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The Body as a Toolbox in Kasem: Forms and Functions

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Abstract

Research on the conceptualization and categorization of body parts have received quite significant attention in Cognitive Linguistics and other Linguistics related fields. The use of body part terms in linguistic endeavours tend to yield insights into the worldview of a people and language structures and dynamics in general. Body parts are the nearest source domains in our immediate environment and therefore, easily to leap for attention. Notwithstanding the scholarly attention drawn to body parts as sources of conceptualizations, linguistic investigations on the employment of body parts as tools are relatively scant. This research therefore seeks to contribute to the ongoing discussions on the use of body parts in the diverse linguistic situations by examining the verbal and non-verbal cues that manifest as tools in the Kasem. The forms and functions in which body parts are employed as tools are also given detailed elaboration. As such, the research adopts a qualitative research model and undertakes a descriptive analysis of the data presented.

1. Introduction

<1> The mind as being embodied has received quite significant attention in scholarly cycles and in cognitive linguistics in particular (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 1999; Lakoff 1987; Johnson, 1987; Langacker 1987). The conceptualization of body parts as realized in conceptual metaphors, metonymies, semantic extensions and grammaticalization amongst other body parts investigations in linguistics and beyond have been examined from diverse global perspectives. Some notable research in this regard includes amongst others: Dimmendaal (1995); Ameka (1996); Heine (1997); Enfield & Wierzbicka (2002); Dingemanse (2009); Kraska-Szlenk (2014); Brenzinger & Kraska-Szlenk (2014); Kövecses (2014, 2005, 2000); Pasch 2014). Enfield, Majid, & van Staden (2006:138) observe that:

Our more specific questions concerning categorisation and linguistic/conceptual segmentation of the body include the following: How do languages conventionally segment the body into parts? Does the set of body part terms constitute a structured system in all languages? Is there a universal, cross-linguistically consistent way of categorising the body? The answers are of some consequence.

<2> The conceptualizations on the basis of body part terms are more general to languages. However, the nature or kinds of body parts conceptualizations tend to vary from one language to the other. In Kasem for example, the chest is mostly considered as the seat of emotions other than the heart, as it is the case with many languages. The similarities and differences that exist between languages in this regard are quite revealing. Nevertheless, the novelty lies in instances that are peculiar to some particular languages. Langacker's (2002:138) observation on language is worth quoting at length.

Among the fascinations of natural language is its amenability to being characterized by two apparently

contradictory statements: (i) that all languages are basically alike; and (ii) that languages may be fundamentally different from one another and can vary without essential limit. Linguistic theorists face the challenge of accommodating the observations and insights that support these opposing positions. Ideally, an overall account of language structure should specify both the nature of its universality and the extent of its diversity, as well as the source of each.

<3> Perhaps the conceptualizations of body parts as tools are scant but nevertheless, they have received scholarly attention by diverse scholars. The characteristics as well as the constituents of body parts are diverse just as the functions of the body are diverse. Kasem reveals some unique expressions that employ the body as a toolbox. This essay therefore seeks to explore both verbal and non-verbal cues that manifest as tools in Kasem. As a general observation, though body parts may be found within and outside the body as a whole, the body parts that manifest as tools are generally the parts of the body found outside rather than those found within; the reason for this are quite obvious.

Kasem is a language spoken by the Kasena from the northern and southern parts of Ghana and Burkina Faso respectively. It is a Gur language (Naden, 1998:12-49) or a Mabia language according to a recent categorization advanced by Bodomo (1993), belonging to the Niger-Congo language phylum. Insights on the Kasena as a people and their worldview in general have been undertaken by Awedoba (2000) and Taluah (2013:1-27).

<4> This paper primarily seeks to ascertain how body parts in Kasem, the language of the Kasena, are conceptualized as tools. The paper is organized as follows: The objectives of the research and the methodology employed in the research are outlined in the preceding section. The following sections seek to explore the forms or types for that matter, of body parts as tools in Kasem whereas the verbal and nonverbal manifestations of the body parts as tools are also discussed as a reflection of the kinds of body part expressions in Kasem and concluding remarks on body parts as employed as tools in Kasem expressions are offered.

2. Research Objectives and Methodology

<5> The main objective of the research is to examine the forms and functions of the use of body parts as tools in Kasem expressions. Other objectives are to identify the diverse manifestations of the use of body parts as tools in the respective communicative situations and to analyze the linguistic inventiveness of such expressions.

