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WHAT THE EWE MIND THINKS IT IS: A CASE OF SOME EVERYDAY EXPRESSIONS

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Abstract

Like many languages, Ewe exhibits metaphor as a pervasive feature, evident in expressions about emotions, death, sensation, and time. Yet its metaphorical conceptualisation of the human mind has received little scholarly attention. This study addresses that gap by examining everyday expressions that reveal culturally grounded models of cognition and the linguistic expression of thought. Data were collected from 20 older-generation native speakers of Ewe through interviews and conversational observation. Analysis within Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Cultural Linguistics identified nineteen metaphors of the mind, notably those of distance, depth, temperature, purity, turbulence, and divorce. These metaphors function as conceptual tools that reflect embodied experience and cultural values, situating cognition within social, moral, and communal contexts. The findings show that Ewe metaphors of the mind are systematic and context-sensitive, demonstrating how cognition is socially constructed and dynamically expressed through language. Highlighting Ewe perspectives, the study diversifies metaphor theory and affirms the intellectual sophistication inherent in African languages.

Keywords: Cognitive linguistics; conceptual metaphor; Ewe language; cultural linguistics; human mind

1. Introduction

Metaphor is a fundamental mechanism through which human beings conceptualise experience. As Lakoff and Johnson (1980) famously argued, metaphor is pervasive in everyday language, thought, and action, shaping how individuals understand abstract domains such as emotion, time, morality, and mental states. Far from being confined to poetic or rhetorical expression, metaphor operates at the level of cognition, allowing

speakers to map familiar embodied experiences onto more complex or intangible phenomena.

Across languages and cultures, metaphor serves as a bridge between the physical and the conceptual, the observable and the internal. In this regard, African languages offer fertile ground for exploring how metaphor reflects and reinforces culturally specific ways of knowing. The Ewe language has received scholarly attention for its metaphorical richness. Some studies have explored Ewe metaphors in domains such as death (Amenorvi, 2024a), sensation and time (Sevor, 2019), and emotions (Ameka, 2002; Amenorvi, 2024b). These works affirm the expressive and conceptual depth of Ewe, particularly in its use of metaphor to encode cultural values and social commentary. Despite this growing body of research, there remains a notable gap in the literature concerning metaphorical expressions about the human mind. While mental states are central to everyday interaction and cultural interpretation, the metaphorical framing of the human mind in Ewe has yet to be systematically examined. This study addresses the problem of the underexplored metaphorical framing of the human mind in Ewe, despite its centrality to everyday cognition and cultural interpretation.

By examining Ewe metaphorical expressions about the mind, the study will contribute to a broader understanding of how language reflects cultural models of thought. It will also affirm the importance of African languages in advancing metaphor theory and invite a rethinking of cognitive linguistic frameworks through the lens of indigenous epistemologies. This study, therefore, seeks to answer the questions of which metaphors are employed in Ewe everyday expressions about the mind and any peculiarities these metaphors may possess.

2. Conceptual Metaphor Theory

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), first articulated by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), represents a paradigm shift in the study of metaphor, moving it from the periphery of rhetorical flourish to the core of human cognition. CMT posits that metaphor is a fundamental mechanism through which individuals conceptualise abstract domains of experience. According to this view, metaphors are systematic mappings between a *source domain*, typically grounded in concrete, embodied experience, and a *target domain*, which is often abstract or intangible. For instance, the popular metaphor *THE MIND IS A CONTAINER* allows speakers to conceptualise mental activity in terms of spatial containment (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 5).

One of the most compelling contributions of CMT is its emphasis on the embodied nature of cognition. Lakoff and Johnson (1999) argue that our sensorimotor experiences form the basis for metaphorical thought, a claim that has been substantiated across a range of languages and cultures. This embodied grounding enables metaphors to function as cognitive tools that structure reasoning, influence perception, and shape social interaction.

The theory has thus found resonance in disciplines as diverse as philosophy, psychology, anthropology, and discourse analysis.

However, CMT has not gone unchallenged. Critics have pointed out that early formulations of the theory tended to underplay the role of context in metaphor use. Kövecses (2020) addresses this limitation by proposing an *Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory*, which incorporates socio-pragmatic and discourse-level factors into the analysis. He argues that metaphor is not only a cognitive phenomenon but also a context-sensitive and dynamic process, shaped by communicative intent, cultural norms, and situational variables. This extension is particularly relevant for this study, which explores metaphor in culturally embedded, everyday discourse.

Another critique concerns the literal-figurative dichotomy that underpins much of early CMT. Scholars such as Yu (1998) and Sharifian (2011, 2017) have demonstrated that what is considered “literal” is often culturally contingent. Yu’s (1998) comparative study of Chinese and English metaphors, for example, reveals that metaphors like *ANGER IS HEAT* or *TIME IS SPACE* may appear universal but are realised differently across linguistic communities. Sharifian (2011, 2017), in turn, introduces the notion of cultural conceptualisations, arguing that metaphors are shaped by distributed cultural cognition and collective memory. His framework is particularly useful for analysing metaphors in African languages, where communal epistemologies and oral traditions play a central role in meaning-making. Furthermore, the static nature of source-target mappings in early CMT has been problematised. Critics contend that metaphor is frequently emergent, hybrid, and multimodal. Blending Theory and dynamic systems approaches have been proposed to account for the fluidity of metaphor in real-time discourse (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002). These developments suggest that metaphor is not just a mapping between two domains but a creative act of conceptual integration, often involving multiple inputs and contextual cues.

