Therefore, a lay Akan speaker may employ the descriptive terms *kanko/hankra/kurukuruwa* (adjectives for circular/rounded objects) to describe all full circular and oval shapes. Incomplete circles may be described with process verbs like *kontono* ‘bend’, *kuntunu* ‘bend’, or *koa* ‘bend’. The number of sides of a given shape may also be used to name it. Terms like *etwasa* ‘three sides’ or *ahinasa* ‘three have met’ may be used to describe a triangle, and *ahinanan* ‘four have met’ to describe a quadrilateral. The terms mentioned for the various geometric shapes are descriptive terms that may be adjectives or verbs.

On the other hand, through indirect conveyability, a triangle may be referred to as *akra-kom* (lit. ‘soul in the neck’). The source of this term is culturally specific: “*Akrakom* is a triangular golden piece worn around the neck of the chief in such a way that the piece rests firmly

on the chest between the two pectoral muscles. The base faces downwards while the apex faces upwards. It symbolizes that the chief rule the earth and God is the limit of his power” (Agyekum 2003, 63).

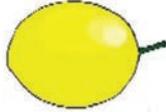
These examples show that to make up for the lack of lexical equivalence for basic geometric terms, the Akan describe shapes or compare shapes to concrete entities they resemble in order to name them. Resemblance is also key to the naming of objects. Some objects are named by virtue of resemblances with their most conspicuous feature, *SHAPE*. The Akan people rely on indirect conveyability to name objects. Table 1 gives names of objects triggered by resemblances in *SHAPE*.

Table 1: Object names triggered by *SHAPE*<sup>2</sup>

SOURCE DOMAIN	TARGET DOMAIN
<p>(1)</p>  <p><i>pɔw</i> ‘knot’</p>	 <p><i>bayermpɔ(w)</i><sup>3</sup> (lit. ‘yam knots’) ‘yam sett’</p>
<p>(2)</p>  <p><i>enyiwa</i> ‘eye’</p>	 <p><i>bankye enyiwa</i> (lit. ‘cassava eye’) ‘cassava bud’</p>

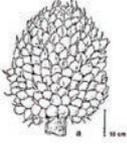
<sup>2</sup> All images in this article are used by permission, from the following sources: Dreamstime.com: (1) *pɔw* ‘knot’. Author’s photo: (1) *bayermpɔ(w)* ‘yam sett’. Quest Media: (2,3) *enyiwa* ‘eye’; (3) *pandze/doroba enyiwa* ‘needle eye’; (12) *kyirefuwa* ‘egg’; (12) *enyiwa kyirefuwa* ‘eyeball’; (14) *kɔtɔ* ‘crab’; (15) *tabon* ‘paddle’, (15) *nantabon* ‘foot’. Sharon Antwi-Baah: (2) *bankye enyiwa* ‘cassava bud’; (5) *ntorɔba ebuwa* ‘garden-eggs flowering bud’; (7) *ntorɔba ebuwa* ‘garden-eggs flowering bud’; (10) *oguan no ntɔhwɛ* ‘sheep’s testicles’; (16) *eburow sekamba* ‘ears of maize (early stage)’. Aziz Plange: (4) *kukuduudu* ‘twig fruit’. [jette55](#) from [Pixabay](#): (4) *eduadzewa kukuduudu* ‘flowering bud’. Vecteezy.com: (5) *ebuwa* ‘smoking pipe’. [OpenClipart-Vectors](#) from [Pixabay](#): (6) *dɔn* ‘bell’; (8) *nsatseaba* ‘finger’. Vector.com / shutterstock.com: (6) *boredze/mpuwa no dɔn* ‘plantain flowering bud’. [Clker-Free-Vector-Images](#) from [Pixabay](#): (7) *kɔntoa* ‘gourd’; (8) *ɔhembaa nsatseaba* ‘cayenne pepper’; (10) *oguan no ntɔhwɛ* ‘egg crop produce’; (11) *nsa* ‘hand’; (35) *ese* ‘teeth’; (36) *kasafir no funuma* ‘radio’s on/off button’. Cleanpng.com: (9) *tsir* ‘head’. [www.nzdl.org](#): (9) *abetsir* ‘palm fruit head’. [Sinisa Maric](#) from [Pixabay](#): (11) *nansa* ‘foot’. Silhouettegarden.com: (13) *ano* ‘mouth’, (13) *bɔdambɔ ano* ‘mouth of bottle’. Silhouettegraphics.net: (14) *nsakɔtɔ* ‘hand’. SilhouetteAC: (16) *sekamba* ‘knife’. [Alejandra Jimenez](#) from [Pixabay](#): (35) *afe ne se* ‘teeth of comb’. [2221709](#) from [Pixabay](#): (36) *funuma* ‘navel’. Shutterstock.com: (37) *hwen* ‘nose’. [Jhonatan Bahtiar](#) from [Pixabay](#): (37) *sokota ne hwen* ‘toe strap’.

