

Research Paper



Conceptualizing óbì and ọkàn: a comparative analysis of heart metaphors in igbo and yoruba

Adaobi Ngozi Okoye¹, Peter Oyewole Makinde^{2*}

¹Department of Linguistics, Faculty of Arts, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria.

²Department of Linguistics, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, University of the Western Cape, South Africa.

Article Info

Article History:

Received: 15 May 2025

Revised: 25 July 2025

Accepted: 02 August 2025

Published: 20 September 2025

Keywords:

Conceptualization

Heart

Igbo

Metaphor

Óbì



ABSTRACT

This study explores conceptualizations associated with the heart rendered óbì and ọkàn respectively in Igbo and Yoruba; two major Nigerian languages of the same typological descent. Although similar, these terms embody rich cultural metaphors that reveal how emotions, morality, personhood, and spirituality are perceived within each culture. Drawing on the Cognitive Linguistics framework, particularly Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) and based on data from primary and secondary sources, the study reveals that in both languages, the heart is metaphorically constructed as a fragile object, a container, a seat of thought and emotion, and even a moral compass. However, key differences emerge in the religious and metaphysical loading associated with each language. This comparative analysis not only enhances our understanding of embodiment in African languages but also emphasizes the interplay between language, cognition, and culture.

Corresponding Author:

Peter Oyewole Makinde

Department of Linguistics, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, University of the Western Cape, South Africa.

Email: po.makinde@unizik.edu.ng

Copyright © 2025 The Author(s). This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

1. INTRODUCTION

The role of metaphor in human cognition and linguistic expression cannot be overstated, as it serves as a fundamental mechanism through which people conceptualize abstract experiences. [1] Among the most pervasive metaphors across languages and cultures are those that relate to the human body, particularly the heart. The heart, as both a physical and conceptual organ, holds symbolic value in

conveying emotions, moral character, consciousness, and identity in many languages worldwide. [2] In Figure 1 below, we present a visual representation of heart.

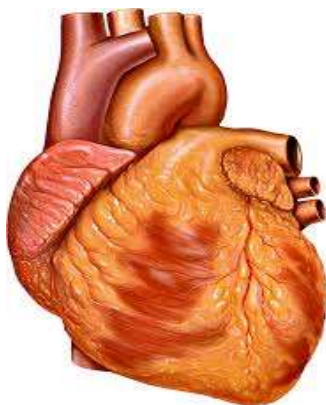


Figure 1. Showing Visual Representation of Heart

Across cultures, the human heart apart from being an anatomical organ is a symbol of emotion, morality, identity, and soul. This multifaceted role together with expressions such as “broken-hearted,” “goodhearted,” and “cold-hearted” reflect how universal yet culturally varied the metaphorical representations of the heart are. In African linguistic traditions, particularly among the Igbo and Yoruba peoples, the heart is not merely a poetic motif but a conceptual cornerstone through which emotions, intentions, and ethical values are expressed and understood. The Igbo term *óbì* and the Yoruba term *òkàn* share physiological roots but differ significantly in how they are metaphorically extended and cognitively conceptualized. Although there has been substantial research on metaphors in African languages, direct comparative studies focusing specifically on Igbo and Yoruba heart metaphors remain limited. Works on Igbo semantics and Yoruba lexicon provide valuable linguistic descriptions but fall short of detailed metaphorical analysis. [3], [4], [5] Recent research on African pragmatics and semantics highlights the need for more culturally contextualized metaphor studies [6], [7].

In view of the foregoing, the present study explores these conceptualizations within the framework of cognitive linguistics, especially drawing on Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). We argue that metaphorical mappings in Igbo and Yoruba encode cultural values and reveal how deeply the body is intertwined with conceptual structures in African worldviews. The effort is to show the conceptualizations associated with *óbì* and *òkàn*, in Igbo and Yoruba and in addition ascertain if certain similarities and differences can be confirmed for the two languages. In Figure 2 below, we present a visual comparative representation of heart metaphors in Igbo and Yoruba.

