

METAPHOR AND MEANING IN AKAN TUBER NAMING

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Abstract

This study analyses Akan tuber names using Cultural Linguistics (Sharifian 2017). We used a qualitative method, drawing on both primary and secondary sources. Data came from farmers, language experts, and historical texts. Names such as **Nankabayer**, ‘python yam’, function as metaphors that draw on animal imagery and cultural narratives. They transmit deep ecological knowledge. They also reinforce shared values and social structures. A tuber name contains entire cultural schemas. Within the Cultural Linguistics framework, we analyse how tuber names function as culturally grounded conceptual metaphors (e.g., YAM IS A PYTHON). This connects farming to a broader worldview. These naming conventions preserve indigenous wisdom. They strengthen a community's identity. They integrate physical objects into mental frameworks. This research addresses a gap in African name studies. It proves that tuber names are vital cultural artefacts. They reveal the profound link between language, thought, and the natural world.

Keywords: Akan tuber names, Cultural Linguistics, agricultural metaphors, indigenous knowledge, onomastics

Nhɛnmu

Nhwehwɛmu yi nam amambra a ɔda edzi wɔ kasa mu tiɔri (Sharifian, 2017) do pensapensa edzin a Akanfo dze to dwow asorɔtow mu. Nhwehwɛmu yi dua mboanosem a ofi ankorankor na dodow ntamu nkitahodzi do dzi dwuma yi. Dwumadzi yi tsim kasa mu ndzeyɛɛ na dwumadzi a enyi tua ho ho suahu na nhunmu do. Yenyaa mboanosem fii ekuafɔ na Akan kasa mu enyimdzefo nkyɛn. Yenyaa bi so fii nwoma ahorow a ɔka Akan abakɔsem mu. Dzin a wɔdze ma dwow bi tse de *Nankabayer* ye ngyinahɔma a otsim nhunmu a Akanfo nya wɔ wɔnye mbowa na hɔn amambra ntamu nkitahodzi mu no do. Wɔdze nhunmu a yɛnya fi yɛnye abɔdze a etwa hɛn ho ehyia ntamu nkitahodzi a no mu do to gua. Wɔsan ma su pa na asetsena mu nhyehyɛɛ a ɔsom Akanfo bo no so tsim. Dzin a wɔdze ma dwow biara ne fapem ye Akan amambra mu nhyehyɛɛ na nhunmu. Yɛnya ngyinahɔma BAYER YE NANKA wɔ bayer-dzin *Nankabayer* mu. Dzin yi dze dza ɔkɔ do wɔ nyimpa no wiadze no toto ekuadwuma mu adzeyɛ ho. Mbrɛ yesi to edzin a ɔtsetse dem yi boa ma yekora nyimdzee na nyansa a yewɔ wɔ dza etwa hɛn ho ehyia ho no do. Dzinto yi boa ma dza yenyim fa nyimpakuw bi ho no tsim. Nhwehwɛmu yi ye ebibirmu dzinto ho adzesua ne fa bi a no mu esuadze mmbɛdaa gua no ho edwuma. Odzi dase de edzin a yɛdze ma dwow no ye amambra mu edwindze asorɔtow. Edzin yi da no edzi pefee de nyimpakuw biara hɔn kasaa, mbrɛ wosi dwen na wiadze a etwa hɔn ho ehyia no wɔ twaka a no mu ye dzen.

Nsemfua etsitsir: Akanfo dwow edzin, kasasua ho amambra, kuadwuma mu ngyinahɔma, kusum nyimdzee, dzinto

1. Introduction

In Akan culture, naming transcends simple identification; it functions as a vital cultural practice that articulates and preserves connections to the natural environment, significant events, and cherished objects (Agyekum 2006; Kos 2019). To them, names form a complex symbolic system, and tuber names are no exception. These names function as more than simple labels; they employ metaphor to convey cultural knowledge, often drawing on references to animals or body parts. Akan tuber nomenclature functions as a repository of cultural knowledge, much like traditional proverbs (Sharifian 2017), capturing both the interconnection between the Akan people and their ecological context and the preservation of collective memory. Through a cultural cognition approach, this paper investigates the metaphorical systems underlying these naming conventions, illustrating how tangible attributes of tubers are conceptually linked to broader cultural values and meanings. In this paper, ‘tuber names’ refer to indigenous labels used for yams and cassava within the Akan

agricultural lexicon. Rather than botanical classifications, these labels identify distinct crop varieties based on characteristics such as shape and growth requirements. Beyond their practical function, tuber names carry significant social and symbolic meaning, serving as cultural repositories that preserve both practical knowledge and conceptual understanding.

Naming practices, which reflect a culture's worldview and identity, carry deep social and ideological meanings that studies across cultures consistently confirm. While Imoh (2023) and Kahyana (2023) examine death-prevention names in Basà and Bakonzo societies, Petrollino & Ndlovu (2023) analyse livestock names among the Hamar, and these cross-cultural investigations reveal that such names function not merely as identifiers but as social critique, historical documentation, and ecological records. Because these naming systems convey subtle messages that permeate daily life, they actively shape societal values while simultaneously preserving the cultural frameworks through which communities interpret their experiences and organise their collective knowledge.