<sup>3</sup> Traditionally, the Akan use yam setts for the propagation of yam. In other societies, yam heads are used for propagation.

<p>(3)</p>  <p><i>enyiwa</i> 'eye'</p>	 <p><i>pandze/doroba enyiwa</i>          (lit. 'needle eye')          'eye of a needle'<sup>4</sup></p>
<p>(4)</p>  <p><i>kukuduuduw</i> 'twig fruit'</p>	 <p><i>eduadzewa kukuduuduw</i><sup>5</sup>          (lit. 'crops' twig-fruit')          'flowering bud'</p>
<p>(5)</p>  <p><i>ebuwa</i> 'smoking pipe'</p>	 <p>(lit. 'garden egg's tobacco pipe')          'garden egg's flowering bud'</p>
<p>(6)</p>  <p><i>dɔn</i> 'bell'</p>	 <p><i>boredze/mpuwa no dɔn</i>          (lit. 'plantain/banana's bell')          'plantain flowering bud'</p>

<sup>4</sup> Since the eye serves as the source for naming the 'eye of a needle' in many other languages, including English and French, the metaphor may be considered as a calque. A loan translation is possible across the languages of the world because the eye is one of the most basic and concrete source domains.

<sup>5</sup> *Kukuduuduw* is a fruit of a twig tree that grows on naturally created mounds. It has seeds that are medicinal. Some sub-dialects of Mfantse call it *kakaduba*, others call it *kakaduuduw*. The Twi dialects of Akan call it *kukududu* or *pupu*

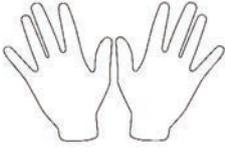
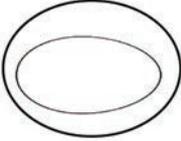
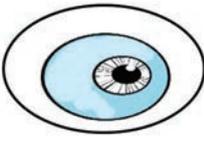
<p>(7)</p>  <p><i>kɔntoa</i><sup>6</sup> ‘gourd’</p>	 <p><i>mankanyi no kɔntoa</i>          (lit. ‘cocoyam’s gourd’)          ‘cocoyam flowering bud’</p>
<p>(8)</p>  <p><i>nsatseba</i> ‘finger’</p>	 <p><i>ɔhembaa nsatseba</i>          (lit. ‘pepper finger’) ‘cayenne pepper’</p>
<p>(9)</p>  <p><i>tsir</i> ‘head’</p>	 <p><i>abetsir</i> (lit. ‘palm head’)          ‘palm fruit head’<sup>7</sup></p>
<p>(10)</p>  <p><i>oguan no ntɔhwɛ</i> ‘sheep’s testicles’</p>	 <p><i>oguan no ntɔhwɛ</i><sup>8</sup>          (lit. ‘sheep’s testicles’)          ‘eggplant’</p>

<sup>6</sup> The source object can be harvested when young to be consumed as a vegetable or harvested when mature to be dried and used as a musical instrument (*adankum*) or a utensil.

<sup>7</sup> *Abetsir* ‘palm fruit head’ may also be considered as a calque because it is found in languages like English. A loan translation is possible because the head is also one of the most basic and concrete source domains among humans.

<sup>8</sup> The other name for this vegetable is *taatoo*; it is normally used to prepare stew or as a substitute for fish in traditional dishes.