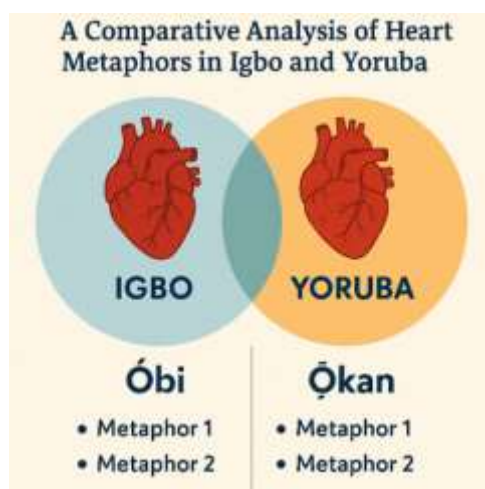


Figure 2. Showing Visual Comparason of Heart Metaphors in Igbo and Yoruba

Thus, in exploring heart metaphors, we reflect on the cross-disciplinary relevance of this study, as it informs not only linguistic and cognitive studies but also anthropological, psychological, and philosophical investigations into how cultures encode emotion and identity through language. [8] The rest of the paper is organized as follows; section 2 reviews literature relevant to the study while section 3 provides the methodology. In Section 4, the data is presented and analyzed. Section 5 forms the conclusion of the study.

2. RELATED WORK

The metaphorical conceptualization of body parts, especially the heart, has received significant attention in cognitive linguistics [1], [2]. Within this tradition, the heart is often treated as a locus of emotion and moral reasoning, reflected in cross-linguistic studies such as Chinese and English. [9], [8] However, African languages have been underrepresented in such cognitive explorations. In African philosophy and linguistics, scholars [10], [11] have noted the centrality of internal organs, particularly the heart and soul, in identity construction and ethical reasoning. The Yoruba conceptualization of *ọkàn* goes beyond biology to touch on metaphysical and moral aspects of being [12], [13]. Similarly, research shows that *óbì* in Igbo is a highly polysemous term tied to emotion, personhood, and agency [14], [15].

The use of metaphor in African languages has also been analyzed through a semiotic and sociolinguistic lens [16], [17], [18]. Olaoba emphasizes the legal and moral implications of inner states in Yoruba legal discourse [19], while Akinyemi explores how oral traditions and aesthetic representations hinge on embodied concepts like the heart [20]. In an empirical analysis of idiomatic expressions, Anasiudu reviewed over 150 Igbo proverbs and found that more than 70% used *óbì* in reference to emotional and moral experiences [15]. The study shows that the expression *óbì dī m ụtọ* as “my heart is sweet” depicts the state of the heart as in I am happy and *óbì adighi m mma* as “my heart is not well” meaning I am sad. Similarly, Eze in a cognitive semantic analysis of *óbì* in Igbo employed introspective data and interviews with 25 native Igbo speakers in Anambra and Enugu states. Finding from the study shows a high level of convergence in the interpretation of *óbì* as representing inner emotional states, conscience, and moral bearing [21].

Furthermore, Nwankwo and Nwaozuzu in their study on emotional metaphors in Igbo adopted a qualitative methodology using oral interviews and ethnolinguistic documentation [22]. They discovered that metaphors involving *óbì* extend to spiritual perception as in *óbì ya nwere udo* as in “his heart has peace”. They also note the common use of *óbì* in ritual speech and ancestral invocations, suggesting a symbolic-metaphysical layer [22]. In addition, Odebunmi conducted a pragmatic study based on naturally occurring conversational data and found that *òkàn* frequently occurs in expressions that index moral character, empathy, emotional balance, and mental disposition. His data, drawn from both modern Yoruba media and traditional oral narratives, supports the metaphor “THE HEART IS THE MIND/MORAL COMPASS” [23].

In a study on the semantics and pragmatics of Yoruba heart idioms, Adedimeji used content analysis on 100 proverbs and expressions and noted that *ọkàn* is metaphorically associated with truthfulness, deceit, fear, and emotional sensitivity. The empirical corpus included both contemporary media and traditional Ifá verses, showing consistency across temporal domains [24]. Also, Owolabi in his Cognitive metaphors in Yoruba applied a metaphor elicitation technique with 30 Yoruba speakers from Ekiti, Oyo, and Lagos regions. Participants were asked to explain the meaning and contextual use of expressions such as *ọkàn mi dùn*, *ọkàn rẹ bàjé*, and *ọkàn àfín*. The results showed a high frequency of metaphorical mappings between *ọkàn* and psychological, ethical, and spiritual domains, reinforcing the conceptual metaphor “THE HEART IS THE SOUL” [3].

