

THE CONCEPTUALIZATION OF AZU 'BACK' IN IGBO

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cm.egenti@unizik.edu.ng**Abstract**

The lexical item azu 'back' in Igbo, a West Benue-Congo branch of Niger Congo language family in West Africa, has the concrete meaning 'back' in Igbo which has been confirmed to occur with several lexical items. This paper examines the various groupings of azu such as azu as part of human body, azu in terms of location in time, and azu in terms of space. There is a conceptual metaphor involving a mapping between this concrete meaning and these other domains. Speakers of the language use the HUMAN BODY as their source domain to conceptualize the target domains following their anthropocentric experiences of the world. The data for the study was elicited from everyday conversations, and from a concordance of the keyword drawn from self-created corpora consisting of fictional, popular periodicals and religious Igbo texts. Using the LancsBox corpus tool to extract the keyword azu, the Conceptual Metaphor Approach was adopted in the data analysis. The findings of the study show that azu, apart from its concrete and idiomatic meanings 'back', can also be conceptualized metaphorically in Igbo. The metaphorical extensions of azu are found within the domain of space and time in which the domain of space is more prominent. For instance, the source domain azu can be mapped unto the target domains of 'behaviour', 'academics', 'competition', 'distance' such as the domain mapping of SPACE and TIME in terms of our knowledge of the position of azu 'back' in the human body, in order to express progression or retrogression, winning or losing a contest or to denote time. The conclusion is that the use of corpora reveals the various nuances of meanings and conceptualization of azu, which is very useful for language teaching and learning, especially with regard to expression that can only be disambiguated in context.

1. Introduction

Language is rich in metaphor. Conceptual metaphors are manifested by dozens of linguistic expressions including words and lexical items. Linguistic expression of a conceptual metaphor can be highly conventional or novel linguistic exploitation of the underlying conceptual metaphorical system. Metaphor is chiefly cognitive and demonstrates how humans try to understand difficult, abstract or less delineated concepts in terms of familiar ideas (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). Metaphoricity is central to how the Igbo and other humans conceptualize or try to understand their natural and social worlds. Kövecses (2010) argues that conceptual metaphor underlies every aspect of human life. Studies on meaning interpretation with regard to the figurative, idiomatic and metaphorical usages by Igbo Scholars (Kamalu, 2020, Emeka-Nwobia, 2019, Egenti, 2018; Okoye & Mmadike, 2016; Asonye & Emma-Asonye, 2013) from various perspectives and approaches attest to the fact that Igbo language is rich in metaphor, and meaning in the language can be construed from social and cultural experiences. Just like Igbo speakers also use their bodily experiences as vehicles through which they conceptualize and concretize their world, the concept of *azu* 'back' has varieties of usages in Igbo in everyday discourse which is known to and understood by a native speaker of the language. The concept of *azu* 'back' is conceptualized in various ways in the language. Sometimes, the meaning of *azu* in some dialects of Igbo is conceptualized as referring to both the past and/or future events, which is why this study is motivated, in addition to the interesting variety of uses of the lexical item by the native speakers. This paper therefore explores the different conceptualizations of *azu* such as the literal, metaphorical and idiomatic uses, and also tries to explain them using the conceptual metaphor approach. The data for the study were elicited from everyday conversations, and from a concordance of the keyword drawn from sixteen Igbo novels and interview of respondents between the ages of 50 – 70 years in order to obtain deeper usages of *azu* among old people.

Igbo is a tone language, spoken in Nigeria, West Africa, which belongs to the West Benue-Congo phylum, a major subdivision of the Niger-Congo language family. It is spoken predominantly in the south eastern geo-political zone of Nigeria precisely; Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo states, and

spoken as a major language in some parts of Delta and River states in the south-south geo-political zone. There are also pockets of Igbo speaking communities in Benue, Cross River and Akwa Ibom States (Emenanjo, 2015). Since Igbo is the tone language, the tone marking convention adopted for this study is that of Green and Igwe's (1963) which leaves the high tone ['] unmarked, but marks the low tone and the down-stepped tone with the grave accent [˘] and macron [-] respectively. The rest of the sections is structured as follows: section two discusses the concept of metaphor and studies in Igbo lexical semantics, while section three forms the data presentation and analysis, the last section summarizes and concludes the paper.