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<p>(11)</p>  <p><i>n̄sa</i> ‘hand’</p>	 <p><i>nansa</i> (lit. ‘leg hand’) ‘foot’</p>
<p>(12)</p>  <p><i>kyirefuwa</i> ‘egg’</p>	 <p><i>enyiwa kyirefuwa</i> (lit. ‘eye egg’) ‘eyeball’</p>
<p>(13)</p>  <p><i>ano</i> ‘mouth’</p>	 <p><i>bɔdambɔ n’ano</i> (lit. ‘bottle mouth’) ‘mouth of bottle’</p>
<p>(14)</p>  <p><i>kɔtɔ</i> ‘crab’</p>	 <p><i>nsakɔtɔ</i> (lit. ‘hand crab’) ‘hand’</p>
<p>(15)</p>  <p><i>tabon</i> ‘paddle’</p>	 <p><i>nantabon</i> (lit. ‘leg canoe paddle’) ‘foot’</p>

<p>(16)</p>  <p><i>sekamba</i> ‘knife’</p>	 <p><i>eburow sekamba</i> (lit. ‘maize knife’) ‘ear of maize (early state)’</p>
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We observe metaphorical mappings in the names of objects expressing SHAPE in Table 1. From the decoders’ perspective, we observe a one-to-one conventional shape mapping in (1–16). Based on this mapping, the target objects are the *name borrowers*, while the entities the target objects are named after are the *name lenders*. Examples (1–14) are instances of a WHOLE-TO-WHOLE mapping, while examples (15) and (16) give instances of PART-TO-PART and WHOLE-TO-PART mapping, respectively.

It is interesting to discover that in neighbouring Kwa Ghanaian languages like Dangme and Ga, there is no specific terminology for SHAPE. Thus, SHAPE resemblances between two underlying entities trigger naming units of objects in these languages as well. For instance, Dangme people also refer to cassava germination buds as *agbeli tso hengme* (lit. ‘cassava stick eye’, and the eye of a needle as *abui hengme* (lit. ‘needle eye’). The Mfantse name for the egg-plant pictured in (10) is reminiscent of the Ga name for buff loaf, a breakfast delicacy in Ghana, *too gbei* (lit. ‘goat’s testicles’). This name is clearly triggered by a SHAPE resemblance between the buff loaf and the testicles of a goat.

As noted above, shapes are not linguistically codable in Akan. Thus, the naming of objects such as those in (1–16), based on direct reference to their shapes, would require a long description. Describing the SHAPE of an object literally in order to name it is possible, but the description might go beyond the typical length of an object name. For instance, *nsatseaba* ‘cayenne pepper’ might be referred to as something along the lines of *muoko heahea tsentsen no a n’ano sorɔnsorɔm no* ‘a narrow, long shaped pointy ended pepper’; instead, the Mfantse people employ metaphor to call it *nsatseaba*<sup>9</sup> ‘finger’, which allows for a far more economical expression. Similarly, rather than calling *nantabon* ‘foot’ something like *nan ne fa beebi a ɔye tratra tsentsen no* ‘the part of the leg that is flat and elongated’, a metaphor based on its resemblance to the blade of a paddle is employed to name the foot, allowing economy in the expression used as a naming unit. There are instances where the blade of a paddle, among the Mfantse people, is cast in the shape of a foot. This use of metaphor serves a basic naming need, and is not necessarily a creative venture, contrary to the claims of Benczes (2006).

### 2.1.2 Object names triggered by sense of GUSTATORY and TACTILE features

According to Levinson and Majid (2014), OLFATORY and GUSTATORY features resist lexical codability in the English language. Simply put, there are no words to identify the precise OLFATORY and GUSTATORY properties in the English language. Therefore, expressions of specific OLFATORY and GUSTATORY features in English must be metaphorical. GUSTATORY and TACTILE features simi-

<sup>9</sup> Some sub-dialects of Mfantse call it *ɔhembraa nsatseaba* ‘the queen’s finger’.

larly resist lexical codability in Akan: simple, dedicated lexical items to express specific qualities of taste and feel are rare, and possibly even non-existent. Instead, the Akan people rely on metaphor to express concepts which are identified by precise TACTILE – including internal sensations – and GUSTATORY salient features. For instance, specific pains in the stomach of an Akan speaker are mapped onto a wave, a stair, or an itch, in order to describe their sensations. Table 2 consists of names of objects that are triggered by specific TACTILE and GUSTATORY qualities.