Despite these studies, only very few works have conducted a side-by-side comparative analysis of how two major African languages conceptualize the same core anatomical term. This paper fills that gap by adopting a cognitive linguistic and ethnolinguistic approach to compare the Igbo *óbì* and Yoruba *ọkàn*, demonstrating how language-specific conceptual metaphors are grounded in broader cultural ideologies.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative comparative approach within the framework of Cognitive Linguistics, particularly Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) as developed by Lakoff and Johnson. [1] CMT posits that our conceptual system is largely metaphorical and that we understand abstract concepts in terms of concrete bodily experiences.

Data were collected from a combination of native speaker introspection, existing ethnolinguistic literature [14], [13], Yoruba and Igbo idiomatic expressions, proverbs, and cultural texts. Biblical translations in the two languages were also used to uncover deeper moral and spiritual metaphors associated with the heart. Each expression was analyzed for metaphorical mapping using the cognitive linguistic tools of source-target domain correlation and image schema theory [25].

Regarding data analysis procedure, the study's data are examined through the identification of metaphorical expressions, categorization of metaphors, cross-linguistic comparison, and interpretation of the findings. All instances where Óbì and Ọkàn appear in metaphorical contexts are extracted. Using Lakoff and Johnson's [1] categorization of source and target domains, the various metaphors are classified based on the conceptual domains they map onto. Common conceptual metaphor types like HEART AS PERSON, HEART AS CONTAINER, HEART AS FRAGILE OBJECT, HEART AS EMOTIONAL CENTER, HEART AS MORAL COMPASS, and HEART AS SOUL/SPIRIT among other conceptualizations, are used as coding categories. This categorization enables comparative analysis in order to identify similarities and differences in the metaphorical mappings between the two languages.

Thus, a thematic comparative analysis was conducted to highlight similarities and differences in the metaphorical extensions of óbì and ọkàn, attending to cultural, religious, and philosophical underpinnings. Metaphorical expressions were grouped under key conceptual metaphors and contrasted across the two languages. Through this method, the study captures not just linguistic data but the underlying cognitive and cultural patterns that inform heart metaphors in Igbo and Yoruba worldviews.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The word heart which is rendered óbì in Igbo and ọkàn in Yoruba is the part located below the front part of the chest. Physiologically, the heart pumps blood throughout the body, controls the heart rate and maintains blood pressure. Purely anatomically, óbì or ọkàn is seen as the organ responsible for the pumping and circulation of blood (obara in Igbo and ejẹ in Yoruba) through the body. At the same time, óbì/ọkàn is conceived of as the source of emotional and psychic reactions. Supporting the above, óbì or ọkàn, located inside the body, is where emotional and psychic reactions 'happen' [26].

Igbo and Yoruba expressions involving the heart óbì and ọkàn reveal the different ways the word is conceptualized in the two languages. For instance, óbì is a container with a bottom and top. It has textures and as such it can be soft or hard. Óbì can also be narrowed or tightened. In Igbo, courage is conceptualized as having a heart hence the expression inwe óbì 'to have a heart'; weakness is conceptualized as enwe ghi óbì 'not having a heart', wickedness is conceptualized as Óbì í dī n'azụ 'a heart at the back'. To have a heart in Igbo means to be brave, courageous while not having a heart equals not being brave or courageous. [14] For the Yorubas, the heart is more than a blood machine: it is the seat of the emotions and of psychic energy. [27] Thus, a brave man is said to possess a strong heart – o l'ọkàn – and if a man is known to be weak in his thoughts and action, i.e., a timid person, the Yoruba would say, ko ni ọkàn – 'he has no heart'. [28] In the subsections that follow, we present the data on Igbo and Yoruba heart expressions based on the different conceptualizations beginning with the conceptualization of óbì and ọkàn as a person.

4.1. Óbì and Ọkàn as a Person

The expression Obì m literally my heart which translates to my Beloved shows that the heart can be conceptualized as a person. Here, the heart is used to represent the whole person thus bringing to bear the PART FOR WHOLE METONYMY. The examples in 1 as shown in Table 1 and Table 2 instantiate óbì as a person.