2. A Brief Explication of Conceptual Metaphor

The theory undertaken in the analysis of this paper is the conceptual metaphor theory first proposed by Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) book: *Metaphors we live By*. Evans (2019:300) notes that the Conceptual Metaphor theory is part of the Cognitive Linguistics enterprise (alongside Langacker's (1987, 1991) theory of Cognitive Grammar, and Leonard Talmy's (2018) lectures on Cognitive Semantics which has contributed to the development of cognitive linguistics. Evans (2019: 300) explains that the basic premise of Conceptual Metaphor theory is that figurative language- especially metaphor, but also other types such as metonymy - is not simply a stylistic feature of language; rather, thought itself is fundamentally metaphoric in nature.

Cognitive linguistics posits that our understanding of abstract concepts is often grounded in more concrete, embodied experiences. This idea is encapsulated in the notion of cognitive domains. Kövecses (2010) explains a conceptual domain as any coherent organization of experience. A cognitive domain refers to a mental space or conceptual category that encompasses a set of related experiences, knowledge, and associations. These domains are fundamental to how we structure and make sense of our experiences and the world around us. There are different kinds of cognitive domains. However, the foundation of our human experience is inextricably linked to our understanding of space and time. Consequently, the domains of space and time constitute the primary conceptual domains.

Space is the framework within which we perceive and organize our surroundings. It provides the context for our physical existence and the relationship between objects and entities. Our perception of space is shaped by our sensory experiences, including vision, touch, and proprioception (awareness of our body's position in space). Spatial perception allows us to navigate our environment, interact with objects, and understand spatial relationships such as proximity, distance, and direction. Different cultures and individuals may have varying perceptions and interpretations of space, influenced by factors such as cultural norms, personal experiences, and environmental factors.

On the other hand, time is the dimension through which we perceive the passage of events and sequences of change. It provides the framework for organizing our experiences and memories. Our perception of time is subjective and influenced by factors such as attention, memory, and cultural context. Time perception allows us to anticipate future events, remember past experiences, and understand temporal relationships such as duration, sequence, and rhythm. Time is experienced differently in different cultures and contexts, with variations in concepts of punctuality, time management, and the pace of life. Together, our experiences of space and time shape our understanding of reality and inform our interactions with the world. They provide the foundation for our cognitive processes, including perception, memory, and reasoning, and play a crucial role in how we navigate our physical and social environments.

Cognitive linguistics theories emphasise the centrality of our embodiment to the formation of our human experiences. This means that cognition and experience are fundamentally grounded in the body and its interactions with the environment. It suggests that our perceptions, thoughts, emotions, and actions are shaped by our bodily experiences and sensorimotor interactions with the world. Being that the term *azu* 'back' is a body part term, it can be seen as basic and a source for meaning extensions.

It is important to note that conceptual structure is organized by cross-domain mappings which give rise to conceptual metaphors, that is correspondences between conceptual domains. Conceptual metaphor theory proposes that one often understands abstract concepts by mapping them onto more concrete,