Although Akan personal names have emerged as a well-established field of scholarly inquiry, the multifaceted nature of this onomastic system has been elucidated through diverse analytical frameworks. Agyekum (2006), whose typological classification illuminates the various categories of naming practices while simultaneously exploring the sociolinguistic foundations that underpin them, and Obeng (1998), who scrutinises death-prevention names as they operate within the broader cultural matrix of Akan belief systems, have both contributed substantially to our understanding of how these names function as repositories of cultural meaning. While Sekyi-Baidoo (2024) discusses how the Akan communicate highly esteemed traits through personal names, research in other cultures reveals similar symbolic processes, as evidenced by Mensah's (2023) study of Ibibio and Tiv animal names and Mensah's (2017) analysis of Nigerian proverbial nicknames, both of which demonstrate how metaphor functions as a mechanism that links individual traits with culturally embedded values and conceptualisations. This symbolic naming practice, which extends beyond the domains of people and animals, finds further elaboration in the work of Wonkyi (2021) and Wonkyi et al. (2021), whose studies of Mfantse object names reveal that designations for objects and sea creatures are systematically grounded in their visual characteristics, shapes, and functional properties, a practice that not only achieves linguistic economy but simultaneously serves as a vehicle for cultural expression.

Despite the extensive scholarly attention devoted to the semantics of personal names and general object nomenclature, the naming conventions of staple foods, particularly tubers, have been systematically overlooked, a gap that persists even within the specialised field of agricultural semantics. While researchers such as Abdul-Halik (2024) and Constantine & Andrew (2024) have examined farming terminologies and their collocational frameworks in Dagbani and Yoruba, respectively, and Ofori (2008) and Wonkyi (2016) have explored broader agricultural knowledge systems in Ewe and Akan cultures, the specific domain of tuber nomenclature remains unaddressed. Indeed, although Wonkyi (2021) acknowledges that metaphors play a significant role in agricultural naming, a dedicated investigation into the semantic structures governing tuber names has not been pursued.

This paper analyses Akan tuber names that employ systematic and vivid metaphors. Names that connect tubers to animals, body parts, and cultural narratives, while applying Cultural Linguistics to one central question: how do these metaphors express cultural, ecological, and social meaning? We propose that these names constitute a cognitive strategy that encodes environmental knowledge and cultural values, a phenomenon analogous to the LOVE IS A PLANT conceptualisation documented in Gikūyū (Gathigia & Maitaria 2019). The paper begins by reviewing related literature before outlining its Cultural Linguistics framework, after which it catalogues and classifies a collection of tuber names, identifies their metaphorical structures and cultural significance through systematic analysis, and discusses the implications for Akan cultural cognition. This work contributes to anthropological linguistics by

supporting the preservation of Indigenous knowledge systems and African linguistic heritage, demonstrating how agricultural nomenclature functions as a repository of both practical wisdom and conceptual worldviews.

2. Literature Review

While Akan naming practices employ metaphor to encode cultural knowledge, a phenomenon explored in prior research on personal names and other domains, the specific area of tuber names remains understudied. This review, therefore, connects existing scholarship to demonstrate how it informs the analysis of Akan tuber naming. Agyekum (2006), for instance, demonstrates that Akan personal names function as key sociocultural markers, a principle that applies directly to tuber names, which similarly operate as cultural labels. Although his flora and fauna names category encompasses concepts like ‘python’, which appears in the tuber name **Nankabayer**, his analysis terminates at personal identification without extending to agricultural nomenclature. Building on this foundation, Wonkyi and Bosiwah (2020) investigated metaphors in Mfantse terms for overripe farm products and discovered that descriptive phrases like **werpe** ‘dry’ create linguistic efficiency, a finding that mirrors how a tuber name like **Butuabaso** ‘incubated eggs’ employs a simple image to describe a shape, though their focus on post-harvest states overlooks the naming of specific cultivars during active cultivation. Konadu (2023) also approaches Akan ‘soul names’ as historical archives, a perspective that proves valuable when decoding a tuber name like **Tutumeakɔn** ‘neck uprooting’, which narrates the physical challenge of harvest. However, despite the utility of his historical lens, it remains unapplied to the agricultural lexicon. While these studies collectively confirm that metaphor constitutes a core cultural practice in the Akan linguistic tradition, their shared limitation lies in the absence of specific analysis devoted to crop names, thereby creating the scholarly gap this paper addresses.

Tuber names often carry ecological and social symbolism, as demonstrated by Wonkyi et al.’s (2021) analysis of Mfantse sea creature names based on physical resemblance, a method evidenced in the tuber **Nankabayer**, which is named for its coiled, python-like form. Though their work, while revealing how perception shapes naming conventions, remains limited to marine life and does not extend to agricultural domains. Similarly, Obeng (1998) observes that Akan death-prevention names often confronts challenging social realities, a symbolic role reflected in the cassava name **Otuakaw** ‘pays debts’, which conveys notions of financial security. However, although the study successfully connects names to social concerns, it does not examine subsistence crops, an area where naming practices can be particularly revealing of cultural cognition and material conditions. Research in other cultures, such as Enweonye and Uzoalor’s (2019) work on Igbo rice terminology, demonstrates how agricultural language serves as a dual repository that preserves both practical knowledge and cultural memory, suggesting that crop nomenclature systems warrant deeper investigation as sites of cognitive-linguistic analysis. Similarly, the Akan yam name **Asahina** ‘water pot’ links the tuber’s shape to a vital household object. Although these studies highlight the symbolic depth of naming, they do not offer a unified framework for Akan tuber names.

Metaphor allows complex ideas to be conveyed quickly, a principle demonstrated by Wonkyi et al.’s (2021) observation that Mfantse object names employ resemblance for rapid identification, as exemplified by the tuber name **Asɔbayer** ‘toe yam’, whose form recalls toes on a foot. Agyekum (2006) also characterises Akan names as cognitive shortcuts that bundle meaning into compact linguistic units, a phenomenon illustrated by the yam name **Makyese** ‘matchbox yam’, which compares a tuber to a modern container through cross-domain mapping. Ofori’s (2008) study of Ewe farming terminology further demonstrates that plant names often describe appearance for ease of recognition, a pattern that manifests in Akan names such as **Efu** ‘hump yam’; however, while his research offers methodological value, it focuses on a different language group and does not address the Akan context specifically. Despite recognising metaphor’s linguistic economy as a mechanism for efficient communication, existing studies lack a deeper analysis of the conceptual mappings and systematic metaphorical

structures that underlie tuber names, leaving a significant gap in our understanding of how these agricultural labels encode both perceptual and cultural knowledge.