Table 1. Showing Conceptualization of Heart as a Person (Igbo)

1a	Ifeanyi	bù	Obi	M
	Ifeanyi	be	heart	1SG
Ifeanyi is my beloved [14]				

Given the relevance of the heart to human existence, a beloved person is viewed as the lover's heart as shown in Table 1 above. This is particularly evident in the place of emotions where the object of love is one's heart. The object of love is one's *óbì* 'heart'. *Óbì* 'heart' as an object of love can be desired thus, we have the Igbo expression *Nye m òbì gi* literally 'Give me your heart' which is also rendered in Yoruba as *Fun mi ni ọkan ẹ*.

Regarding the conceptualization of *ọkan* as a person in Yoruba, there is no concept that relates *ọkan* as a person, rather the word *ọkan* could be used to depict possession as in *ọkan mi* (my heart). However, we can have a direct translation where a person is regarded as my heart as in the expression in Table 2 below where heart is conceptualized as one's beloved:

Table 2. Showing Conceptualization of Heart as a Person (Yoruba)

1b.	Ojo	je	Ọkan	Mi
	Ojo	be	heart	1SG
Ojo is my heart (beloved).				

Apart from the conceptualization of *óbì* as a person, in the context of having to choose among options, that is with respect to decision making, one's *óbì* 'heart' translates to the person's choice as shown in the expression in 2a of Table 3 while in 2b as depicted in Table 3, 'heart desire' in Yoruba translate to the person's choice or desire as in *ife ọkan*.

Table 3. Showing Conceptualization of Heart as a Choice/Desire

2a.	Nkea	bù	obì	M	
	This	be	heart	1SG	
This is my choice [14]					
b.	O	je	olu'fe	ọkan	mi
	S/he	be	love	Heart	1SG
S/he is my heart desire					

In addition, a shock suffered by a person is conceptualized as a pain in the heart as in 2c and 2d as shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Showing Pain in Conceptualization of Heart

c.	Óbì	fù	rù	ya	ufu	mgbe	ọ	nù	rù	ya
	Heart	pain	rv	3SG	pain	when	3SG	hear	PST	it
He was embittered when he heard it. [14]										
d.	Ọkan	Mi	baje	n'igba ti	mo	gbo	oun	to	so	
	Heart	1SG	spoilt	when	1SG	hear PST	what	he	say PST	
My heart was embittered when I heard what you said.										

In 2c and 2d above as depicted in Table 4, the heart is used to stand in for the affected person and thus perceived as the recipient of the effect of the unfavorable event. The 2d can also be rendered as *O dun mi l'ọkan gan ni* (It pained me (saddened my heart) a lot.) The next section considers *óbì* as a breakable object.

4.2. Óbì as a fragile object

The heart is delicate and needs to be protected from damage. In Igbo, a breakup with a loved one is conceptualized as *obì mgbawa* 'broken heart'. The sentences in examples 3 as depicted in Table 5 reveal the conceptualizations of the heart as brittle.

Table 5. Showing Conceptualization of Heart as a Fragile Object

	Ọ	gbàwà	rà	̀m	obì
3a.	3SG	break	rv	1SG	heart
	S/he broke my heart. [14]				
	Ọ	ba	ọkan	mi	je.
3b.	3SG	spoilt SPT	heart	1SG	spoilt
	S/he broke my heart.				

As shown in Table 5 and Table 6, findings show that the heart is conceptualized as a fragile object. In the event of serious disappointment and mishap, especially from or concerning a beloved person, the heart is said to have been shattered, a more intense version of the examples in 3a and 3b (See Table 5) is shown in 3c and 3d (See Table 6). The intensity is usually achieved using the extensional suffix *riri* as shown in 3c below while 3d depicts the Yoruba version. In 3d, there is the use of splitting verb in *ba* and *je* with *l'ọkan* inserted inbetween. This occurrence of the splitting verb results in the repetition of the verb *spoilt* which enables the conceptualization of a fragile heart as in shattered her heart.

Table 6. Showing Conceptualization of Heart as a Fragile Object

	Ọnwu	di	Ya	gbàriri	ya	obì
3c.	Death	husband	3SG	shatter	3SG	heart
	Her husband's death shattered her heart. [14]					
	Iku	ọkọ	rẹ	Ba	l'ọkan	je.
3d.	Death	husband	3SG	spoilt	heart	spoilt
	Her husband's death shattered her heart.					