embodied domains. This process is known as cross-domain mapping. Kovesces explains that the conceptual domain from which we draw metaphorical expressions to understand another conceptual domain is called the source domain, while the conceptual domain that is understood is the target domain. For instance, one can talk about QUANTITY in terms of VERTICAL ELEVATION, as in *she got a really high mark in the test*, where *high* relates not literally to physical height, but to a good mark. According to Conceptual Metaphor theory, this is because the conceptual domain QUANTITY is conventionally structured and therefore understood in terms of the conceptual domain VERTICAL ELEVATION. Lakoff & Johnson (1980) aver that there is a conventional link at the conceptual level between the domain of LOVE, which is the **target** (the domain being described) and the domain of JOURNEY, which is the **source** (the domain in terms of which the target is described). This association is called **CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR**. What makes it a metaphor according to the authors is the conventional association of one domain with another. What makes it conceptual (rather than linguistic) is that the motivation for the metaphor resides at the level of **conceptual domains**. That is, we not only speak in metaphorical terms but think in metaphorical sense. There are a number of distinct roles that populate the source and target domains according to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), for example, JOURNEYS include TRAVELLERS, A MEANS OF TRANSPORT, ROUTE, OBSTACLES along the route etc. Similarly, the target domain LOVE RELATIONSHIPS LOVERS, EVENTS IN THE RELATIONSHIP etc. The metaphor works by mapping roles from the SOURCE unto the TARGET: LOVERS become TRAVELLERS (We're at crossroads), who travel by a particular MEANS OF TRANSPORT (We're spinning our wheels), proceeding along a particular ROUTE (*our relationship went off course*), impeded by obstacles (*our marriage is on the rocks*). Since one important feature of conceptual metaphor is meaning extension, i.e metaphor can give rise to new meaning, we shall use these conceptual mappings in delineating the understanding of *azu* 'back' in Igbo.

2.1 On Lexical Semantics and Conceptualization of Meaning in Igbo

There are a number of studies in Igbo lexical semantics which adopted the cognitive linguistic approach. Such studies include: Uchekukwu, 2011; Mbah & Edeoga, 2012; Ogbonna, 2013; Obitube, 2014; Ifeagwazi, 2014; Okeke, 2015; Okoye and Mmadike, 2016; Kamalu, 2020. However, most of the studies focused on the verb since Igbo is a verb centered language. We shall discuss some of these studies.

Uchekukwu (2011) in his study of Igbo verb from the cognitive linguistics perspective, examines the semantics of the verb root *tú* 'throw' using the image schema approach. He argues that the verb root can realize different meanings in both compound and verbal complex structures through the source-path-goal image schema. This is against Nwachukwu's (1987:83) claims that "the greater the number of verbal complexes formed with a verb root, the more practically meaningless the verb root becomes". Uchekukwu therefore, concludes that the Igbo verb is neither empty nor does it become practically meaningless due to an increase in the number of verbal complexes formed with it. Instead, the Igbo verb has meanings that arise from specific image schemata and their metaphorical and metonymic extensions.

Using a similar approach to Uchekukwu, Mbah & Edeoga (2012) also undertake the study of the semantics of the verb *Sè* 'draw'. They adopt the image schema of containment, path and force schema in relation to metaphor in their examination of some selected *sè* - based constructions/sentences both in compound and complex verb structures. Their studies reveal that *sè* can be adequately glossed as 'draw, make, lightening, cause, quarrel, booked, stress, snap, float, etc'. Also, the study reveals that meaning is conceptualized and that image schemas can be used metaphorically to extend meanings of structures or sentences. Here, because the approach was image schema, the conceptual domains were not discussed. Similarly, Ifeagwazi (2014) undertakes a cognitive semantic analysis of the verb *bà* 'enter', using metonymy and image schema of containment, path and force which form the basis of analysis for conceptualizing the *ba* based Igbo constructions. The study intends to find out whether the analysis of the verb will help to determine whether it is inherently transitive. The findings of the study reveal that the verb *ba* translates as 'enter', but its semantic import changes with the appropriate complements which can also be translated or glossed as 'soak, fight, initiate, fit, valuable, accommodate and branch off' in various constructions. The study claims that since *ba* 'enter' can be classified as an inherent complement verb, every use of *ba*, in all the examples translates to 'enter' but the complement it takes

changes the semantic import. According to her, this is why it is classified as an inherent complement verb. Also, since *ba* does not always take an object complement, it is therefore not inherently transitive. Two examples showing the different structures (compound and complex) using metonymy to show the meaning extensions (Ifeagwazi 2014:10 & 12). Okoye and Mmadike (2016) adopt the cognitive linguistics approach in their study of body parts idioms in Igbo. Their study reveals that there are some cognitive mechanisms that aid the interpretation of idioms in Igbo such as metaphor, metonymy and conventional knowledge. The study also notes that conventional knowledge is a vital mechanism in the meaning interpretation of the Igbo body parts idioms especially where both metaphor and metonymy cannot account for such meaning.