In light of these developments, CMT remains a robust yet evolving framework. For the study of Ewe metaphors about the mind, CMT offers a powerful lens through which to uncover how abstract cognitive processes are grounded in culturally specific bodily and social experiences. At the same time, integrating insights from Extended CMT and Cultural Linguistics will allow for the contextual, communal, and multimodal dimensions of metaphor in Ewe discourse. This approach will enrich the theoretical scope of the analysis and contribute to the diversification of metaphor theory by spotlighting African epistemologies and linguistic practices.

2.1 Cultural Linguistics

Cultural Linguistics provides a complementary lens to Conceptual Metaphor Theory by highlighting the role of cultural conceptualisations in shaping language use. Developed by Sharifian (2011, 2017), this framework argues that cognition is not only embodied but also distributed across members of a community, emerging from shared experiences, collective memory, and cultural schemas. Cultural conceptualisations are instantiated in

language through recurring metaphors, categories, and schemas that reflect communal ways of knowing.

Within this perspective, metaphors are also cultural resources that encode values, moral orientations, and social practices. Sharifian (2011, 2017) identifies several types of cultural schemas such as event schemas, role schemas, image schemas, and emotion schemas which provide the interpretive backdrop against which linguistic expressions are understood. For example, in Ewe discourse, metaphors of the mind may draw on communal notions of *susu* ‘mind’, moral reasoning, and ancestral knowledge, situating cognition within a broader cultural ecology rather than solely within an individual’s mental processes.

Applying Cultural Linguistics to the study of Ewe metaphors of the mind may highlight how collective epistemologies shape metaphorical constructions. By integrating Cultural Linguistics with CMT, the analysis will move beyond structural mappings to reveal how metaphors of the mind in Ewe are embedded in socially negotiated meanings and culturally distributed cognition. This theoretical addition strengthens the study by situating Ewe metaphors within both cognitive and cultural paradigms. It demonstrates that metaphor is simultaneously a tool of thought and a repository of cultural knowledge, affirming the intellectual depth of Ewe as a language that encodes communal models of cognition.

2.2 Literature Review

Within the CTM framework, metaphors allow speakers to conceptualise emotion, morality, time, and mental states by drawing on spatial, physical, and social domains. This cognitive perspective has inspired a growing body of research across languages and cultures, including African languages, where metaphor serves as a vital conduit for encoding cultural knowledge, moral values, and social commentary. One of such studies is Afreh (2015). She examined metaphorical and metonymic structure concerning the heart between Akan and English through the theoretical lenses of conceptual metaphor. She found no major differences in the way the Akan and English conceptualise the heart. Both languages conceptualise the heart as a living person, a living organism, an object of value, and a container. According to Afreh (2015), while there are no striking differences in the way English and Akan conceptualise the heart, there are slight differences in the language-specific conceptualisation attributed to cultural modes found in the two languages. It shows that there are universals as well as language specifics as regards metaphorical conceptions in human languages. While the present study is not a comparative one like Afreh’s (2015), it concerns something closely related to the human figurative heart – everyday expressions about the human mind. It could reveal similarities between conceptualisations of the mind and the heart among the Akan, English and Ewe languages, and pave a way for future studies regarding the two concepts.

Metaphors indeed permeate human interactions and conceptualisations even in naming practices. Wonkyi et al (2021) explored conceptual metaphors in sea creature naming strategy in the Fante dialect of the Akan language. They discover that there is the general metaphor SEA CREATURES ARE LAND ANIMALS/ENTITIES. Their study reveals the Fante cultural conceptualisation that every sea animal has its land entity or counterpart. While this mapping of sea creatures to land animals in Fante may not be exclusive to the Fante language, the study obviously highlights the role of metaphors as far as naming practices or strategies are concerned. Metaphors, therefore, have a place in onomastics, revealing the pervasive nature of metaphors and the human mind.

Another closely related Akan language to Fante is Nzema. Nzema also employs conceptual metaphors in everyday expressions. Yakub (2019) conducted a cognitive-conceptual metaphorical analysis of the animal proverbs in Nzema. According to Yakub's (2019:175) findings, "both domestic and non-domestic animals including birds, flies, insects, and reptiles are deployed in Nzema proverbs to advise people against undesirable attitudes like recalcitrance, procrastination...and all sorts of social vices." Yakub (2019) identifies such metaphorical mapping as sheep representing one who does what is right; putting medication on a dog's nostril to performing a difficult task; a cat to a leader; a mouse to a subordinate etc. Yakub's (2019) study revealed the role of animal metaphors in Nzema proverbs and shows that the use of metaphors could embrace just any topic. It is obvious that the animal metaphors start with the mapping of the physical to another physical or an abstract entity. The present paper's focus is on the unseen, the abstract human mind.