The example in 3e as presented in Table 7 is used to conceptualized brokenness and repentance especially in biblical context. It is believed that penance is achieved only when the heart, an object that is delicate and cherished, is torn.

Table 7. Showing Conceptualization of Heart as Brokenness and Repentance

	Dọwáá	nụ	óbì	únù	
3e.	Tear	3PL	heart	3PLPOSS	
	Rend your heart				
	Ẹ	fa	ọkàn	yín	ya
3d.	2PL	draw	heart	2PL	tear
	Rend your heart.				

4.3. Conceptualization of Óbì as a Moveable Object, Centre for Attachment/Detachment, a Container, a Temperature and a Possession

Other conceptualizations of heart in Igbo include *óbì* as a moveable object. This is revealed through expressions such as *Obì mmapụ* 'an upward movement of the heart' and *obì iwùná afọ*, 'a downward movement of the heart to the stomach'. These show a kind of shift from the position of the heart to somewhere else as a result of fear. [14] Also, as a centre for attachment cum detachment, the Igbo heart depicts commitment and lack of commitment as exemplified in the expressions *Itinyē obì* 'to show commitment', *ịtụkwàsì obì* 'to trust', and *iwēpù obì* 'to lose interest' serve to buttress these conceptualizations. This is further exemplified in Okoye. [14] The conceptualization of *óbì* as a container is

depicted via a universal image schema in human language and cognition. As Okoye [14] explained, container schema has such key elements as interior, exterior and boundary as depicted in the Igbo expression *Óbì juputara m n' ọ̀nụ* (My heart is overflowing with joy).

Other instances depicting conceptualization of heart in Igbo include a cross mapping from a concrete body part domain to an abstract temperature domain as in *Óbì nà jú yā ọ̀yī* (He is having cold feet.) *Óbì* is also conceptualized as a quality which can be possessed as in *O na e nwe óbì abuo* (He is doubtful) [14].

4.4. Conceptualization of Ọ̀kàn in Yoruba

In addition to our analysis in 4.1 and 4.2 above, the conceptualization of ọ̀kàn (heart) in Yoruba thought reflects a deep intertwining of language, culture, spirituality, and psychology. Unlike the strict biological notion of the heart in Western paradigms, the Yoruba conceptualization of ọ̀kàn extends far beyond the physical organ. It serves as a vital node in understanding personhood, consciousness, emotion, morality, and even destiny. We therefore present such conceptualizations below.

4.4.1. Ọ̀kàn as the Seat of Emotion and Thought

In Yoruba cosmology and everyday language, ọ̀kàn is primarily associated with the inner self or the emotional and intellectual core of a person. It is often used metaphorically to represent the mind, feelings, and will. Yoruba expressions such as *Ọ̀kàn mi dùn* (my heart is gladdened) or *Ọ̀kàn mi bàjẹ* (my heart is broken) clearly position the heart as the seat of emotional states. [19] Moreover, ọ̀kàn is seen as the centre of rationality and intention. In Yoruba proverbs and moral discourses, one's ọ̀kàn rere (good heart) is synonymous with a good character (*ìwà rere*), reflecting moral and ethical soundness. This demonstrates that ọ̀kàn also participates in decision-making and moral reasoning [11].

The expressions below elaborate further on ọ̀kàn as the seat of emotion and thought when one's heart is gladdened as in *Inú mi dùn / Mo ní ayọ̀ púpọ̀* (My heart is gladdened, or I am happy) as well as *Mo ní ifọ̀kànbàlẹ̀* (I have a peace of mind). Further explorations are shown in Table 8.

Table 8. Showing Conceptualization of Heart as the Seat of Emotion and Thought

4a.	Ọ̀kàn	mi	dùn
	Heart	1SG	sweet
My heart is gladdened.			
4b.	Ọ̀kàn	mi	balẹ̀
	Heart	1SG	peaceful
My heart is at peace.			

4.4.2. Ọ̀kàn and the Concept of the Soul

Ọ̀kàn is often discussed alongside other elements of Yoruba metaphysical anthropology, such as *ẹ̀mí* (life force), *ọ̀rìṣà* (deity), and *ìpín* (destiny). Scholars [10] have argued that while *ẹ̀mí* is regarded as the breath or vital force from *Olódùmarè* (the Supreme Being), ọ̀kàn is seen as the inner essence or the soul, responsible for an individual's emotions, memory, and personality. The expression in Table 9 below portrays ọ̀kàn as the concept of soul.