While existing research establishes the importance of metaphor in Akan culture, its application to tuber naming remains indirect and fragmented, a circumstance that arises not from the failures of previous scholars, who necessarily focused on their own name categories, but rather from the opportunities these specialised studies have created for more integrative analysis. This study addresses this gap directly by applying Sharifian's (2017) cultural cognition framework to a specific set of Akan tuber names, employing a theoretical apparatus that analyses cultural conceptualisations such as metaphors and schemas to demonstrate how names like **Kyeremedansibew** 'show me a building site' compress narrative and value into a single lexical phrase. By building on prior findings about metaphor and symbolism while providing a focused analysis of how ecological knowledge, social values, and cognitive efficiency are intricately woven into the naming of tubers, this study offers a new perspective on the dynamic relationship between language, culture, and agriculture, revealing how agricultural nomenclature functions as a site where practical wisdom and cultural worldviews converge.

3. Theoretical Framework: Cultural Linguistics

Providing a unified theoretical apparatus that synthesises cognitive psychology, cognitive linguistics, anthropology, distributed cognition, and complexity science (Sharifian 2011, 2015, 2017), Cultural Linguistics forms the foundation of this study as a robust analytical lens for investigating the intricate relationship between language, culture, and thought in examining Akan tuber names. The framework proposes that conceptualisations, which are both rooted in cultural context and expressed through language, function as simultaneously individual and collective cognitive entities that embed meaning through specific mechanisms, including schemas (Talmy 1983), categories (Rosch 1978), metaphors (Lakoff & Johnson 1980; Kövecses 2000), and conceptual blends (Fauconnier 1997). Unlike purely cognitive approaches that focus primarily on individual mental processes, Cultural Linguistics distinguishes itself by emphasising how these mechanisms operate systematically at a cultural level, reflecting shared understandings that are dynamically shaped by social, historical, and environmental contexts (Sharifian 2015; Kövecses 2005), thereby revealing how collective knowledge becomes encoded in linguistic practices that transcend individual cognition.

Culture, understood as a shared system of beliefs, values, and interactions with the world (Kövecses 2005), operates through cultural cognition, an emergent and dynamic system that is not uniformly distributed but rather spread across a group through members' interactions over time and space (Sharifian 2008; Frank 2011). These cultural conceptualisations are inherently adaptive, constantly negotiated and reshaped through communicative practices (Sharifian 2008), such as naming a tuber. The recursive relationship between micro-level linguistic performance and macro-level cultural schemas suggests that naming practices serve not merely as reflections of pre-existing cultural knowledge but as active sites where cultural cognition is reproduced, contested, and transformed across generations.

Within this framework, Akan tuber names are treated as cultural vehicles (Sharifian 2011). Their lexical representation functions not merely as labels but as metaphorical encodings of ecological and social knowledge that imbue named entities with culturally specific meaning. These encodings carry conceptualisations of farming and the environment that reflect broader cultural schemas, which provide shared scripts for social life that, though often unconscious, structure worldview perception and render social behaviour predictable. The name **Nankabayer**, for instance, demonstrates a schema of ecological observation wherein the tuber's coiled shape mirrors that of a python, while **Tutumeakɔn** 'neck uprooting yam' embodies agricultural wisdom by encoding a specific harvesting technique designed to prevent loss, illustrating how Akan naming practices create cultural categories, a classificatory systems that group entities based on shared traits and hierarchical rankings rather than on universal or

natural principles. These categories, which language reveals through words that represent entire classes of phenomena, feel natural to speakers yet are fundamentally learned constructs that shape perception and cognition. The Akan system, which groups yams as animal-like or according to consumer reaction, relies on symbolic traits rather than botanical taxonomy, thereby aligning with Rosch's (1978) prototype theory in demonstrating how cultural categorisation operates through salient exemplars and metaphorical reasoning rather than through scientific classification.

Cultural metaphors are central to this process. They use mappings to connect different ideas. The Akan understand one thing through another. They are rooted in culture. For example, money is often seen as blood. Such analogies shape their thoughts. They are not universal but learned. These structures make abstract concepts tangible. A cultural metaphor such as YAM IS A PYTHON, for instance, transforms a physical trait into a narrative of strength and resilience, a phenomenon that mirrors Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) conceptual metaphor theory while supporting Wonkyi's (2021) findings on Akan metaphors, though these conceptualisations are dynamic rather than static, emerging from ongoing interactions between farmers and their lands in a process of cultural-ecological co-construction (Sharifian 2008). This analysis connects language to practice by demonstrating how names reflect both the challenges of harvesting and social dynamics, while also exploring adaptation strategies evident in terms like **Efu**, which signifies resilience, and **Otuakaw** cassava, 'pays debts' to indicate economic stability, thereby uncovering indigenous wisdom about plant morphology and taste that has been encoded in agricultural nomenclature. In African onomastics, where previous studies have focused predominantly on personal names (Agyekum 2006; Obeng 1998) or examined non-tuber entities (Wonkyi 2021), this research fills a significant gap by offering a new perspective on the triadic relationship among language, culture, and ecology as manifested in Akan tuber names.

4. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach to analyse metaphors in Akan tuber names that refer to animals, body parts, or cultural narratives; through a method that combines primary and secondary sources while incorporating insights from native speakers, whose experiential knowledge is then cross-checked against existing literature to ensure both analytical robustness and cultural authenticity. This methodological process, which is designed to capture the full context of naming by examining its ecological, social, and cognitive dimensions, operates within the framework of Cultural Linguistics as articulated by Sharifian (2017), a theoretical orientation that enables systematic investigation of how cultural conceptualisations are encoded in linguistic forms. The following section details the methodological steps through which this integrated approach unfolds, demonstrating how empirical data collection and theoretical analysis converge to reveal the deeper cognitive and cultural patterns embedded within agricultural nomenclature.

4.1. Data Collection

The data consist of Akan 'tuber names' that function as cultural rather than botanical classifications for staple foods, specifically identifying distinct yams (*Dioscorea* spp.) and cassava (*Manihot esculenta*) types. These local identifiers are analysed here through a triangulated methodological approach that combines primary fieldwork with secondary cultural texts to ensure both depth and contextual richness. Primary data were gathered firsthand from Akan sources through three principal methods: structured elicitation involving twenty participants (ten farmers from the Ashanti and Central Regions and ten language students from the University of Education, Winneba) who performed free-listing, contextual usage tasks, metaphorical association exercises and ethnographic observations conducted in Kumasi and Cape Coast markets, which captured the organic use of names such as **Asahina** 'water pot yam' in everyday trade contexts; and elicited oral narratives collected from community elders, who provided folktales and proverbs that revealed deeper meanings embedded within the nomenclature.

These narratives proved particularly illuminating, as stories explaining the name **Tutumeakɔn** ‘uproot my neck’ framed the yam as a wilful adversary while linking the designation to specific harvest techniques, and accounts of **Kyerɛmedansibew** ‘show me a building site’ clarified its role as a social joke about quality, demonstrating how these narratives embed tuber names within a moral framework wherein a specific yam becomes a character symbolising resilience or trickery. This process connects the crop to Akan history and cosmology, anchoring practical agricultural knowledge in cultural story and revealing how nomenclature serves as a cognitive-linguistic repository that integrates ecological expertise with cultural worldviews (Sharifian, 2017).

Secondary sources provided historical and cultural context through a range of materials that included historical lexicons such as Christaller’s Dictionary of the Asante and Fante Language (1933), published texts like the Akan (Fante and Twi) Bibles, which revealed broader cultural schemas embedded within religious discourse and academic literature on Akan onomastics and ethnobotany (e.g., Agyekum 2006; Obeng 1998; Wonkyi 2021), all of which informed the paper’s theoretical foundation and provided a diachronic perspective on naming practices. Two fluent Akan-speaking linguists from the University of Education, Winneba, verified the data for accuracy and cultural consistency. Their contribution extended beyond mere validation, as they employed native-speaker introspection to deepen the analysis of naming patterns by connecting, for instance, the yam **Efu** to cultural notions of resilience through its distinctive hump-like shape.

When data conflicts emerged, we employed triangulation through follow-up interviews with five elderly farmers, aged 60 to 75, from the Ashanti Region, whose insights provided a richer ethnographic context that clarified the histories behind names like **Nankabayer** and **Asɔbayer** ‘hoe yam,’ thereby grounding the linguistic analysis in lived agricultural experience and intergenerational knowledge transmission.

4.2. Analytical framework

We analysed Akan tuber names through cultural linguistics, specifically employing the cultural cognition framework, which conceptualises culture as shared thought and utilises schemas, categories, and metaphors for analytical inquiry (Sharifian 2011, 2015, 2017), with the ultimate goal of uncovering the embedded knowledge systems within these nomenclatural practices. Our study revealed distinct cultural schemas, patterns of shared knowledge that structure community understanding, as exemplified by the name **Nankabayer** ‘Python Yam’, which demonstrates a schema of ecological observation by connecting the yam’s morphological characteristics to those of a python, thereby reflecting a shared cognitive framework for interpreting the natural world. Similarly, the name **Tutumeakɔn** ‘Uproot-my-neck Yam’ illustrates a schema of agricultural wisdom that encodes a specific, challenging harvest method within its very designation, functioning not merely as a label but as stored procedural knowledge that the community can access and transmit across generations, thus revealing how linguistic forms serve as mnemonic devices that preserve and perpetuate practical expertise alongside cultural ways of knowing.

The names form cultural categories that group tubers by culturally important traits, yet these groupings are cultural rather than botanical, for they organise the empirical world through a specific cultural lens. One category is based on animal resemblance, like the python yam, but another category is grounded in human experience, such as a yam’s taste. We also identified potent cultural metaphors, for these metaphors connect physical traits to abstract ideas. The mapping of serpentine morphology onto agricultural produce is evident in **Nankabayer**’s use of the metaphor YAM IS A PYTHON, whereas the framing of eating as a profound personal event is achieved through **Kyerɛmedansibew** ‘Show me a building site, which deploys TASTE IS A LIFE-CHANGING EXPERIENCE.

We performed a detailed morphosemantic analysis of the compound names, breaking each into its constituent morphemes to establish literal, grammatical meaning, to ground our cultural analysis in empirical linguistic evidence, a process exemplified

by the decomposition of **Tutumeakɔn** into **tutu-** ('uproot'), **-me-** ('my'), and **-kɔn** ('neck'), which served multiple interconnected analytical purposes. First, this decomposition objectively identified the source domains of the conceptual metaphors (such as BODY PART for **-kɔn**), thereby providing the linguistic basis for the subsequent mapping to cultural concepts. Second, it revealed that grammatical structures, including the imperative verb and possessive pronoun embedded in **Tutumeakɔn**, directly encode cultural schemas. In this case, a schema of personal challenge, which indicates that cultural meanings are not merely associated with names but are fundamentally embedded within their morphological architecture. This morphosemantic analysis proves that tuber names function as conventionalised cultural texts and lexical artifacts that simultaneously contain ecological knowledge (the neck as a fragile, vulnerable body part), practical instruction (the imperative to uproot carefully), and cognitive frameworks (the possessive 'my' as a marker of personal engagement and individual responsibility), demonstrating how agricultural nomenclature operates as a multilayered repository where linguistic form, practical wisdom, and cultural conceptualisation converge.