With regard to Ewe, scholars have done some exploration of the metaphorical richness embedded in Ewe everyday discourse. While not specifically on expressions about the mind, there are a handful of studies that unearth the cultural as well as metaphorical significance of some Ewe expressions. One of such is Ameka (2002) who explored Ewe cultural scripting of jealousy and its related emotions in Ewe. He argued that jealousy and its related emotions in Ewe are expressed through both the physical eye and a psychologised eye, the latter of which is cognitive. Ameka (2002) argued further that expressing jealousy and envy has culturally specific nuances. An example of such nuances is that among the Ewe one's eyes are said to be red when one is envious or jealous of someone. In Masaai, on another hand, one's eyes are black when one experiences envy. These differences can be further understood by the symbolic meaning of the colours associated with the expression of envy. The point is clear that culture constructs our day-to-day expressions about just any given topic. Moreover, the fact that such emotions as envy having locus of a particular body part is a way of concretising them in language as they are conceived in the mind. In a related study, Amenorvi (2024b) investigated metaphorical expressions of anger, fear, happiness, and love, identifying ontological metaphors that concretise emotions through imagery such as fire, clothing, and possession. These metaphors reflect embodied experience and cultural values, and highlight the

challenges of translation and cross-cultural interpretation. The study affirms that emotions in Ewe are not only felt; they are also linguistically and culturally constructed.

Like Ameka (2002), Sevor (2019) offered a linguistic analysis of Ewe metaphorical expressions in domains such as time, death, and sensation, demonstrating how embodied experience informs linguistic structure. Her work reveals that time is metaphorically framed as a possession, a container, and a moving object, while sensations such as pain and sleep are rendered as substances or agents. Amenorvi (2024a) extends this inquiry by examining cultural metaphors of death in some Ewe proverbs, identifying metaphorical domains such as household items, animals, and traditional ways of life. These metaphors reflect ancestral values, moral legacies, and spiritual beliefs, and affirm the role of metaphor in encoding historical memory and cultural continuity. In that study, Amenorvi (2024a) unearthed such mappings as DEATH IS A FARM TOOL, DEATH IS A WATCH, DEATH IS A CAT, DEATH IS A GOAT, and DEATH IS A SNAIL, revealing the multifaceted metaphorical conceptualisation of death among the Ewe.

Another study is that of Dor (2015) who explored conceptual metaphors and indigenous Ewe knowledge in the life and work of Hesino Vinoko Akpalu. Hesino Akpalu is to the Ewe what Shakespeare is to the English, a renowned poet and composer. One conceptual metaphor Dor (2015) identifies in Akpalu's composition stems from the very name Akpalu had given his songs. Akpalu called his songs *agoha* 'lit. velvet songs'. According to Dor (2015), this name is born from the Ewe indigenous knowledge of the *ago* 'velvet' cloth or material. The *ago* cloth is revered among the Ewe for its beauty, textual quality, monetary worth etc. It is conceived to be on top of the most expensive cloths and are worn by the rich and the important in the community around Akpalu's time. Akpalu, therefore, maps the value of the velvet cloth among the Ewe to his songs and thereby metaphorically transferring the *ago* 'velvet' qualities to his songs. This artistic use of a conceptual metaphor has made people perceive Akpalu's compositions as masterpieces. Even today, Akpalu's songs are used on special occasions, studied in schools and are explored in many scholarly studies for their social, linguistic, literary and historical values to the Ewe language and culture. Were his songs simply known by the Ewe word *hawo* for songs, perhaps Akpalu's compositions might not have received the attention they did then and do today. It shows that conceptual metaphors have their place as mental pictures in giving value or its lack thereof to things, ideas and concepts.

Together, these studies affirm the expressive and conceptual depth of Ewe, particularly in its use of metaphor to encode abstract domains such as death, emotion, and sensation. They also demonstrate the value of integrating Conceptual Metaphor Theory with Cultural Linguistics (Sharifian, 2011, 2017), the latter of which emphasises the role of cultural schemas and collective memory in shaping metaphorical thought. However, despite this growing body of research, Ewe metaphorical expressions about the human mind remain underexplored. While mental states are central to everyday interaction and

cultural interpretation, their metaphorical framing in Ewe has yet to be systematically examined.

The present study addresses this gap by investigating the types and nuances of metaphors employed in everyday Ewe expressions regarding the human mind. By examining both the structural patterns and the subtle cultural implications of these expressions, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how Ewe speakers linguistically construct and interpret mental states. It also affirms the importance of African languages in advancing metaphor theory and cultural linguistics and invites a rethinking of cognitive linguistic frameworks through the lens of indigenous epistemologies. Overall, this inquiry positions metaphor not only as a cognitive tool but also as a cultural resource, one that reflects the lived experience, moral imagination, and conceptual sophistication of Ewe-speaking communities.

3. Methodology

Data for this study were collected from a combination of naturalistic and elicited sources between November 2024 and March 2025 in the Aflao and Denu Ewe-speaking communities of the Volta Region, Ghana. Respondents were purposively selected to capture generational perspectives on language use. Twenty older generation native speakers of Ewe (11 men and 9 women), with whom the researcher had previously established relationships through earlier studies, participated. The oldest respondent was in his eighties and the youngest in her late sixties. This age group was chosen because older speakers are regarded as custodians of traditional expressions and cultural knowledge, making them particularly valuable for documenting metaphorical language about *susu* ‘the mind’. To complement these insights, younger speakers were also consulted informally to confirm the continued relevance and intelligibility of the expressions across generations.