Table 9. Showing Conceptualization of Heart as the Concept of Soul

4c.	Ọ̀kàn	rere	lọ́ n	fì	tọ́jú	ẹ̀bí.
	Heart	good	Use	to	cares	family
It is with a good heart that he takes care of the family.						

The Yorubas' belief system holds that *Olódùmarè* creates the ọ̀kàn, which forms part of what makes an individual unique. [13] After death, the *ẹ̀mí* (soul) is believed to return to *Olódùmarè* (the Creator). At the same time, the ọ̀kàn may be judged or continue its journey in the metaphysical world, reflecting notions of moral responsibility and consciousness as in the expression *Ọ̀lórún, jọ̀wọ̀ f'ọ̀kàn mi mọ̀, kó má bàjẹ̀* (a

plead to God to keep one's heart clean and pure from all defilements). Such a belief system has a profound impact on the innermost being of every human.

4.4.3. Ọkàn in Language and Semiotics

From a semiotic standpoint, ọkàn functions not only as a lexical item but also as a symbolic construct. Its metaphoric extensions reveal how the Yoruba perceive the integration of mind and body. For instance, phrases like ọkàn ayé (the heart of the world – referring to a central or vital place), ọkàn balẹ (to calm one's heart or to relax or find peace) and ọkàn tú (to confess or unburden the heart). The data in 4d as shown in Table 10 below encapsulates the semiotic representation of heart in Yoruba.

Table 10. Showing Conceptualization of Heart as a Symbolic Construct

4d.	Ọkàn	mi	tú.
	Heart	1SG	loose
My heart is free			

In Table 10 above, the idiom Ọkàn mi tú, as in *Mo ti sọ ohun t'ówà lẹkàn mi* (I have freed my heart by saying what is on my mind), suggests that the heart is both a site of internal turmoil and a source of communicative expression, highlighting its multimodal significance in Yoruba life and art [29].

4.4.4. Ọkàn in Healing and Religion

Traditional Yoruba medicine and religious practices often attribute ailments to the heart (ọkàn). Spiritual imbalances, emotional distress, or curses are believed to affect the ọkàn, leading to illness. Healers, priests, and diviners may prescribe rituals to cleanse or fortify the heart as shown in Table 11 represented by 4e and 4f below [20].

Table 11. Showing Healing and Religious Perspectives in the Conceptualization of Heart

4e.	Ọkàn	rẹ	ní ń fa	àìlera	yíí
	Heart	2SG	causes	illness	this
It is your heart that causes your illness.					
4f.	Kó	fí	ọkàn	Ọlórún	mọ
	2SG	Prep	heart	Lord	Prep
S/he did not draw closer to God.					

In the above contexts, healing encompasses not only physical but also emotional and moral purification. Table 11 presents the healing and religious perspectives in the conceptualization of heart. In 4e, the state of the heart indicates the causes of one's illness, while in 4f, one's heart or relationship with God as a religious process is believed to bring about healing while the failure draw closer to God on the part of human may result to illness or trouble.

5. CONCLUSION

The comparative analysis of ọbì in Igbo and ọkàn in Yoruba reveals that while both terms refer to the anatomical heart, their metaphorical extensions reflect deep cultural and cognitive particularities unique to each linguistic community. In both languages, the heart is conceptualized as more than a physical organ; it is a vital construction that embodies emotion, thought, will, morality, and even spirituality.

In Igbo, ọbì functions as a locus of emotion, desire, courage, and commitment, often metaphorized as a person, a container, a fragile object, and a moveable entity. It is central to how the Igbo perceive emotional experience and decision-making, capturing states of attachment, detachment, strength, and vulnerability. In Yoruba, ọkàn similarly transcends its biological reference to encompass the soul, the seat of rationality, and the moral conscience. Yoruba thought positions the heart at the intersection of emotional and spiritual life, making it essential not only for personal well-being but also for communal ethics and

religious identity. The findings underscore the importance of cognitive metaphor in understanding how language and culture structure human experience. While the Igbo and Yoruba hearts share some metaphorical patterns, such as being fragile, moveable, and expressive of inner states, their cultural inflections differ significantly, highlighting the richness of African metaphysics and embodied cognition.