4.3. Ethical consideration

Our research followed strict ethical protocols wherein all participants gave verbal consent, a practice that aligns with local Akan customs and demonstrates cultural responsiveness in methodological design. All identities were anonymised to protect privacy, while the researcher adhered to cultural norms during data collection, ensuring that interactions with elders and farmers honoured Akan communal values and reciprocal obligations. We informed every participant of the study's purpose and clarified their right to withdraw at any time, and no sensitive personal information was recorded throughout the research process.

5. Data Analysis

This section analyses Akan tuber names using the framework of cultural cognition. We apply its three core components, namely cultural schemas, categories, and metaphors, to individual names. Each analysis demonstrates how a name encodes specific cultural knowledge, ecological wisdom, and social values.

5.1. Animal Metaphor

Plants and animals share a symbolic kinship within the Akan worldview, which perceives deep connections in nature, a cosmological perspective reflected in tuber names like **Nankabayer** 'python yam' that employ animal metaphors to endow yams with life by attributing qualities such as strength, vitality, or nurturing care, thereby weaving ecology, values, and wisdom into linguistic expression. Using Cultural Linguistics (Sharifian 2017) as an analytical framework, this section explores metaphors such as **Nankabayer**, which mirrors a python's coiled form while simultaneously evoking strength and ecological connection, and **Butuabaso** 'incubated egg yams', which suggests fertility and nurturing through its avian imagery, revealing a core Akan belief system that demonstrates reverence for crops imbued with animal traits. These names function as woven tributes that integrate practical agricultural utility with cultural narratives of life and harmony, transforming subsistence crops into symbolic repositories where ecological knowledge converges with cosmological understanding, ultimately demonstrating how the Akan conceptual system collapses boundaries between the botanical and zoological domains to create a unified vision of interconnected natural forces.

5.1.1. Nankabayer 'Python Yam'

Nankabayer, the Akan name for 'Python Yam,' functions as a compound term that merges **nanka** 'python' with **bayer** 'yam,' establishing a metaphorical connection between the tuber's coiled shape and that of a resting serpent while simultaneously reflecting a cultural pattern of meticulous ecological observation that integrates environmental knowledge with agricultural practice. By encoding both practical

guidance and symbolic meaning within a single lexical unit, this name ties Akan agriculture directly to their worldview, demonstrating how nomenclature serves as a cognitive bridge between empirical cultivation and cultural cosmology.

The Akan classification system connects natural forms through shared patterns, as evidenced by the name **Nankabayer**, which functions as a communicative act that links a yam's twisted tuber to a python's coil in a profound analogy that encodes knowledge about both the yam's growth habit and the python's resting posture, a cognitive strategy also documented in Kokomba naming practices (Bisilki 2018). This analogy provides direct agricultural instruction, for a coiled yam is inherently fragile, and pulling it vertically from the soil will cause it to break; consequently, the name **Nankabayer** implicitly advises a specific harvesting technique involving careful excavation around the tuber's form, thereby embedding practical farming knowledge directly into the nomenclature itself (Mensah 2020).

Through its very nomenclature, the tuber signals the need for adapted culinary techniques, as its unique coiled morphology, a serpentine form that makes it particularly difficult to peel and pound, dictates specialised cutting and preparation methods that differ markedly from those employed for block-shaped yams. Furthermore, the name guides crop selection practices, as farmers actively cultivate this morphological trait by selectively replanting tubers from the Nankabayer vine, a practice that demonstrates how the conceptual schema directly influences agricultural cultivation and varietal maintenance. Pedagogy remains central to this cognitive-cultural system, with farmers teaching the python-yam connection through the instructional phrase: **Bayer yi na nanka a ogu famu, nsonsoee biara nnyi mu**, 'This yam is the python that lies on the ground; there is no difference,' an utterance that trains young observers to perceive the shared pattern while simultaneously building perceptual insight and reinforcing a cosmological worldview wherein humans, plants, and animals exist in profound interconnection. This holistic respect for nature, encoded within and transmitted through the name itself, is thus passed down across generations, ensuring that agricultural knowledge remains embedded within a broader ecological and spiritual framework.

By classifying Nankabayer as an 'animal-like' yam, Akan nomenclature positions it within a culturally specific category that groups tubers according to their perceived zoomorphic characteristics, such as the python-like coil of Nankabayer; thereby establishing a taxonomy grounded in experiential and visual similarity rather than biological lineage, one that constructs certain yams as a distinct class defined by their morphological resonance with animal forms. This classificatory framework reveals how cultural perception shapes agricultural categorisation, privileging phenomenological pattern-matching over scientific taxonomic criteria.

This system reflects a holistic worldview. It rejects a strict division between plants and animals, seeing them as interconnected through shared forms. A yam is not just a plant; it is a 'python' of the soil. This perspective imbues the natural world with relational meaning. The naming process itself reinforces this ecological philosophy. By categorising a yam as animal-like, the Akan strengthen the perceived bonds within their environment. This practice makes the relationship between the farmer, the crop, and the animal world tangible. It transforms a simple food source into a participant in a broader, living ecosystem.