Kamalu's (2020) study of metaphorical naming of selected dreaded diseases and medical conditions in Igbo language using the Conceptual Metaphor Approach shows that Igbo use different conceptual metaphor such as container, journey, leaf, natural/physical force, heavy burden to frame their understanding of some dreaded diseases and conditions. The study concludes that Igbo use language metaphorically to express their understanding of their natural world and social relations which emanates from their understanding of their cultural and social orientations, bodily actions and experiences. These empirical studies simply analyze Igbo lexical items from different cognitive approaches showing their different conceptualizations. This study therefore goes beyond the analysis of literal and idiomatic meaning to presenting the conceptual domains of *azu* which has not been undertaken in Igbo language studies.

In examining the metaphorical expression of time in Igbo, Onuoha and Uchechukwu (2022) posit that while named entities in ecological and festive-cum-religious events differ, the same linguistic elements, particularly verbal constructions depicting concrete, physical activities, are metaphorically employed to express time in both systems. This observation suggests that the concept of space dominates as the source domain for metaphorical expressions of time in the Igbo language. Furthermore, they identify the applicability of the "Moving Time Metaphor" and "Moving Observer Metaphor" concepts in the conceptualization of time in Igbo, irrespective of whether it is expressed within the traditional or modern system of reckoning time. This suggests a continuity in the underlying cognitive structures used to conceptualize time, despite the shift in temporal frameworks. The findings presented by the authors underscore the intricate relationship between language, culture, and cognition, highlighting how linguistic elements can adapt and evolve to convey abstract concepts such as time within different temporal frameworks.

Chukwuogor and Uchechukwu (2023) explore how the domain of space is reflected in Igbo suffixes. Using the Cognitive Grammar principles of construal and perspectivization, they observe that the directional suffixes in Igbo involve two different perspectives or viewpoints of the directional scene. The first and primary perspective involves focusing on the direction toward the speaker as the deictic center, while the second perspective is secondary and less specific.

Okoye (2023) examines the conceptualizations of *obi* 'heart' in Igbo by exploring Igbo heart expressions sourced from competent native speakers. The findings of the study show that various forms of endearment and empathy, in addition to emotional attachment and detachments are captured in the conceptualization of *obi* heart'. Furthermore, the study shows that the 'heart' is capable of various kinds of movements. The study concludes that the various conceptualizations associated with the heart in Igbo are indicative of an underpinning in the expression of cultural meaning in the language. Having looked at studies in the conceptualization of meaning in the language, the next section explains the morpho-semantics of *azu* 'back' in various contexts.

3. Morpho-Semantic Analysis of *Azu*

In this section, the study identifies the different contextual manifestations and use of the lexical item in the corpus using the LancsBox. The concordance of *azu* were analysed in their various contexts as single morpheme, a complex word, an idiomatic expression, and as a binominal. The last part of the analysis presents the different senses of *azu*. To do all of the aforementioned, it is important to briefly show the basic meaning of *azu* 'back' (the source) from which all other meanings are derived through metaphorical extension.

3.1 *Azu* as a body part term

The term *azu* ‘back’ refers to the rear surface of the human body, extending from the shoulders to the hips. It encompasses the area between the neck and the buttocks and includes the spine, muscles, and other structures that support the upper body and facilitate movement. The word ‘back’, just like other body part terms like head, eye, mouth, heart, e.t.c, have been noted to be the source of spatial terms cross linguistically. Body part terms like back have been discussed in the literature of space (Svorou, 1994), and grammaticalization (Heine and Kuteva, 2002). By virtue of the kind of bodies we possess as humans, the back is behind us (where our eyes cannot see). The structure of the human body offers us a unique perspective of the world thus shaping our experiences. Hence, the human body is the source domain which structures our understanding of all the senses in which *azu* ‘back’ is used. The consensus is that, back like other body part terms, is the source from which new words and meanings are formed to represent more abstract notions usually within the domain of space and time. Moving forward, we shall look at the morphological features of *azu* ‘back’ from the Igbo data set, before introducing the different senses in which it is used.