Participants were asked to provide as many everyday Ewe expressions relating to *susu* ‘the mind’ as possible. Among the Ewe, such expressions typically revolve around words including *tame* ‘inside head’, *susu* ‘mind’, *tagbo* ‘near head’, *nugomesese* ‘understanding’, and *nunya* ‘knowledge/wisdom’. Collected data were verified by several other native speakers and cross-checked with five Ewe language experts and scholars to ensure accuracy.

Metaphorical expressions were identified and analysed using the three-stage procedure proposed by Group (2007) and extended by Steen (2011), namely, lexical identification, determining key linguistic expressions likely to be metaphorical; source-target mapping, establishing underlying conceptual metaphors; and cultural interpretation, situating metaphors within Ewe cultural schemas such as the interplay between heart and mind, communal wisdom, and moral reasoning.

To ensure interpretive rigour, inter-rater reliability was addressed through a structured process. Prior to coding, the language experts participated in a calibration exercise to align their understanding of the coding scheme. A subset of data was

independently coded and then compared, with discrepancies discussed until consensus was reached. Agreement levels were monitored through percentage agreement, thereby ensuring consistency in the categorisation and interpretation of metaphors. Selected participants were further consulted to confirm the semantic and cultural plausibility of the identified metaphors. Finally, the results are contextualised within broader typologies of metaphor in Ewe (Ameka, 2002; Amenorvi, 2024a, 2024b; Sevor, 2019).

4. Findings

The analysis of everyday Ewe expressions about the human mind revealed a rich inventory of metaphorical constructions. In total, 19 distinct metaphor types were identified, reflecting both ontological and orientational mappings. These metaphors provide insight into how Ewe speakers conceptualise cognition as a culturally embedded phenomenon. The identified metaphor types are as follows:

Orientalional metaphors

1. THE MIND IS DISTANCE
2. THE MIND IS FRONT/BACK
3. THE MIND IS DEPTH

Ontological metaphors

4. THE MIND IS TEMPERATURE
5. THE MIND IS LIFE/DEATH
6. THE MIND IS WEIGHT
7. THE MIND IS PURITY/DIRT
8. THE MIND IS AGE
9. THE MIND IS LIGHT/DARKNESS
10. THE MIND IS AWAKE/ASLEEP
11. THE MIND IS TURBULENCE/CALM
12. THE MIND IS A SUBSTANCE TO HAVE OR NOT
13. THE MIND IS SIZE
14. THE MIND IS MARRIAGE/DIVORCE
15. THE MIND IS SHARPNESS
16. THE MIND IS SPEED
17. THE MIND IS AN AMOUNT
18. THE MIND IS A DOOR
19. THE MIND IS SOMETHING SPOILT

These metaphors demonstrate that the Ewe conceptualisation of the mind is multidimensional, drawing on physical properties (distance, depth, weight), natural phenomena (temperature, turbulence), moral and social evaluations (purity/dirt, age, light/darkness), and states of consciousness (awake/asleep, life/death). Collectively, they highlight the cultural schemas by which cognition is understood, linking mental processes

to communal values such as wisdom, moral responsibility, and social maturity. By accentuating these findings, the study affirms that metaphors of the mind in Ewe are more than random linguistic embellishments; they constitute systematic cultural conceptualisations encoding indigenous epistemologies and enrich global metaphor theory.

5. Discussion of Findings

This section discusses the types of Ewe mind metaphors identified in this study, starting with the orientational ones followed by the ontological ones. **Table 1** presents a set of Ewe orientational mind metaphors.

Table 1: Some Ewe orientational metaphors about the mind

Type of Metaphor	Example
1. THE MIND IS DISTANCE	<i>Ame tsitsi-a yi ta-me vii.</i> person old-DEF go head-inside IDEO (lit. The old man has gone far into his head.) <i>E-fe susu dzo.</i> 3SG-POSS mind leave (lit. His mind is gone.)
2. THE MIND IS FRONT/BACK	<i>Me-bu-a ta-me yi ŋgo o.</i> NEG-think-HAB head-inside go front NEG (lit. He does not think go front) <i>E-tsi megbe le susu me.</i> 3SG-remain back at mind POST (lit. He remains at the back in his mind.)
3. THE MIND IS DEPTH	<i>Nugɔmesese deto hiã le agbe-me.</i> understanding deep need at life-inside (Deep understanding is needed in life.) <i>Agbetɔ fe ta-me goglo ŋutɔ.</i> human POSS head-inside deep very (The inside of the human head is very deep.)

Example 1 presents an orientational metaphor of distance where an old man is said to have gone far into his mind. The expression is similar to the English expression of being lost in one's thoughts. The Ewe ideophone *vii* is used to describe someone or something so far away that the person's figure is either blur or cannot be seen at all. That in mind, the expression relates the process of thinking to a journey of some distance, and the farther one goes, the deeper one's thoughts become. The second part of Example 1 presents another metaphor of distance where one's mind is said to be gone. This Ewe expression is equivalent to saying that one is absentminded, which itself has some idea of the mind not being with one.

Another orientational metaphor discovered among the Ewe is the front/back metaphor. Here one's mind is said to be either front (forward thinking) or back (backward thinking). In Example 2, one is said not to think *yi ngɔ* 'lit. go front/forward,' which means one does not have foresight. The reverse in Example 2b *Etsi megbe le susume* 'lit He/She remains at the back in his/her mind' presents the case of being 'at the back' in the mind. In Ewe, the expression *tsi megbe* can also mean to be late. Given that, the mind metaphor of one being late personifies the mind as someone whose appointment one misses by being late, ending in the lack of intelligence or wisdom as a consequence.