The name **Nankabayer** operates on the embodied power metaphor principle by framing the yam not as a botanical specimen but as an animal embodiment whose coiled form is perceived as a python's latent power and living presence, thereby transforming the yam's growth into an active, coiling force within the soil rather than a passive vegetative process. This metaphorical reconceptualisation means that harvesting becomes a respectful encounter with a living entity rather than a simple act of crop extraction, fostering a vital interaction with the land that constitutes a key feature of local conceptualisation (Levisen 2016), particularly given that the python functions as a sacred symbol of earth and strength in Akan cosmology.

5.1.2. Butuabaso ‘Incubating Eggs Yam’

The Akan name **Butuabaso** means ‘incubating eggs.’ **Butu-aba-so** can be broken into morphemes, such as ‘incubate-eggs-POST’. By connecting the yams’ clustered, oval shape to a hen’s egg, this name not only reflects cultural associations with nurturing and fertility but also demonstrates deep ecological insight that merges observational precision with symbolic meaning. Through the lens of cultural linguistics (Sharifian 2017), we examine how the name encodes both farming knowledge and cultural values, ultimately tying agriculture to Akan beliefs about life cycles in ways that transform the tuber from mere foodstuff into a conceptual repository linking subsistence practices with cosmological worldviews about reproduction and continuity.

By applying the Form-Pattern Knowledge Schema to a different natural prototype, the name **Butuabaso** identifies shared morphology between clustered small yams and a hen’s egg, not through passive observation but through an active meaning-making process that frames the tuber as a source of life and potential, consequently guiding farmer behaviour toward preserving these ‘eggs’ for future planting (Bisilki 2018). Because this schema dictates specific practical actions, the fragile, egg-like yams demand gentle harvesting and careful storage, their value determined not by current size but by latent potential in ways that embody an ecological principle prioritising careful stewardship over short-term maximum yield (Mensah 2020), while simultaneously forging a deep conceptual link that connects crop cultivation to animal reproduction. The name **Butuabaso** thus becomes a vessel for a holistic worldview that integrates agricultural practice with a philosophy of care and regeneration, demonstrating how nomenclature encodes both practical wisdom and cosmological understanding.

The yam, as an animate food category, establishes it as a vital entity within the food system. The name **Butuabaso** removes the strict boundary between plant and animal by invoking eggs to classify the yam within a category of beings defined by life potential, an animistic perspective that attributes a developmental life cycle to the tuber while foregrounding its ontological status as a living entity rather than inert matter. This classification highlights profound functional similarities, as both eggs and these yams are nutritional resources that, more importantly, serve as vessels of future life, a parallel that frames the yam not as a static commodity but as a regenerative resource whose value extends beyond immediate consumption to encompass reproductive potential. By establishing this ‘animate’ classification, the nomenclature reinforces core cultural values that directly link the consumption of food to the principles of fertility and continuity, thereby rendering the yam a sacred participant in the cycle of life rather than merely a source of calories, and revealing how agricultural practice becomes inseparable from cosmological understanding within Akan cultural cognition. This portrays yams as vital, conscious partners in sustaining the community, central to Akan cultural identity and ecological philosophy.

The name **Butuabaso** is built on the metaphor YAM IS AN EGG. This is a fundamental naming tool that conceptualises the tuber based on its clustered shape and, more importantly, its function as a life source. The metaphor maps the nurturing requirements of an egg onto the yam, thereby framing the farmer’s role not as a mere harvester but as a caretaker responsible for realising the tuber’s latent potential (Wonkyi 2021). This perspective constructs agriculture as a sacred, relational act that rejects extractive resource models in favour of positioning the farmer as a guardian embedded within a natural order, an orientation that aligns with postcolonial semantics valuing ecologically grounded worldviews (Levisen 2016). Because the egg functions as a potent symbol of fertility in Akan culture, the metaphor connects the yam to beliefs about cyclical renewal, embedding agricultural practice within a cosmological framework where cultivation and regeneration are understood as spiritually significant processes rather than merely economic transactions.

The metaphor directly dictates practice. It signals the need for delicate handling to preserve the yams’ dual role as immediate food and future seed. Farmers learn to

harvest these fragile ‘eggs’ at the correct time, understanding that their small size holds immense future value. **Butuabaso** contrasts with other names.

Where **Nankabayer** ‘python-yam’ highlights coiled strength and **Tutumeakɔn** suggests a harvesting challenge, **Butuabaso** uniquely emphasises nurture. This shows the Akan naming system's capacity to blend practical instruction with deep symbolic meaning, preserving ecological wisdom and a holistic cultural identity.

5.2. Body Part Metaphors

In Akan tradition, the human body provides a primary schema for interpreting agricultural life, as evidenced by yam names like **Aniwa-aniwa** ‘eye-eye’, **Tutumeakɔn** ‘neck uprooting’, and **Efu** ‘hump’, which map bodily features onto tuber forms in ways that transform yams into symbols of vitality, challenge, and resilience. Rather than mere labelling, these names operate as narratives of embodied cognition, connecting human experience to the physical form of plants and embedding ecological knowledge within a familiar framework. The yam consequently becomes a living entity that forms a story of growth, struggle, and endurance, demonstrating how agricultural nomenclature serves as a cognitive mechanism through which the Akan conceptualise cultivation as an extension of human corporeal experience.