The research therefore adopts a qualitative research model and undertakes descriptive analytic examinations of the data presented. It is hoped that an in-depth linguistic examination, exploring both verbal and non-verbal cues, of body parts employed in Kasem communicative situations as tools will be ascertained. The data presented is principally based on the native intuition of the researcher. Other speakers of Kasem were also consulted to ascertain some further examples and clarifications on the expressions or cues that may be deemed plausible or right in Kasem discourse situations.

2.1. Forms of Body Parts as Tools

<6> Linguistic creativity, to a great extent is tied to the cultural conceptions or general worldview of the speakers of the language in question. Hence, diverse creative forms employing body parts may spring up in languages, of which Kasem is no exception. The employment of body parts as tools in Kasem verbal expressions are quite a few and they are realized in different types and kinds. On a more general note, linguistic examinations of the use of body parts as tools invariably call for investigations of both verbal and non-verbal cues employed in such tasks. This is necessary as both verbal and non-verbal cues are often employed simultaneously, if not, exclusively in communication. Amongst the diverse communicative enterprises that embody body parts, quite a few employ parts of

the body as tools. Considering the different kinds of non-verbal expressions, there exist some gestures that function as the use of tools in Kasem communication situations. Other non-verbal cues as facial expressions and postures do not fulfil the functions of tools.

<7> Apart from the main distinctions between the verbal and non-verbal expressions within which body parts can be employed as tools, the body may also be employed as a toolbox in three main forms as the following discussion seeks to portray. First, the respective body part is employed in a manner that depicts a kind of tool. Second, the tool is implied in the verb form employed in the body part expression and thirdly, the body part term is grammaticalized as a verb form that depicts a tool. Whereas the first and second forms are common in Kasem, the third form is rather uncommon. The only notable instance in Kasem that may serve to conform with this last form of body part expressed as a tool is example 4 below. Detailed elaborations of the expression are provided.

2.2. Functions of Body Parts as Tools

<8> The pervasiveness of body parts conceptualizations may be attributed to the fact that the body serves as the closest concrete domain that readily captures one's attention. The body is best experienced as far as the immediate environment is concerned. As such, conceptualizations or employments of body parts in one's linguistics enterprises are diverse. For instance, why would one attempt to go through the effort and time of picking objects for the purpose of counting when the fingers are readily available?

The body may serve as a toolbox of instruments or objects that perform the functions of tools in a myriad of ways. The most notable instruments or objects contained in the body-toolbox in Kasem are instruments of measurement, for the measurement of distance, space and quantity. There are also instruments to measure spatial orientation as well as direction. Last but nevertheless the least are instruments that function as objects to fulfil diverse tasks or actions. It should be noted however that the object function of body parts as tools are often realized by the verbs contained in the body part expressions. Lehmann (2016:4) offers a classification of body parts in English expressions as follows:

Body parts are primarily categorized as nouns. Their stems may be simple, as in *finger*, or compound, as in *forefinger*. Derivation is used more rarely; not a single body-part term is formed by an English derivation process.

Quite apart from the fact that most body parts in Kasem that function as tools come in the forms of nouns, they are also often realised as objects, either direct or indirect objects. In very few instances, body parts may appear as verbs. The following discussion serves to corroborate the respective functions stated herein.

2.3. Body Parts as Tools: Verbal manifestations

<9> One basic form by which the body is employed as a toolbox in Kasem is the direct engagement of the respective body part as a tool. Amongst a host of body parts that may be employed in this enterprise, the hand (*jiŋa*) offers the most typical examples as far as Kasem is concerned. In the verbal expression that follows, the hand and its constituent parts are typically employed as tools for measurement. A cupped hand mostly designates a quantity of measurement for quite diverse things, most typical of which are solids, such as grains and such related items. Note the example below:

(1) O *moni* *ji-boŋo* *mu* o *pa* *ni*

3SG fetch.PST hand-palm FOC 3SG give 1SG .OBJ

He fetched a hand full for me.

<10> In a similar vein, the jaw (*keli*) may also be employed as a tool of measurement in Kasem. However, unlike the hand it is – like a container - mostly employment in the measurement of solids like cereals, the jaw may be employed in the quantifying of both liquids and solids. The former is often common as compared to the latter. A typical example of the use of the jaw as an instrument of measurement is as follows:

(2) A *nyogi* *keli* *yi* *mu.*

1SG drink.PST jaw ADJ FOC

I drank a jaw full.