3.2 *Azu* as a Single Morpheme

The lexical item *azu* ‘back’ has as its basic semantic import ‘rear view’. This meaning is used with many concrete nouns and some parts of the body to express the meaning ‘rear view’. This is illustrated in the following (1):

- (1) a. **azu** mmadu
Back human
‘The back of a person’
- b. **azu** ulo
back house
‘The back of a house/backyard’
- c. **azu** aka
back hand
‘The back of the hand’
- d. **azu** akwa
back cloth
‘The back of a cloth’

Examples (1a-d) simply show the literal meaning of back as ‘rear view’ of a lexical item. However, some of the examples can be used metaphorically in the contexts in which they are used. For instance, (1c) *azu ulo* ‘back of house’ could be pragmatically used derogatorily to connote ‘somebody or something that is not refined’, except it expresses literal meaning such as *Biko, jee dowe efere a n’azu ulo* ‘Please go and keep this plate at the backyard’, (1d) *azu aka* ‘back of the hand’ could connote ‘deception or giving bribe’, while (1e) *azu akwa* ‘back of cloth’ could be used to devalue somebody.

3.3 *Azu* as a Binominal

The lexical item can be used as a binominal. It is called *ejima okwu* ‘twin word’ in Igbo metalanguage which constitute a class of idiom. They are made up of two nouns or noun phrases linked by a conjunction, or two verbs or verb phrases with or without an overt conjunction linking them (Emenanjo and Oweleke, 2010). The common complimentary binominals of *azu* is *ihu na azu* ‘front and back/forward and backward’. It can be literally used to express spatial relations, but with regard to the applied meaning, it means ‘nowhere’ which encodes hopelessness, aimlessness, state of confusion, restlessness, indecision, all and sundry/everybody, depending on the context of usage as shown in (2).

- (2) a. Okeke gaa **ihu**, O gaa **azu**
Okeke go forward, S/he go backward
‘Okeke is confused’
- b. O janyere onye **ihu**, O janyere onye **azu**

S/he support-PST one front, S/he support-PST one
back
'S/he supported to everybody in all directions'

The expression in (2a) could be used to refer to a 'state of confusion' or 'restlessness'. Also, the meaning of 'aimlessness', 'indecision', or 'hopelessness' could be derived depending on the context. For instance, when the expression is used to refer to a driver who is moving backward instead of moving forward could denote indecision as regards his/her direction. Whereas in (2), the meaning of 'all and sundry/everybody' is understood especially when it is used with the verb *janye* 'to support'

3.4 *Azu* as a Complex Word

A Complex word (Uchekukwu, 2011) or verbal complex (Emenanjo, 2015) is 'the inherent semantic nature of the Igbo verb which obligatorily co-exist with a nominal element which always compliments it. The close-knit syntactic and indivisible semantic relationship between the verb and the noun is called a verbal complex. *Azu* can also be used as a complex word in Igbo. In this type of usage, it must be used as complement to the verb, thereby functioning as an inherent complement of the verb to which it is attached to. The common usages of *azu* functioning as an inherent complement are as follows: *gaghachi/laghachi azu* 'go back/return', *biaghachi azu* 'come back', *buaghachi azu* 'take back', *kpoghachi azu* 'call back', *leghachi azu* 'look back', *gbachigha azu* 'run back'. The semantic content of the complex word is 'go back/return', irrespective of the verb it is used with. The following examples illustrate these verbal complexes.