5.2.1. Aniwa-aniwa ‘Eye-Eye Yam’

The Akan yam designation **Aniwa-aniwa**, translated as ‘eye-eye,’ metaphorically associates the tuber’s germination buds with human eyes. Within the framework of cultural cognition, this nomenclature reflects a conceptualisation of plants as animate entities endowed with vitality. It exemplifies a cultural schema of generative potential wherein the buds, interpreted as ‘eyes’, function as salient indicators of future growth. This analogy operates on both visual and functional levels, encoding agronomic knowledge by signalling that yams with numerous buds possess superior seeding capacity, as increased bud density correlates with enhanced sprouting potential. Consequently, the plant is constructed as an active, life-generating organism whose prospective productivity is inscribed in its morphology. The proverbial expression **Ne fa beebiara tum fifir**, ‘it can grow from any part,’ further consolidates this schema, encapsulating ecological insight within a concise linguistic unit. Collectively, these conceptualisations affirm an Akan worldview that attributes intrinsic life force to botanical entities, thereby integrating agricultural practice with cultural philosophy (Imoh 2023).

This name creates a cultural category: germinative tubers. This category groups yams by their reproductive features. It prioritises sprouting potential over taste or size. Names like **Aniwa-aniwa** and **Ɔwonta** ‘the one that bears twins’, a plantain species, belong here. This categorisation is highly functional. It helps farmers select viable planting material. The terminology uses organic analogies. The name eye-eye directly links the yam's appearance to its purpose. This category embeds essential agricultural knowledge into the language itself.

Aniwa-aniwa operates through the cultural metaphor YAM IS A LIVING EYE, whereby the tuber is conceptualised as a perceptive being whose buds function as eyes symbolising awareness and emergent vitality (Wonkyi 2021). The reduplicated nominal structure holds particular significance, as it iconically represents the profusion of ocular buds through morphological iteration (Adomako 2015), demonstrating how grammatical form mirrors semantic content to encode abundance. This metaphorical framework exerts a direct influence on agricultural practice by guiding farmers to prioritise yams with abundant budding, interpreting these proliferations as markers of latent biological potential. In doing so, the naming system encodes a broader philosophy of regeneration and ecological sustainability, embedding practical agronomic knowledge within culturally grounded linguistic forms (Mensah, 2020).

Critically, this metaphor diverges from the life-source conceptualisation evident in **Butuabaso**, where the latter emphasises nurture and fragility, whereas **Aniwa-aniwa** foregrounds inherent vitality and autonomous generative capacity. Despite these

distinctions, both metaphorical systems construct plants as animate collaborators in agricultural enterprise, collectively revealing the nuanced epistemological frameworks that characterise Akan ecological cognition and demonstrating how metaphorical construal shapes both conceptual understanding and material practice.

5.2.2. **Tutumeakɔn ‘Neck Uprooting Yam’**

The Akan yam name **Tutumeakɔn** means ‘uproot me by my neck’. **Tutu-me-a-kɔn** can be broken into ‘tu.RED-1SG.POSS-EMPH-neck’. The harvest is conceptualised as a deliberate challenge, with the name encoding specialised knowledge and technical skill. It frames farming as an interaction that demands precision and respect rather than brute force. This designation instantiates a cultural schema we term the agonistic harvest, which structures the farmer’s engagement with the yam as a contest. The tuber’s curved apex is metaphorically construed as a “neck,” a salient morphological feature that underpins its categorisation within this schema (Wonkyi 2021). This schema operates as a functional model for agricultural practice by prescribing the appropriate harvesting technique. It cautions against pulling the yams directly, as excessive force would damage the tubers by breaking their neck. Instead, it instructs the farmer to excavate the surrounding soil, thereby neutralising the yams’ resistance. Through this process, the schema embeds technical knowledge into the plant’s identity, transforming harvesting from a routine task into a skilled, deliberate interaction. This observation aligns with findings that naming conventions encapsulate essential agronomic knowledge in proverbial structures. (Mensah & Ishima 2020). The schema reinforces a core principle: true mastery lies in technique, not brute force.

The designation **Tutumeakɔn** situates the yam within a distinct cultural category that may be described as a behaviourally defined species. This classification is informed by the tuber’s characteristic C-shaped morphology and the harvesting challenge it presents. Its bent “neck” renders it susceptible to breakage, thereby necessitating specialised handling. Unlike botanical taxonomies, this system organises yams according to the technical skill required for successful cultivation. Such knowledge is indispensable for food security, as the name itself encodes the agronomic difficulty it embodies. Through this categorisation, practical expertise is preserved within linguistic form, ensuring the intergenerational transmission of survival strategies.

The nomenclature is predicated on a culturally salient metaphor: YAM IS A WRESTLING OPPONENT, which conceptualises the tuber as a volitional adversary and reframes the harvesting process as a skilled contestation rather than a perfunctory agricultural task. This metaphorical construction encodes practical, embodied knowledge within the nominal structure itself, thereby reflecting a profoundly engaged epistemological relationship with the natural world (Levisen 2016). The metaphor functions prescriptively, as the name itself -uproot-my-neck- constitutes a crystallised pedagogical directive that cautions against incautious application of force while simultaneously prescribing the requisite technique for successful extraction (Mensah 2020).

These metaphors illuminate a significant conceptual tension within the Akan worldview: while **Butuabaso’s** life-source metaphor foregrounds nurture and cultivation, **Aniwa-aniwa’s** generative potential metaphor privileges vitality and reproductive capacity, and **Tutumeakɔn’s** adversarial agency metaphor emphasises conflict and human mastery. Collectively, these cultural conceptualisations construct plants as animate interlocutors that necessitate distinct and respectful modes of human engagement, suggesting a cosmology wherein agricultural practice is fundamentally relational rather than extractive.