**Table 2: Produce names triggered by GUSTATORY and TACTILE features**

Metaphorical Names	
(17)	<i>payanku</i> (lit. ‘pear pomade’) ‘pear (species)’
(18)	<i>ekutusawee</i> (lit. ‘orange chewing sponge’) ‘orange (species)’
(19)	<i>payansu</i> (lit. ‘pear water’) ‘pear (species)’

In examples (17–18), we see names which are motivated by specific TACTILE and GUSTATORY features. Gustatory features of the pear and orange varieties in question trigger the names given to the pear species *payanku* ‘pear pomade’ and orange species *ekutusawee* ‘orange chewing sponge’. The mushiness on the tongue of the pear species *payanku* maps onto the mushiness of the pomade *nku*, while the dryness on the tongue of the orange, *ekutusawee*, maps onto the dryness of a chewing sponge<sup>10</sup> on the tongue. These resemblance metaphors are employed to communicate the gustatory features of the pear and the orange respectively. Those precise gustatory features do not have lexical items to express them.

In example (19), the GUSTATORY feature motivates the name *payansu* ‘water pear’. The gustatory features of this variety of pear trigger this metaphor. The tastelessness of the pear maps onto the tastelessness of water. This gustatory feature (lack of taste) would require a long descriptive name, to communicate it in Akan.

Thus, the general referents *paya* ‘pear’ and *ekutu* ‘orange’ are made more specific by evoking the sensations caused by pomade, chewing sponges, and water. Here, metaphor helps not only in economizing naming units (as in the case of expressing tastelessness); it is also applied because it is the only way to express the salient feature (as in the cases of mushiness and dryness on the tongue). Again, these metaphorical mappings are a naming strategy, not a mere creative venture.

## 2.2 Achieving a simpler expression for a salient feature

In this section, we consider names of objects triggered by other salient features that would require a multiword literal description.

<sup>10</sup> *Sawee* ‘chewing sponge’ is a fibrous dental hygiene tool that originates from Ghana. It is made from the twigs of the *Salvadora* tree. Because of its dried state, using it to brush one’s teeth requires a small amount of water, mixed with saliva. It is chewed in order to clean the teeth for some time before water is used to rinse the mouth.

### 2.2.1 Object names triggered by POSITIONAL features

To find a linguistic expression for the salient feature POSITION to name part of a target domain, the Akan language often references another object with similar positional characteristics (source domain) in relation to other parts of the object in question. Thus, the target object takes the name of the source object by virtue of a simple POSITIONAL mapping. This approach to naming leads to metaphorical expressions. Table 3 consists of names of parts of entities triggered by the salient feature POSITION.

**Table 3: Referent names triggered by positional features**

Metaphorical Names	
(20)	<i>kwan n'asowa</i> (lit. 'path's ears') 'edge of a path'
(21)	<i>abatsir</i> <sup>11</sup> (lit. 'arm head') 'shoulder'
(22)	<i>nantsir</i> (lit. 'leg head') 'heel'
(23)	<i>kaar n'enyim</i> (lit. 'car's face') 'hood of a car'
(24)	<i>kaar no tu</i> (lit. 'car's buttocks') 'trunk/boot'
(25)	<i>kaar ne mfe mu</i> (lit. 'car's trunk') 'side of a car'
(26)	<i>nantu</i> (lit. 'leg gun') 'calf'

Examples (20–26) in Table 3 represent instances where the POSITION of an object triggers the name of that object. We observe in examples (20–25) that the images of the edge of a path, a shoulder, a heel, a hood of a car, a boot of a car, and the side of a car are mapped onto the images of parts of the body. These include ears, the head, the buttocks, the face, the buttocks, and the trunk, respectively. In example (26), a gun serves as a source domain for the naming of the calf. These mappings are done by virtue of positional similarities in relation to other parts of the entity in question. The target objects in (20–26) are the name receivers, while the source referents whose positions trigger the names given to the target referents are the name lenders.