The third type of orientational metaphor identified from data is the metaphor of depth. Here, an individual's mind or understanding is considered deep or shallow, the former depicting one with insight and the latter one lacking insight. One interesting thing about this metaphor of depth is that data has revealed two types of depths with regard to the mind. One is *deto* 'lit has reached depth' and the other *goglo* 'very very deep'. *Goglo* is deeper than *deto*. When a pit is *deto* in Ewe it is deep but *goglo* goes further in depth than *deto*. As regards the mind, one whose mind *deto* has deep understanding. On the other hand, the one whose mind *goglo* is considered wicked or cruel. Wickedness or cruelty is, therefore, culturally constructed as a mental process with unreachable depth. *Goglo* is also used to describe such depths as the depth of the sea or water bodies among the Ewe. Drawing from that, if one's mind is compared to the depths of the sea or other water bodies, it means that the person is atrociously cruel.

5.1 Ewe ontological metaphors of the mind

Of the nineteen metaphors of the mind identified in the data, sixteen are ontological in nature. This distribution suggests that Ewe conceptualisations of the mind rely more heavily on ontological metaphors than on orientational ones, highlighting a tendency to frame mental processes in terms of entities, states, and relationships rather than spatial orientation. Let us begin with items on **Table 2** in which the mind is equated with temperature, life/death and weight.

Table 2: The mind as metaphors of temperature, depth, life/death, and weight

Type of Metaphor	Example
4. THE MIND IS TEMPERATURE	i. <i>Nye susu-me xɔ dzo.</i> 1SG mind-inside receive fire. (lit. The inside of my mind is hot.) ii. <i>Susu-me fa n-ε abe avu fe ɲɔti nu ene.</i> mind-inside cold DAT-3SG as dog POSS nose mouth as (lit. The inside of his mind is as cold as a dog's nose.)
5. THE MIND IS LIFE/DEATH	i. <i>Ta-gbɔ ku n-ε.</i> head-near die DAT-3SG (lit. His head is dead.) ii. <i>Susu gbagbe aɖe-e nye ma.</i> mind living some-FOC COP DIST (lit. That is some living mind.)
6. THE MIND IS WEIGHT	i. <i>Nye susu-me le hóyá.</i> 1SG mind-inside at IDEO (The inside of my mind is light.) ii. <i>Ɖevi-e gake e-fe susu kpe.</i> child-FOC but 3SG-POSS mind heavy (He is a child but his mind is heavy.)

Table 2 presents ontological metaphors of temperature, life/death and weight. Example 4i literally translates “The inside of my mind is hot.” Pragmatically, it means that one has a lot on their mind or that one is disturbed by many thoughts. The metaphoric heat is the many thoughts one is processing. Example 4ii contrasts Example 4i in that the metaphor now refers to the opposite of heat – coldness. Here the inside of one’s mind is said to be as

cold as a dog’s nose. To emphasise how cold a person’s mind is, a comparison is drawn against a dog’s nose. This comparison between the human mind and a dog’s nose is so pervasive among the Ewe that the researcher decided to explore whether the coldness assigned to a dog’s nose goes beyond folklore. The notion that a dog’s nose is cold is not merely anecdotal but supported by scientific evidence. Studies have shown that the hairless tip of a dog’s nose is significantly cooler than that of herbivores, a trait linked to enhanced thermal sensitivity (Bálint et al., 2020). This adaptation allows dogs to detect weak heat sources, such as warm-bodied prey, from a distance, suggesting a functional role beyond olfaction (Brown, 2020; Bálint et al., 2020). Some older Ewe native speakers argue that the comparison might have been born from the observation that a dog’s nose is always moist, suggesting that it must be cold. The Ewe mind metaphor “cold as a dog’s nose”, therefore, transcends folklore to reveal a nuanced interplay between cultural perception and biological function. While traditional usage may evoke emotional detachment or cognitive stillness, scientific insights into canine thermoreception complicate this reading, suggesting that “cold” may equally signal heightened sensitivity and alertness. Thus, the metaphor operates not only as a descriptor of mental inactivity but also as a site of conceptual tension, where cultural imagination and empirical reality converge to enrich our understanding of embodied cognition.

The cold mind metaphor shares the same meaning of lack of intelligence with Example 5i, where one’s head is said to be dead, equating the human mind to a living thing whose death renders it lifeless and its lacking intelligence thereof. Example 5ii presents the direct opposite of the human mind as living contrasting its state of being dead. *Susu gbagbe* literally means “living mind”. Its pragmatic meaning in Ewe is a brilliant idea or an excellent thought.

Following the metaphor of life/death is the metaphor of weight. This ontological metaphor considers the mind as a substantial entity possessing or lacking weight. One’s mind is either heavy or light. Example 6i presents the mind as being *hoya*, an Ewe ideophone used to describe something very light. For Example, a balloon or paper can be said to be *hoya*, because of its almost insignificant weight. If one’s mind is *hoya*, it means the one does not think deeply or act maturely. On the other hand, as shown in Example 6ii, if one’s mind *kpè* ‘heavy’, it means one thinks or acts maturely.