The conceptualization of ọkàn in Yoruba thought is rich, multifaceted, and central to understanding Yoruba ontology and ethics. It transcends the physical definition of the heart to encompass emotion, thought, morality, personhood, and spirituality. Understanding ọkàn helps illuminate how the Yoruba navigate the world, make sense of experiences, and articulate what it means to be human. Contemporary Yoruba thinkers and writers continue to explore the depth of the concept of ọkàn. In modern literature, film, and music, it remains a dominant motif used to explore themes of love, betrayal, resilience, and identity. Moreover, the Yoruba diaspora continues to reinterpret ọkàn in global discourses around Afrocentric psychology and decolonial epistemologies (Ogungbile, 2002).

This study contributes to African cognitive linguistics by providing empirical evidence of metaphorical embodiment in indigenous languages. It also points to the need for further cross-cultural studies of conceptual metaphors in African languages, especially in domains of health, spirituality, and social behaviour, where body-part metaphors play pivotal roles in meaning-making.

Acknowledgement

We acknowledge the authors of all the works cited in this study which enable us to foreground our study on the previous knowledge thereby creating a gap in literature.

Funding Information

Authors state that there is no funding involved in this research.

Author Contributions Statement

Name of Author	C	M	So	Va	Fo	I	R	D	O	E	Vi	Su	P	Fu
Adaobi Ngozi Okoye	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Peter Oyewole Makinde	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	

C : Conceptualization

M : Methodology

So : Software

Va : Validation

Fo : Formal analysis

I : Investigation

R : Resources

D : Data Curation

O : Writing - Original Draft

E : Writing - Review & Editing

Vi : Visualization

Su : Supervision

P : Project administration

Fu : Funding acquisition

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper. On this note, the authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Informed Consent

Our study does not require informed consent from any individual as we did not include individuals in this study.

Ethical Approval

Data for the study does not relate to human or animal use and thus does not require ethical approval.

Data Availability

The authors confirm that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article.

REFERENCES

- [1] G. Lakoff and M. Johnson, 'Metaphors We Live By', Metaphors We Live By, 1980.
- [2] Z. Kövecses, Metaphor and emotion: Language, culture, and body in human feeling. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- [3] K. Owolabi, 'Cognitive metaphors in Yoruba: A cultural linguistics perspective', Journal of West African Languages, vol. 42, no. 2, pp. 1-19, 2015.
- [4] A. Bamgbose, Lexical Semantics in Yoruba. Ibadan: University of Ibadan Press, 2000.
- [5] K. Owolabi, The Yoruba Language in Historical and Cultural Context, Ibadan. University of Ibadan Press, 1995.
- [6] A. Odebunmi, 'Pragmatic Strategies in Nigerian Political Oratory: A Critical Discourse Perspective', Discourse & Society, vol. 24, pp. 715-732, 2013.
- [7] I. Chiluwa, The Discourse of Nigerian Christian Sermons: A Communicative Perspective. Ibadan, 2007.
- [8] Z. Kövecses, Metaphor in culture: Universality and variation. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511614408
- [9] N. Yu, 'Metaphor, body, and culture: The Chinese understanding of gallbladder and courage', Metaphor and Symbol, vol. 18, pp. 13-31, 2003. doi.org/10.1207/S15327868MS1801_2
- [10] B. Hallen and J. O. Sodipo, Knowledge, belief, and witchcraft: Analytic experiments in African philosophy. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986.
- [11] W. Abimbola, Yoruba culture: A philosophical account. Ibadan: University Press, 1975.
- [12] B. Idowu, African traditional religion: A definition., London: S.C.M. Press., 1975.
- [13] S. Gbadegesin, African philosophy: Traditional Yoruba philosophy and contemporary African realities. New York: Peter Lang, 1991.
- [14] A. N. Okoye, 'The conceptualization of the heart (Óbì) in Igbo culture', Nigerian Journal of the Humanities, vol. 29, no. 1, pp. 40-58, 2024.
- [15] B. N. Anasiudu, 'Metaphorical Extensions of "Obi" in Igbo Proverbs', Nsukka Journal of African Languages and Linguistics, vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 34-50, 2013.
- [16] P. Makinde, 'Exploring semiotic metaphorical representation in John Donne's "The Flea": A systemic functional linguistic analysis', Journal of English Language Teaching and English Linguistics, vol. 10, no. 1, pp. 19-34, 2025.
- [17] P. O. Makinde, 'A multimodal metaphorical representation of selected political cartoons in Nigeria', Sch Int J Linguistics Lit, vol. 7, no. 10, pp. 300-315, 2024. doi.org/10.36348/sijll.2024.v07i10.003
- [18] P. O. Makinde and J. U. Oyewole, 'Carpe diem: A semiotic metaphorical representation of LOVE, SEX, and SEDUCTION in Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress"', University of Chitral Journal of Linguistics and Literature, vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 1-6, 2024.
- [19] O. B. Olaoba, An introduction to African legal culture. Ibadan: Hope Publications, 2004.
- [20] A. Akinyemi, Oral tradition and aesthetic transfer: Creativity and social vision in two Nigerian artistic traditions. New York: Garland Publishing, 2003.
- [21] E. C. Eze, 'A Cognitive Semantic Analysis of "Obi" in Igbo', Journal of Linguistic Studies, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 101-117, 2014.
- [22] I. E. Nwankwo and G. I. Nwaozuzu, 'Emotional metaphors in Igbo', Journal of Igbo Studies, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 48-63, 2016.
- [23] A. Odebunmi, 'Pragmatic functions of "òkàn" in Yoruba discourse', Intercultural Pragmatics, vol. 4, no. 3, pp. 339-357, 2007.
- [24] M. A. Adedimeji, 'The semantics and pragmatics of Yoruba heart idioms', Nordic Journal of African Studies, vol. 17, no. 2, pp. 160-174, 2008.
- [25] G. Lakoff and M. Johnson, 'The metaphorical logic of rape', Metaphor and Symbol, vol. 2, pp. 73-79, 1987. doi.org/10.1207/s15327868ms0201_5
- [26] O. Oladipo, 'The Yoruba conception of a person: An analytico-philosophical study', International Studies in Philosophy, vol. 24, no. 3, pp. 15-24, 1992. doi.org/10.5840/intstudphil1992243103