The edge of a path is named *kwan n'asowa* (lit. 'path's ears') because it is positioned on the sides of the path, as the ears are positioned on the sides of the head. The shoulder and heel are named *abatsir* (lit. 'arm head') and *nantsir* (lit. 'leg head'), respectively. This is because the shoulder is the topmost part of the arm, and the heel comes vertically right above the *nankɔn* 'ankle', just as the head comes vertically right above the neck. The elbow and calf are named *abatwer* (lit. 'arm knee') and *anantu* (lit. 'leg gun'), respectively. This is because the elbow is positioned on the arm like the knee is on the leg, while the calf is positioned on the leg like the forestock or cylinder of a gun (see also Agyekum 2018, 309).

The hood of the car is the part of the car that first meets the eye, just like the face of a human being; thus, the hood of a car is called *kaar enyim* (lit. 'car's face'). The boot and the side of a car are positioned like the buttocks and trunk of a human being; thus, they are named *kaar no tu* 'car's boot' (lit. 'car's buttocks') and *kaar ne mfe mu* 'car's side' (lit. 'car's trunk'), respectively. We observe that the term for an automobile itself, *kaar*, is a borrowing from English.

<sup>11</sup> The name for shoulder is a noun-noun compound (*abasa* 'arm' plus *isir* 'head') but the first noun (*abasa*) is clipped, hence the form *abatsir*.

When naming parts of this new technology, however, terms were not borrowed from English but were rather derived metaphorically based on positional similarities to human body parts.

### 2.2.2 Referent names triggered by FUNCTION

In general, it is plausible that we could describe the FUNCTION of some referent literally in order to name it. However, as with the description of shapes discussed above, such a description would often go beyond the suitable length of a name. To remedy this, metaphor is often employed to allow for more economical expression. Table 4 gives examples of object names triggered by the salient feature FUNCTION.

**Table 4: Object names triggered by functional features**

Metaphorical Names	
(27)	<i>nsayamu</i> (lit. ‘hand stomach’) ‘palm of hand’
(28)	<i>yafunkotoku</i> (lit. ‘stomach sack’) ‘stomach’
(29)	<i>awotoa</i> (lit. ‘birth bottle’) ‘womb’
(30)	<i>nsakɔn/abakɔn</i> (lit. ‘hand/arm neck’) ‘wrist’
(31)	<i>nankɔn</i> (lit. ‘leg neck’) ‘ankle’
(32)	<i>egua ne nan</i> (lit. ‘chair legs’) ‘hind/rare legs’
(33)	<i>efir ne se</i> (lit. ‘machine’s teeth’) ‘fluted disc’
(34)	<i>batwɛ(r)</i> <sup>12</sup> (lit. ‘arm knee’) ‘elbow’

The event image of the stomach, sack, or bottle functioning as a container is envisioned to name the palm of the hand, the stomach, and the womb, respectively, in (27–29). The event image of a neck linking the head to the body is employed to name the wrist and ankle, respectively, in (30–31). One function of a leg is to help the body stand upright; the legs of a chair do the same thing for the chair (32). The teeth grind food, and the fluted disc grinds cereal, vegetables, and the like in a milling machine (33). The event image of a knee serving as a bending point of the leg is used to name the elbow, which is also a bending point of the arm (34). In each of these cases, using metaphorical mappings obviates the need to use multiword literal descriptions in naming strategies based on salient functional features.

### 2.2.3 Object names triggered by PROJECTION and ARRANGEMENT

To find linguistic expressions for the salient features PROJECTION and ARRANGEMENT to name an object (target domain), the Akan search for another object with similar projection and arrangement characteristics (source domain). Thus, the target object takes the name of the source object

<sup>12</sup> The Akan name of an elbow is the compound *abatwɛr*, which consists of the noun *abasa* ‘arm’ plus the noun *ntwɛr* ‘knee’. The final syllable of the first noun *abasa* is clipped while the initial syllable of the form *ntwɛr* is clipped to form the word *abatwɛ(r)*.

by virtue of a simple PROJECTION and ARRANGEMENT mapping. This approach to naming leads to a metaphorical expression. Table 5 consists of names of parts of entities triggered by the salient features PROJECTION and ARRANGEMENT.