Table 3 presents another group of ontological Ewe mind metaphors, namely metaphors of purity/dirt, age, light/darkness and wake/sleep.

Table 3: The mind as metaphors of purity/dirt, age, light/darkness, wake/sleep

Type of Metaphor	Example
7. THE MIND IS PURITY/DIRT	<i>i. Dekakpui-a fe susu-me kɔ.</i> young.man-DEF POSS mind-inside neat (lit. The inside of the young man’s mind is neat.)

	ii. <i>Egbe viwo fe susu-me foḍi</i>, today child-PL POSS mind-inside dirty <i>gbegblẽ nya-wo ko-e le wo-si.</i> spoilt matter-PL only-FOC at 3PL-hand (lit. The mind of today's children are dirty; all they have are spoilt words,)
8. THE MIND IS AGE	i. <i>E-tsi le susu-me.</i> 3SG-old at mind-inside (lit. He is old inside his mind.) ii. <i>Ḍevi susu le e-si.</i> child mind at 3SG-hand (lit. He has a child's mind.)
9. THE MIND IS LIGHT/DARKNESS	<i>Gbevu ma-wo fe susu-me do.viviti.</i> hooligam DIST-PL POSS mind-inside dark (Inside the minds of those hooligans is dark.) <i>E-fe susu-me kɔ.</i> 3SG-POSS mind-inside neat (lit. The inside of his/her mind is neat.)
10. THE MIND IS AWAKE/ASLEEP	i. <i>Kofi fe susu dɔ-alɔ̃.</i> POSS mind sleep (Kofi's mind is asleep.) ii. <i>E-fe susu le ɲu.</i> 3SG-POSS mind at awake (His mind is awake.)

Example 7 presents two illustrations to demonstrate the metaphor of purity about the mind. Examples 7i and 7ii contrast 'neatness' and 'uncleanliness' of the mind. Example 7i literally means that spoilt words make the minds of today's children dirty. Generally, among the Ewe, when one's mind is said to be *kɔ* 'neat', it means one has positive thoughts. On

the other hand, when one's mind is *fodi* 'dirty', the person's mind has negative thoughts of whatever type, immorality being just one of such thoughts as Example 7ii illustrates. Example 8 presents the mind metaphor of age, contrasting being old in the mind with having a child's mind. Being old in the mind as in Example 9i suggests that one possesses wisdom and discernment and acts accordingly. On the other hand, having a child's mind or being young in the mind is similar to one described as being childish in English.

Example 9 is a metaphor of light compared with darkness. The example literally means that the minds of the hooligans in question is dark. When one's mind is said to *do viviti* 'is dark', it is the same as saying one's mind is dirty as we have discussed earlier. Another type of ontological metaphor in the data is that of awake/asleep. Here a person's mind is said to be awake or asleep, placing the consciousness of being awake before the unconsciousness of being asleep. Example 10i literally means Kofi's mind is asleep while 10ii says his mind is awake. A sleeping mind among the Ewe suggests lack of intelligence and not being able to respond reasonably to cognitive tasks as one normally would according to one's age. That way, if a pupil's mind is asleep (*do alɔ*), that pupil is not able to do well in school. On the other hand, if one's mind is awake (*le ɲu*), it means one's mind is not asleep in every sense of the opposite of Example 10i; the two examples are direct opposites.

Table 4 presents mind metaphors of turbulence /calm, marriage/divorce, have/have not, and size.

Table 4: The mind as metaphors of turbulence/calm, position, have/have not, size, marriage/divorce

Type of Metaphor	Example
11. THE MIND IS TURBULENCE/CALM	i. <i>Nye susu-me dze kɔ anyi.</i> 1SG mind-inside land neck down (The inside of my mind is calm.) ii. <i>Nye susu-me le klaklakla.</i> 1SG mind-inside at IDEO (The inside of my mind is klaklakla.)
12. THE MIND IS A SUBSTANCE (have/not have)	i. <i>E-gble nunya/susu de afe.</i> 3SG-leave wisdom/mind at house (He has left wisdom at home.) ii. <i>Nunya le e-si.</i> wisdom at 3SG-hand (He has wisdom.) iii. <i>Susu me-le e-si o.</i>

	mind NEG-AT 3SG-hand NEG (He does not have a mind.)
13. THE MIND IS SIZE	i. <i>Nunya adido-e, asi me-tu-n-ε o.</i> knowledge baobab-FOC hand NEG-meet-DAT-3SG NEG (Wisdom is a baobab, the arm cannot embrace it.) ii. <i>E-fe susu lolo/hoe</i> 3SG-POSS mind big/small. (His mind is big/small.)
14. THE MIND IS MARRIAGE/DIVORCE	i. <i>Nugomesese/nunya gbe Kudzo</i> Understanding/wisdom divorce <i>ta devi nu ko wò-wò-na</i> CONJ child thing only 3SG-do-HAB (Understanding/wisdom has divorced Kudzo, so he only does childish things.)

Examples 11i and 11ii contrast one's mind being calm with the other where the mind makes the ideophonic sound *klaklakla*. The metaphor of calmness presents a soundless mind while a disturbed mind produces the *klaklakla* sound. This same ideophone is used among the Ewe to describe a sound that an analogic wall clock makes, what is commonly referred to in English as tick-tock. In effect if one's mind does not make this sound, it means that one is not burdened with many thoughts. On the other hand, when one's mind is *klaklakla*, it means one has many thoughts to deal with.