- [27] B. Idowu, *Olodumare: God in Yoruba belief*, Lagos: Longman, 1996.
- [28] B. A. Ademuleya, 'The concept of ori in the traditional Yoruba visual representation of human figures', *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2007.
- [29] O. B. Yai, 'Theory and practice in African philosophy: The poverty of speculative philosophy', in *African philosophy: An anthology*, E. Chukwudi Eze, Ed. 1993.

How to Cite: Adaobi Ngozi Okoye, Peter Oyewole Makinde. (2025). Conceptualizing óbì and ọkàn: a comparative analysis of heart metaphors in igbo and yoruba. *Journal of Language and Linguistics in Society (JLLS)*, 5(2), 34-44. <https://doi.org/10.55529/jlls.52.34.44>

BIOGRAPHIE OF AUTHORS

	Adaobi Ngozi Okoye  is an Associate Professor in the Department of Linguistics and currently serves as the Sub Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Nigeria. She obtained a PhD from the same institution in 2017 and has over a decade of teaching and research experience. Her research interest includes syntax, semantics, language documentation and cognitive linguistics. He has published extensively in peer reviewed journals and edited volumes and has presented her research at numerous national and international conferences. She is a member of the Linguistics Association of Nigeria and the Association of Contemporary African Linguistics. She can be contacted via Email: an.okoye@unizik.edu.ng or ang.okoye@gmail.com.
	Peter Oyewole Makinde  is a lecturer in the Department of Linguistics, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Nigeria. He obtained his BA and Postgraduate study from the Department of English Language and Literature, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. His doctoral study at the University of the Western Cape, South Africa has also revolutionised his research paradigm, positioning his for global recognition as a young scholar. Peter Makinde is a member of many professional bodies and the Editor-in-Chief of Writing360 journal. He is the African Representative for the Systemic Functional Linguistics Interest Group (SFLIG); the Founder of Nigeria Systemic Functional Linguistics Interest Group (NiSFLIG); and the Co-Founder, West Africa Systemic Functional Linguistics Association (WASFLIG). He has also served as a reviewer to a number of journals at local and international levels. His areas of specialization are Stylistics, Social Semiotics, Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) and Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). He can be contacted via Email: po.makinde@unizik.edu.ng.