<11> The elbow (*jatoga*) is usually employed as object that is used to perform an action such as inflicting pain on another person or thing. Such an instance is often expressed idiomatically in metaphorical terms. Note the following example:

3) A *pam* *jatoga*

1SG give.FUT elbow

I will elbow you. (Lit. I will hit you with my elbow)

<12> The stomach *wɔ* is often employed as a space of containment. Its use as a form of space is often directed to inanimate objects in a form of personification. Here, the stomach is conceptualized as space in the personification of inanimate objects. Objects such as sacks, rooms, bowls and several of such related objects are perceived as having stomachs. The stomach may also be employed metaphorically to mean something is 'spacious' or other such adjectival synonyms. The difference is mostly a matter of syntax. Example 4 may be referred to as a nominal or equational sentence. The sentence does not contain a verbal predicate but rather a nominal predicate of the body part, stomach *wɔ*. Example 5 is also unique amongst Kasem expressions that employ body parts as tools by virtue of the linking verb 'to have' as the verb of the sentence.

4) *Zuŋa* *kan* *wɔ* *yala.*

bowl DET .INAN stomach ADJ

The bowl is wide.

5) *Yolo* *kom* *jigi* *wɔ.*

Sack DET .INAN have.PERF stomach

The sack is spacious.

<13> Apart from the preceding instances, body parts may also be employed as tools by virtue of the actions of the verbs in the body-part expressions. A critical observation reveals that the verbs employed in this instance are action verbs. For instance, the leg (*na g a*) is employed as a tool by implication as realized in the verb *tɔ* 'to kick'. In most instances, the body part in question is not stated explicitly in the expression but it is implied in the semantics of the verb in question and/or the context of the expression in general. Note the examples that follow:

6) O *tɔ* *bu* *won* *mu.*

3SG kick.PST child DET .ANIM FOC

He kicked the child. (body part implied: 'leg' *naga*)

The leg (*naga*) may also be used in cutting to imply the act of whacking particularly with the leg, especially in the case of fights. To prevent the possibility of ambiguity in some body-part expressions, the body part may be stated explicitly in the expression. With such expressions therefore, the respective body part then functions as an indirect object of the sentence. Note example 7 below:

7) O *kom* *bu* *won* *di* O *naga* *mu.*

3SG cut.PST child DET .ANIM with 3SG leg FOC

He whacked the child with his leg.

The leg (*naga*) may be excluded as the context may determine what is actually implied by the expression. With the absence of the leg in the predicate, what may also be implied is the usual cutting of the child's physical body with a sharp object as a knife. The same expression without the indirect body-part object may also mean that 'he cheated the child'. Hence, the word *kom*, not only has the meaning 'cut' but also 'whack' or 'cheat' depending on the situational context.

<14> Some other typical examples of Kasem expressions in which body parts are employed as tools, as evidenced by the verb forms employed in the expressions are as follow. As reiterated earlier, in these body part expressions, the object is usually not identified but inferred from the verb and the context in general. For instance, the hand (*ji η a*) is often employed as an object to break (*lɔ*) one's jaw.

8) A *lɔ* *n* *pupoŋɔ.*

1SG break FUT 2SG jaw.

I will slap you. (Lit. I will break your jaw.)

The head (*yuu*) or the hand (*jija*) may be employed to punch or to pierce *zɔ* with a knife respectively. The verb *zɔ* has the meanings 'to pierce' or 'to punch'. The verb is used in the contexts of fights or quarrels and any body-part may be the direct object. In case there is no body-part in object position, the expression may be ambiguous. The situational contexts usually serve to make meanings clear.

9)	A	<i>zɔ</i>	<i>n'</i>	<i>ni</i>
		1SG	punch	2SG

I will punch your mouth.

The hand (*jij a*), especially with the direct use of the knuckles are also used to 'hit' or 'pierce', *chu*. This verb is a synonym of *zɔ* in Kasem (example 9) and has the meaning to give someone a knock on the head in general'. Both verbs are often used interchangeably, and the respective sentences will still remain valid. However, in order to describe a way of hitting in which the knuckles are implied, the verb *chu* is more appropriate.

10)	A	<i>chu</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>yuu.</i>
		1SG	hit.PST	2SG

I will give you a knock on your head. (lit. I will hit your head)

<15> From the preceding discussion of verbal expressions, it could be observed that body-parts serve as tools in quite different forms and functions in Kasem. As a general note, the verbs that are employed in body part expressions usually exhibit transitivity. Most of the verbs are also action verbs, with rather rare occurrences of linking verbs. Body parts are usually found in object position, either as direct or indirect objects of the expressions they tend to embody. When they are used as tools, they may not be explicitly mentioned but are understood. Body part expressions may also be realized as idiomatic expressions as either in metaphoric or personified terms.