Another mind metaphor found in the data is the **have** or **have-not** metaphor where the mind is conceived as a substantial thing one can have or not have. Examples 12i to 12iii illustrate this conception. Example 12i literally translates "He has left his mind/wisdom at home" to mean that the person does not act wisely. Example 12iii speaks to the idea that one does not have wisdom in their hand. The mind is, therefore, conceived as something substantial to be located in the hand. Example 13i is a popular Ewe proverb about the mind. Here is the metaphor of size where knowledge is compared with a baobab tree that no one could embrace. This metaphor emphasises the vastness of knowledge and the impossibility of one person to have it all.

Example 14 presents the mind metaphor of marriage/divorce. The Ewe expression *Nugomesese/nunya gbe Kudzo ta devi nu ko wòwona* conveys the idea that understanding or wisdom has divorced Kudzo, leaving him to act only in the manner of a child. The verb *gbe* ‘to divorce’ is central here, as it frames the relationship between a person and wisdom in terms of a marital union that can be dissolved. Wisdom is personified as a partner who once shared a bond with Kudzo but has now withdrawn, and the result of this separation is a regression in his behaviour. The metaphor dramatises the absence of wisdom by presenting it not as a simple lack but as an active rupture, a decisive break that carries consequences. Kudzo’s actions, described as those of a child, highlight the immaturity and irrationality that follow when wisdom is no longer one’s spouse, metaphorically speaking. In this way, the metaphor constructs cognition as a relational process; wisdom can join with a person to stabilise and guide them, or it can depart, leaving them diminished and incapable of mature judgment.

Let us now turn to the final table of this discussion to discuss the rest of the Ewe mind metaphors unearthed in this study. On **Table 5** are metaphors of sharpness, speed, amount and door.

Table 5: The mind as metaphors of sharpness/bluntness, speed, amount, and door

Type of Metaphor	Example
15. THE MIND IS SOMETHING SHARP/BLUNT	i. <i>E-fe ta-gbɔ/susu qa.</i> 3SG-POSS head-near/mind sharp (His head/mind is sharp.) ii. <i>Devi ma yi tsitsi-e,</i> child DIST cutlass blunt-FOC <i>me-se-na nu gome o.</i> NEG-hear-HAB thing under NEG (That child is a blunt cutlass; he does not have understanding.)
16. THE MIND IS SOMETHING WITH OR WITHOUT SPEED	<i>Efe susu de-able.</i> 3SG-POSS mind walk.fast (His minds walks fast.)
17. THE MIND IS SOMETHING OF AMOUNT	<i>Nye susu sɔgbɔ, mega de fu na-m o.</i> 1SG mind many NEG-REP remove worry DAT-1SG NEG (My mind is many, don’t worry me.)

18. THE MIND IS A DOOR	i. <i>Kofi fe susu-me vu.</i> POSS mind-inside open (The inside of Kofi's mind is open.) ii. <i>E-fe ta-me do vɔ.</i> 3SG-POSS head-inside close door. (The inside of his mind has closed door.)
19. THE MIND IS SOMETHING SPOILT	i. <i>E-fe tagbɔ gblẽ; ewi</i> 3SG-POSS head spoil marijuana <i>nono-a va glo.</i> smoking-DEF come too.much (His head is spoilt; too much smoking of marijuana.) ii. <i>Kofi wu aɖavato,</i> more.than mad.person <i>ye me susu-me fafã.</i> 3SG POSS mind-inside rotten (Kofi is more than a mad person; the inside of his mind is rotten.)

Example 15i and 15ii present the mind as a sharp object. This expression is used to show that an individual is witty or clever. But as to exactly what the comparison is drawn to, Example 14ii provides the answer – a cutlass. In that metaphor, a sharp cutlass symbolises intelligence while a blunt one obviously represents lack of intelligence. There is also the mind metaphor of speed as shown in Example 16 where the mind is said to literally work fast, expressing the idea of speed of thought. Just as a person walking fast reaches a destination early or responds to a need in time, if one's mind 'walks fast' one could solve cognitive tasks very quickly. The mind is also conceived as something that can be large in number or not. Example 17 presents the mind as *sɔgbɔ* 'many/much'. The Ewe adjective *sɔgbɔ* is used for both count and non-count nouns. That way money can be *sɔgbɔ* 'much' while children can be *sɔgbɔ* 'many', both depicting amount or number. When the mind *sɔgbɔ*, therefore, one has a lot to think about.

Example 18i which presents Kofi's mind as being open is equivalent to the English expression of being openminded. Example 18ii projects the mind as a closed door. However, the meaning does not correspond to the opposite of the English *open-mindedness*. This nuance and others are discussed in the following section. The final item on Table 5 is

Example 19, where the mind is compared to something spoilt or rotten. Insanity and related mental problem are expressed in Ewe this way. Example 18i is taken from a discussion where a man is said to be behaving abnormally from his excessive use of marijuana. In Example 18ii, someone's mind is said to be rotten because he is acting like a mad person.