**Table 5: Object names triggered by PROJECTION and ARRANGEMENT features**

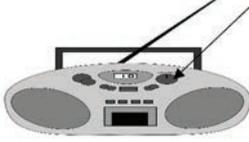
SOURCE DOMAIN	TARGET DOMAIN
(35)  ese 'teeth'	 afe ne se (lit. 'comb's teeth') 'teeth of a comb' <sup>13</sup>
(36)  funuma 'a navel'	 kasafir no funuma (lit. 'radio's navel') 'on/off button'
(37)  hwen 'a nose'	 sokota no hwen (lit. 'sandal's nose') 'toe strap'

Table 5 consists of Akan referent names triggered by PROJECTION and ARRANGEMENT features. The teeth of a comb project and are arranged like the teeth of an animate being, hence the name *afe ne se* 'comb's teeth' (35). The on/off buttons of a radio and the toe strap of a sandal may be known as *kasafir no funuma* 'radio's navel' and *sokota no hwen* 'sandal's nose' respectively (36–37). This is so because the on/off button projects from the radio and the toe strap from the sandal much as the navel and nose project from the abdomen and the face. In this context, metaphors of PROJECTION and ARRANGEMENT are employed in naming, to avoid using longer descriptions of how the object in question projects or is arranged.

<sup>13</sup> There is a case of calque in *afe ne se* 'teeth of a comb' where the metaphor is the same as in English. Nevertheless, it is apparent that the metaphor is triggered by the same salient features, projection and arrangement.

### 2.2.4 Object names triggered by UNIQUENESS

There are objects that exhibit features that make them unique and unlike other objects of their kind. These unique features of farm products motivate metaphors in Akan. To find a linguistic expression for a salient feature UNIQUENESS to name an object (target domain), the Akan search for another object with similar UNIQUE characteristics (source domain). They metaphorically map the target object to the source object by virtue of their UNIQUE features. Table 6 consists of names of farm products that are triggered by the salient feature UNIQUENESS.

**Table 6: Object names triggered by unique features**

Metaphorical Names	
(38)	<i>boredzehen</i> (lit. ‘plantain chief’) ‘plantain (species)’
(39)	<i>besehen</i> (lit. ‘cola nut chief’) ‘cola nut (species)’
(40)	<i>mbirehen</i> (lit. ‘mushroom chief’) ‘mushroom (species)’

Examples (38–40) are metaphors in which the unique qualities of underlying entities are at play. A one-to-one image mapping between target and source objects is realized. By virtue of unique feature mapping, specific metaphors like KINDS OF PLANTAINS, COLA NUTS, AND MUSHROOMS ARE CHIEFS are created.

The types of plantain, cola nut, and mushroom in question are unique among their kinds. The kind of plantain in (38) is known for its white colour, in contrast to the traditional yellowish colour of most plantains. The cola nut species in (39) also has a whitish colour, contrasting with the coloured cola nuts that are more commonly seen. Lastly, the mushroom named in (40) is bigger in size than all other mushrooms known to the Akan. It is also traditionally touted as the most delicious of all mushrooms. These products are rare commodities and their market prices are therefore always high.

Similarly, among the Akan, chiefs are rare and believed to be sacred. They are expected to have unique innate and visible characteristics. Such features set them apart from other members of the society. Through these metaphorical names, the Akan communicate that these species of plantain, cola nut, and mushroom are as unique among their kind as are chiefs among the people of the society.