- (3) a. Obi gaghachi **azu**
Obi go-PST back
'Obi went back'
- b. Ada gbachighara **azu** n'ulo
Ada run-suffix-PST back PREP-house
'Ada ran back home'

The verbal complexes as shown in (3a & b) show that they are used with the verb to fully realize the meaning in the context in which they are used. *Ime aka azu* 'to do back of hand: to give bribe' and *ime ihe n'azu mmadu* 'to do something at someone's back' are verbal complexes.

3.5 *Azu* as an Idiomatic Expression

Idiomatic expressions are expressions, words or phrases that have a figurative meaning conventionally understood by native speakers. They are phrasal or sentential in length and with fixed meanings. Their meanings are non-compositional. This means that the meaning of the expression cannot be imported from the meaning of the individual words that make up the expression, and it can be used in all domains of discourse. *Azu* can be construed idiomatically in Igbo following the tabulated examples showing the idiomatic usages of *azu*.

Idiomatic Expression of <i>Azu</i>			
S/N	Expression	Literal meaning	Idiomatic meaning
1.	Ije azu	walk back	To do things in secret, which are usually evil
2.	Aka azu	Back hand	To bribe
3.	Igōsī azu akā	To show the back of hand	To deceive
4.	Okwu azu	Speech back	To gossip
5.	Obi ife azu	Heart is behind	Hard-hearted
6.	Igbakūta azu	To turn back at a person	To abandon/neglect
7.	Azu anuuka	Back not listening to conversation	Someone that does not listen to gossip/hear
8.	Azu eruala	Back not touching the ground	Someone is strong/someone that cannot be defeated
9.	Azu iru mmadu ala	Back to touch person ground	One to be badly beaten

In the table above, the lexical item *azu* is used with other lexical items to express an idiomatic meaning. The meaning of ‘behind’ is conceptualized in (1), (2), (4), (5) and the speakers understand that anything that is done behind is shrouded in secrecy as such it is not ethical or usually not pleasant, as Okoye and Mmadike (2016) affirm. This can be exemplified in (4) below as drawn from the concordance.

- (4) Okaka ji ego ahụ mechaa aka azụ
 Okaka hold money that do-all hand back
 ‘Okaka used all that money to give bribe’

This is also construed in the same way for the construction *igōsī azū akā* ‘to show the back of hand’ which idiomatically translates ‘to deceive someone’.

4. *Azu* as a Conceptual Metaphor

The lexical item ‘azu’ can be used metaphorically in Igbo to conceptualize spatial relation, time, academic failure, competition, exclusion from a plan or absence e.t.c. The following metaphors of *azu* were identified:

4.1 ACADEMIC FAILURE is *Azu* ‘back’

Azu is conceptualized as academic failure with regard to performance. In the conceptual metaphor, academic failure is *azu* ‘back’. There are two domains: ACADEMICS and the domain of HUMAN BODY. The domain of HUMAN BODY is the source domain in terms of which ACADEMICS (the target domain) is understood. Academic failure in the classroom is understood in terms of *azu* ‘back’ (not progressive or forward looking; but poor, behind or retrogressive). The conceptual metaphor is reflected in (5):

- (5) a. O na- anaghachi azụ na klaasị
 S/he is go-suffix back PREP Klaasị
 ‘S/he is doing poorly academically in class’
- b. Chioma na- ana azụ n’akwukwo ya.
 Chioma go-backback PREP-book PRON
 ‘Chioma is doing poorly in his/her studies’

Azu in (5a & b) is construed in relation to academic progression and performance. The examples show that the source domain HUMAN BODY is mapped onto the target domain ‘academics’, and when a region of the domain (*azu* ‘back’) is used in such constructions, it is understood as poor performance.