6. Some Peculiarities about the Ewe Mind Metaphors

Two nuances were identified in the Ewe mind metaphor data. First is that some of the metaphors, whether orientational or ontological, have direct opposite forms with equally direct opposite meanings. Examples are the front/back, life/death, purity/dirt and awake/sleep metaphors. If one's mind *yi ɲɔ* 'lit. go forward', it means the one has foresight. The direct opposite of *ɲɔ* 'front' is *megbe* 'back'. That way, if one's mind *tsi megbe* 'lit. remain back', that individual lacks foresight. Like the front/back mind metaphor, the purity/dirt ones are said as direct opposites with equally direct opposite meanings. In that regard, if one's mind *ko* 'clean', one's mind one has clean thoughts; on the other hand, if one's mind is said to be *fodi* 'dirty', one has unclean, immoral or other negative thoughts. Even the English equivalents of these expressions in themselves are metaphorical, reiterating Johnson and Lakoff (1980) that metaphors permeate all spheres of everyday discussions including those about the human mind.

The life/death Ewe mind metaphors also present opposite metaphors with corresponding opposite meanings. If one's mind is *gbagbe* 'alive', the one has brilliant ideas. On the other hand, if one's mind is said to be *ku* 'dead', the one lacks common sense, a direct opposite to a brilliant idea. These types of metaphors marking opposites with corresponding ones opposite in meaning are not farfetched as it is only natural that opposites have contrasting meanings. The next type of metaphors presents a more interesting nuance.

An interesting peculiarity of the Ewe mind metaphors are those that appear as direct opposites but not with opposite meanings. Examples are the open/close and hot/cold mind metaphors. The open/close metaphor is said in relation to a door. One's mind can be said to be *vu* 'open' and another's *do vo* 'close door'. The former corresponds to the English way of saying that one possesses an open mind. Among the Ewe, if one's *susu* 'mind' *do vo* 'close door', this is not lack of an open mind but that one is wicked or cruel. The same goes for the hot/cold mind metaphors in Ewe. When one's mind is said to *xɔ dzo* 'lit. receive/is hot', it means one is under mental stress out of a lot of thinking. On the other hand, when's one's mind is said to *fa* 'cold'; it does not mean that one is not under mental stress. It actually means one lacks intelligence. These metaphorical reversals reveal a culturally embedded logic where in some cases semantic opposition does not necessarily equate to conceptual contrast. In some Ewe cognition, therefore, metaphor encodes moral and intellectual judgments that defy surface-level binaries.

7. Cultural Significance of Ewe Mind Metaphors

The metaphors of the mind identified in this study, while reflecting patterns that may be found across languages, are deeply inflected by cultural nuances that shape their meaning

and resonance. Conceptual Metaphor Theory demonstrates that metaphors are grounded in embodied experience, and many of the Ewe metaphors such as those of distance, depth, temperature, and turbulence, draw on physical domains that are widely accessible to human cognition. However, Cultural Linguistics reminds us that metaphors are not only cognitive mappings but also cultural conceptualisations, shaped by communal schemas, collective memory, and social practices (Sharifian, 2011, 2017). In this sense, the Ewe metaphors of the mind illustrate how cognition is linguistically constructed through culturally specific models.

For instance, metaphors such as *THE MIND IS MARRIAGE/DIVORCE* or *THE MIND IS AGE* extend beyond universal embodied experiences to encode culturally salient institutions and values. While the general idea of “losing wisdom” or “becoming immature” may be cross-linguistically familiar, the Ewe framing through divorce or childhood highlights relational and social dimensions of cognition. Similarly, metaphors of purity/dirt and light/darkness not only describe mental clarity or confusion but also resonate with moral schemas that are culturally distributed. These examples demonstrate that metaphors of the mind are simultaneously universal in their reliance on embodied domains and culturally specific in their instantiation through local institutions, values, and moral orientations. The cultural significance of these metaphors lies in their ability to situate cognition within a broader social and moral space. They reveal that the Ewe mind is not conceptualised as an isolated faculty but as a relational and evaluative phenomenon, one that is negotiated through communal values and cultural schemas. This supports the claim in Cultural Linguistics that metaphors are repositories of cultural knowledge, encoding collective ways of knowing and moral imagination.

8. Conclusion

This study has shown that Ewe expressions about the human mind are richly metaphorical, drawing on a wide spectrum of orientational, experiential, and existential domains to encode cognitive and emotional states. The identification of nineteen metaphor types, including spatial oppositions such as front/back and thermal oppositions of heat/cold reveal a coherent metaphorical logic that is both linguistically systematic and culturally embedded. These metaphors shape conceptual frameworks, reflect indigenous epistemologies, and offer insight into how mental states are socially constructed and linguistically negotiated within Ewe-speaking communities.

The findings affirm that metaphors in Ewe are cognitive tools that organise experience and mediate understanding. The metaphors of distance, temperature, light, turbulence, and possession, among others, point to a dynamic interplay between physical experience and abstract thought, revealing that the Ewe language encodes mental states through embodied and culturally resonant schemas. These metaphorical conceptualisations provide a window into the Ewe worldview, where sanity and insanity are not binary absolutes but spatially and experientially situated conditions. This study contributes to the growing body of African cognitive linguistics and challenges the dominance of Euro-

American models in metaphor theory. It shows the need for culturally grounded approaches that recognise the diversity of metaphorical thought across languages and societies. Moreover, the study invites further comparative research across African languages, particularly in exploring how metaphor intersects with mental health discourse, social norms, and indigenous knowledge systems.

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