2.4. Body Parts as Tools: Non-Verbal Manifestations

<16> On the non-verbal level of communication, body parts may be employed to perform diverse functions as realized in the verbs *ga* 'to count', *zi η* 'to carry', *kwe* 'to pick', *tɔ* 'to kick', *ja* 'to hold', *nom* 'to stump', *bori* 'to break', *chu* 'to knock', or *magi* 'to beat' or 'to hit' and *zor* 'to pierce " amongst other such related verbs.

A verb that is found in many Kasem body-part expressions is the verb *ziη* 'to carry'. For instance, the head is used as a tool to carry objects and other general things. The backs of women in particular are used to carry babies, whereas the shoulders of men are used to carry children and other objects. The hands in general are used to carry children and objects, and though they may initiate and end the process of carrying, they may also be employed with the support of other body parts like the head, back, shoulders and chest. Pasch (2020:54) notes that "Body-parts, normally the hands, are used as tools to carry out manipulative work, or they hold tools with which they can work more easily. Head, back, arms and shoulders are used as carrier tools, with or without further auxiliary materials."

The hands are generally implied with the mention of the verbs *kwe* 'to pick' and *ja* 'to hold. In such

expressions therefore, the objects of the respective clauses are normally stated. Note the following examples:

11) *Kwe bu won.*

pick child DET.ANIM

Pick the child.

12) *Ja daa kan.*

hold stick DET.ANIM

Hold the stick.

<17> With respect to fighting incidents, external body parts are mostly used in defense and/or in attack. The head, leg, hand, forehead and its surrounding parts, knees, feet, palms, fingers and teeth amongst others may be employed. The legs, with respect to the feet in particular, are used 'to kick' (*to*), 'to stump' (*nom*), and to carry out such other associated actions. The hands in particular are used 'to beat' or 'to hit', both verbs have the same equivalent in Kasem, *magī*.

Note how the world boxing champ, Mike Tyson bit his opponent Evander Holyfield on June 28th, 1997 in what was supposed to be boxing match requiring only the use of clinched fists. Instead of defending by hitting with the hand, the teeth were used as a means of defence. The teeth are not normally used as a weapon for defence. Usually, it is the weaker one or the loser for that matter who may resort to employing the teeth. Instances of nails being employed as defence weapons are also not uncommon. As such, biting and scratching become defensive mechanisms.

<18> With regard to the body as an instrument of communication, König's and Pfister's (2007:200) elaboration on Pierce's semiotic theory of signs as icons, indices and symbols offers insightful revelations to the use of body parts as tools in so far as non-verbal communication is concerned. See also Van Langendonck (2007) on the discussion on iconicity. If the constituents of the body toolbox may be considered as objects, the following models are worth elaborating.

On the iconic level, an iconic sign perceptually bares resemblance with the object or idea to be conveyed or described. For instance, the hands and their complementary parts are often used to signal size or quantity. In other respects, the hands may be used to indicate shapes. In the preceding instances, horizontal and vertical hand gestures are employed as tools in Kasem discourse situations to indicate a range of measurements which may range from diverse sizes and quantities as in big or small, tall or short and plenty or little amongst a host of other sizes and quantities or styles of measurements. As examples, one may convey the height of a particular person by outstretching his or her hand and holding it up at the level of the height as sought to be conveyed. In this process, the palm is usually cup sided, with the palm slightly cupped when reference is being made to humans. An outstretched hand either cup-sided or not may be employed to indicate the height or level of anything other than a person. These distinctions are guarded by taboos in Kasena contexts.

<19> To indicate the size of objects like a papaya, one may gesture the two hands or palms in exact parallel positions, with the perception of the space between the hands or palms as indicative of the size or shape of the papaya. In most instances also, something that is relatively small or of

insignificant quantity is usually portrayed or measured with a cupped palm and fingers brought closely together. With respect to the employment of hands gestures to show the shapes of objects as in a rectangle, square, circle and cone amongst other shapes, both hands and sometime fingers are normally employed to depict the particular shapes.