### 2.2.4 Summary of metaphorical naming based on salient features

We observe from Sections (2.2.1–2.2.4) that metaphor enables the Mfantse people to name some objects based on various salient features. Described literally, these features would require a multi-word description which would go beyond the typical length of a name. The salient features include POSITION, FUNCTION, PROJECTION, ARRANGEMENT, and UNIQUENESS. For instance, to avoid referring to *kwan n’asowa* ‘edge of a path’ (lit. ‘path’s ear’) as *kwan ne nkyenkyen beebi a ɔwɔ mbre asowa wɔ no* ‘the part of a path that has the position of the ear on a head’, the Akan employ metaphor to map the edges of a path to the ears. Metaphor allows Akan speakers to be economical in expressing the names of the objects mentioned in Tables 3–6. This is an effective naming strategy, and not a mere creative venture.

## 2.3 Condensing multiple local features

At the perceptual level, some objects may also have names triggered by more than one local feature. In this naming strategy, the Mfantse people conceptualize an event image involving the images of underlying objects being named.

### 2.3.1 Object names triggered by multiple local features

Certain farm products are named using a one-onto-one conventional image mapping between the farm product and another entity. The underlying entities in such metaphors are similar to each other in more than one local feature. Table 7 gives the names of some farm products that are triggered by multiple salient features.

**Table 7: Farm product names triggered by multiple features**

Metaphorical Names	
(41)	<i>kookoo nkunuma</i> <sup>14</sup> (lit. ‘cocoa okra’) ‘cocoa fruit’
(42)	<i>boredzewase</i> (lit. ‘plantain sucker’) ‘yam (species)’

Examples (41–42) in Table 7 represent instances where the multiple local features of an object trigger the name of a said object. As an example, we consider the two Akan names for the *kookoo nkunuma* ‘immature cocoa fruit’, which is similar to an okra by virtue of COLOUR, SHAPE, SIZE, and TASTE in (41). Here, AN IMMATURE COCOA FRUIT IS AN OKRA. We may also consider *boredzewase* ‘kind of yam’, which is similar to the plantain sucker in terms of ENVIRONMENT OF GROWTH, ENDURANCE WITHIN VARIOUS ENVIRONMENTS, and PRODUCE ABUNDANCE in (42). Here too, YAM (SPECIES) IS A PLANTAIN SUCKER. In both examples, all the salient features considered are condensed into the metaphorical expressions *kookoo nkunuma* ‘cocoa fruit’ (lit. ‘cocoa okra’) and *boredzewase* ‘kind of yam’ (lit. ‘plantain sucker’). In both metaphors, we express more local features from the perceptual level with fewer linguistic items.

## 3. Conclusion

From a semasiological perspective, the images of objects are mapped onto basic objects in the environment by virtue of a one-to-one conventional image mapping. The triggers of such metaphors include SHAPE, TASTE, FEEL, POSITION, FUNCTION, UNIQUENESS, and multiple local features. From an onomasiological point of view, we agree with Kos (2019) in suggesting that metaphor in name coinage is not only a creative venture, as suggested by Benczes (2006), but also a basic naming strategy employed by name coiners in some languages. This strategy is a result of the unavailability of lexical units to express specific salient features perceptually. It may also result from avoiding long literal descriptions which go beyond the length of a name, achieving simpler forms for salient features that trigger names. The salient feature(s) which trigger the

<sup>14</sup> Immature cocoa fruits are used as okra when okra is scarce among the Akan people. According to them, they taste and feel just like okra in meals.

names of objects are found in a different conceptual domain perceptually, and can therefore be considered as metaphorical expressions.

Metaphor also serves as a tool to express features that resist linguistic codability altogether in Akan, such as *SHAPE* and *FEEL*. It further serves as an economical tool to compress multiple features, analyzed at the perceptual level, into one concept. Here, a multiple event image mapping is noted and combined into one word. We conclude that, in economizing expressions to name objects, complex onomasiological structures are simplified with metaphor. To achieve simplicity, onomasiological structures are either ignored or the constituents of the onomasiological structures are compressed into simple formal expressions.

We realize that syntactic structures (i.e. phrase, sentences, and clauses) are also compressed into single or dual metaphorical structures to name objects; these syntactic structures are an important topic for future research. Metaphor is a vital tool in the naming of objects in the various Ghanaian languages and in all the languages of the world, and further research on the nature of the role of metaphor in object naming will surely be enlightening. It will lead to a better understanding and appreciation of how various people in different parts of the world interpret and represent their environments through their language.

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