4.2 BAD BEHAVIOUR is *azu* ‘back’

For the conceptual metaphor domain of BEHAVIOUR, the domain of BEHAVIOUR is structured in terms of the source domain HUMAN BODY. Hence, the understanding of retrogression from good behavior to bad behavior in terms of the region in the domain (*azu* ‘back’) is realized. This meaning assumes that good behaviour is seen as positive and progressive. Hence, it is perceived as forward motion. On the other hand, bad behaviour is assumed to be negative with little to no benefits. Hence, it is construed as moving backwards. It is important to note that the anchor from which the directions are made is the human body. Also, the understanding of the expression ‘forward ever, backward never’ can be used to conceptualize good and bad behavior in the sense of backsliding or retrogressing from good behavior to bad behavior as shown in the examples (6a) & (6b) below:

- (6) a. O na daghachi azụ n’omume
 S/he is fall-suffix back PREP-behaviour
 ‘S/he is backsliding in behavior’
- b. O nara azụ na nkwa O kwere m
 S/he go-suffix back PREP promise PRON promiseme
 ‘S/he did not keep her promise to me’

4.3 COMPETITION is *azu* ‘back’

- (7) a. Nkechi ahughi **azu** Amusan anya n’oso
 Nkechi see-NEG back Amusan eye PREP-race
 ‘Nkechi could not catch up with Amusan on the race’
- b. **Azu** Okeke erughi ala na mgba ahụ
 Back Okeke OVS-reach-NEG ground PREP Wrestling that
 ‘Okeke won the competition’

Example (7a) gives a picture of Nkechi losing the race competition to Amusan because she could not catch up with Amusan in the race, whereas (7b) shows that Okeke won the wrestling contest because his back did not touch the ground. This is to say that when the back of a wrestler touches the ground in a contest, he is said to have been defeated.

4.4 TIME is *azu*

Azu can be used to conceptualize past time as shown in (8)

- (8) Kpofee ihe mere n’**azu**
 Throw away thing happen-PST PREP-back
 ‘Forget what has happened in the past’

Time can also be conceptualized in terms of the future in the sense of ‘what is hidden is conceptualized as greater than what is to come’, that is making reference to the future. Since what is kept in the back is not seen, it is also equated to the future which is not known. This explains why Igbo names such as *Azuka*, ‘Back is greater’, *Azubundu* ‘Back is life’, *Azubiike* ‘Back is strength’ still abound.

4.5 ABSENCE is *azu*

Azu can be used to denote the sense of ‘exclusion of somebody from an event or from a plan’. This is reflected in the example (9):

- (9) Ha gburu nwata ahụ n’ **azu** m
 They kill-PST child that PREP-back my
 ‘They killed the child in my absence’

4.6 DISTANCE is *azu*

Azu can be used to express something that is far removed in space, to show distance or location.

- (10) Ha lawara **azu azu**
 They go-PST back back
 ‘They moved far away’

In (10) above, the notion of distance is realized through reduplication of *azu*. The foregoing has simply shown that conceptual structure is organized by cross-domain mappings which give rise to conceptual metaphors; that is, correspondences between conceptual domains. It can be clearly seen that the metaphorical extensions of *azu* are found within the domain of space and time. Furthermore, the domain of space is the more prominent domain because more senses are found there. The examples suggest a kind of correlation experienced by Igbo speakers in their everyday lives which give rise to these formations of an association at the conceptual level. The study has also shown how the speakers of the language conceptualize the aforementioned target domains and their source domain (HUMAN BODY) following their anthropocentric experiences of the world. Thus, conceptual metaphors are grounded with the speakers’ everyday interaction with the world.

5. Conclusion

This paper has explored the different usages of *azu* in Igbo from its literal, idiomatic to its metaphorical usages. Aside providing the different nuances of meaning of *azu*, the study shows how conceptual

metaphor can be used to explain how the different senses of *azu* arise. Thus, the source domain from which the different senses arise is our understanding of the HUMAN BODY. So, Igbo conceptualizes the domains of SPACE (bad behavior, academics, competition, and distance) and TIME in terms of our knowledge of the position of *azu* ‘back’ in the human body, in order to express progression or retrogression, winning or losing a contest or to denote time. These multiple usages or senses of *azu* gives support to the idea that metaphor is the foundation and basis for polysemy.

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