<20> It should be noted that not in all cases can vivid depictions of shapes be made. The shapes stated above may be quite simple to produce with one's hands or fingers, however, other shapes such as a pentagon and hexagon may be difficult or impossible to produce with one's hands or fingers. When such complexities arise, verbal descriptions are employed to offer detailed explanations for the listener(s) to understand what is sought to be conveyed.

Another non-verbal function of the fingers or hands as tools is their use to indicate directions, locations, distances and boundaries. Pointing serves as a typical example of indices. An index signals a dynamic spatial connection with an object. Pointing gestures are used to indicate location, distances and boundaries and directions. The verb 'point' usually evokes the fingers.

The fingers may be classified as tools as they may be employed as directional instruments or instruments to designate space. To convey directions in particular, the fingers as in pointing serves as an almost inevitable gesture that usually complements verbal expressions. Stating that a particular landmark is located in the north, behind a particular story building is undoubtedly best conveyed with the speaker pointing to the north and indicating with the index finger, otherwise known as the pointer finger the exact position of the landmark.

<21> A distance, space or boundary from one particular place to the other may also be simply conveyed with the pointer finger just as an oval, rectangular or square space may also be simply indicated with the pointer finger showcasing the respective space or boundary in an imaginary sketch. In a similar vein, the 'head' (*yuu*) may serve as an indication of a beginning, top, or the starting point of any phenomenon, either concrete or abstract, whereas the 'leg' (*naga*) will rather indicate an end, down or conclusion of a phenomenon. The terms for 'head' and 'leg' are used metaphorically to denote positions in space.

With respect to the use of the hands and their constituents as tools in Kasem, the measurement that stretches from the forearm, stretching over the elbow to the palm, through to the finger tips is often employed by market women with the aid of different sizes of bowls to measure cereals. Considering the methods or techniques involved in this kind of measurements, liquids in particular do not work well with these measurements. Fruits or some notable vegetables may be measured in a similar manner as cereals, however, the measurement of the former cannot be compared to that of the latter in terms of technique or able support of the hand in general. The hand can hold many cereals as compared to fruits in the measuring process. This measurement, with respect to the cereals in particular poses many challenges as with respect to consistency and quantity of standards. It is therefore of little doubt or no doubt at all that this kind of measurement often generates quarrels as hands and techniques may vary significantly. In an insightful writeup, Maddox' observation of the use of the elbow in measurement is similar to the Kasena situation, with respect to the measurement of cereals in bowls as elaborated above:

cubit – from Latin *cubitum*, 'the elbow'. A cubit was a measurement based on the forearm from elbow to fingertip. The exact length varied according to whose arm was being used and could be from 18 to 22 inches.

<22> With respect to counting, the body parts that are often employed in this enterprise are the fingers and the toes. Hence, the fingers and toes serve as tools for counting. The general practice has always been for one to start counting with the fingers, normally beginning from the little finger of the right hand to the thumb through to the little finger of the left hand to the thumb. Counting may be done in repeatedly with the fingers in that sequence. However, in some other instances, when the numbering exceeds ten, one may resort in including the toes. Alternating from the fingers to the toes in counting is usually the case with larger numbers.

3. Conclusion

<23> By identifying the significant roles of both verbal and non-verbal expressions, this study makes elaborate the employment of body parts as tools in Kasem. The study identifies three main forms in which body parts may manifest as tools: One, the respective body part is employed in a manner that depicts a kind of tool. Two, the tool is implied in the verb form employed in the body part expression and three, the body part is grammaticalized as a verb form that depicts a tool.

As a whole, this study further identifies that the employment of body parts in Kasem expression may function as instruments in the measurement of distance, space and quantity. Body parts may also be employed as instruments to measure spatial orientation or direction. In some instances, body parts may serve as objects that perform the functions of tools as directed by some respective verbs.

In most instances, verbs employed in body part expressions are action verbs and they are realized in transitive verbs. While some body parts are explicitly stated in the body-part expressions, some body parts are not explicitly stated in the respective body-part expressions but are rather implied. This inference is often not ambiguous to speakers of Kasem as the verbs employed in such expressions and the context in particular makes it easy for speakers to decipher the body parts that are implied in the respective expressions.

Abbreviations:

ADJ	adjective	POSS	possessive
ANIM	animate	PL	plural
DET	determiner	SG	singular
FOC	focus marker	1SG	first person singular, subject or possessor
FUT	future	1SG.OBJ	first person singular, object
INAN	inanimate	2SG	second person singular, subject or possessor
PERF	perfective	3SG	third person singular, subject or possessor
PST	past		

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