5.2.3. **Efu ‘Hump Yam’**

The Akan yam name **Efu**, meaning ‘hump’, establishes a connection between the tuber’s morphology and a camel’s dorsal protuberance, an association that frames the yam as a symbol of resilience and stored energy through what constitutes not merely visual resemblance but functional analogy. This nomenclature instantiates a cultural

schema of resilient form wherein the biological role of the camel hump, specifically its capacity for energy storage, is mapped onto the yam itself, with the tuber's yellow flesh being interpreted as an indicator of high nutritional value (Wonkyi et al. 2021). The schema consequently frames the yam as a natural reservoir of sustenance whilst projecting an ideology of endurance onto the plant (Mensah 2023), thereby guiding farmer action by signalling that **Efu** represents a resilient, durable variety particularly well suited to impoverished soils or challenging growing seasons (Bisilki 2018). The varietal identity is thus constructed fundamentally around the conceptual framework of strength, demonstrating how nomenclature encodes both practical agricultural guidance and cultural valuation within a single lexical unit.

This naming practice situates the yam within a cultural category designated for anomalous objects, grouping tubers with unusual, non-standard morphological features such as prominent humps, whilst simultaneously demonstrating lexical economy through the employment of a familiar bodily term to convey complex characteristics immediately. The nomenclature thus creates a symbolic duality wherein the hump can signify both physical strength and morphological abnormality, and by naming these distinctive traits, the Akan embed social values into agricultural life in ways that transform the unusual form itself into a significant cultural category.

The name is constructed upon a cultural metaphor, **YAM IS A CAMEL'S HUMP**, which maps a symbol of endurance onto the tuber to signify stored vitality and the capacity to withstand scarcity, whilst simultaneously providing practical guidance by marking **Efu** as an adaptive, drought-resistant variety that implies careful handling to preserve its nutrient-rich protuberance. This metaphor, however, carries inherent ambiguity, as a camel's hump symbolises strength whilst a human hunchback can imply stigma, a tension that highlights a cultural principle of naming wherein the honourable camel analogy is privileged over a human referent, which would be considered peripheral (Sekyi-Baidoo 2024). Unlike other metaphors of process, such as those encoding nurture or struggle, **Efu's** metaphor foregrounds a static, durable form that encodes a specific ecological wisdom centred upon survival and stored potential.

5.2.4. **Asɔbayer 'Toe Yam'**

The Akan yam name **Asɔbayer** means 'toe yam'. It can be broken into morphemes such as */a-/*-PLU *sɔ*-[a clipped form of *sɔba* meaning 'toe'] *-bayer* 'yam'. It connects the tuber's shape to a human foot with toes. This analysis shows how the name uses the body to encode identification and value.

The name instantiates a cultural schema of somatic reference wherein the human body serves as a template for interpreting nature, mapping the familiar structure of a foot and toes directly onto the yams' form to create an immediate, intuitive category for the plant (Mensah 2020). This schema renders the yams' unique morphology instantly recognisable by anchoring botanical knowledge in universal bodily experience, a phenomenon analogous to personal naming practices in Konkomba (Bisilki 2018) and reflecting a broader principle of embodied cognition documented in the naming of sea creatures in Akan (Wonkyi 2021). A critical linguistic detail emerges in this naming act through the plural prefix */a-/*, which explicitly signals multiple 'toes' and thereby transforms a physical trait into a stable, communicable cultural concept with classificatory precision.

This naming practice situates the yam within a cultural category that may be termed somatically classified tubers, a categorisation that groups plants according to their resemblance to body parts and thereby provides an intuitive framework for identification whereby a yam's morphology becomes conceptualised as a 'foot' with 'toes', rendering plant knowledge deeply personal and mnemonic. The category serves a vital communicative function through lexical economy, as the designation 'toe yam' transmits a precise image of its structure, thus ensuring stable transmission of knowledge across generations whilst embedding a body-centric epistemology into agricultural practice.

The name **Asɔbayer** is grounded in the cultural metaphor, **YAM IS A FOOT**, which projects human qualities onto the plant in alignment with the Akan principle of

commemorability, wherein feet symbolise positive values such as movement and stability (Sekyi-Baidoo 2024). By rendering the unfamiliar familiar, this metaphor utilises the known human form to comprehend the yam's morphology, thereby grounding agricultural knowledge in embodied, corporeal experience. The metaphor simultaneously provides practical guidance, as the delicate, toe-like tip requires careful harvesting to prevent damage, whilst its distinctive shape signals specific quality indicators and economic value (Asiimwe 2022). This metaphorical framework differs from alternative conceptualisations in that it does not foreground potential, as exemplified by **Aniwa-aniwa**, nor resilience, as demonstrated by **Efu**; rather, it emphasises a functional connection to the human body that reinforces a worldview characterised by deep interconnection, employing physical form as a means of encoding essential agricultural knowledge.

5.3 Object/Artefact Metaphors

Within the Akan agricultural tradition, everyday tools and objects provide a fundamental cognitive framework for interpreting nature. Yam names like **Apuka** 'bead yam,' **Makyese** 'matchbox yam,' and **Asahina** 'water pot yam' use the shapes of hoes, matchboxes, and pots to classify tubers. This practice transcends simple description. It embeds stories of labour, modernity, and domestic sustenance into the crops themselves. These object-based metaphors reveal a cultural ethos where human-made artefacts and the natural world are deeply intertwined partners in survival and meaning.

5.3.1. Apuka 'Bead Yam'

The Akan yam name **Apuka**, meaning 'bead yam', compares the tuber's round morphology to a polished bead, thereby revealing how the nomenclature encodes cultural ideals of beauty, value, and skilled artisanry through the instantiation of an artefact reference schema. This schema, which employs human-made objects to classify natural phenomena, maps the yam's smooth, spherical form onto the perfected shape of a bead, functioning not merely as description but as a framing mechanism that positions the tuber as an object of crafted beauty and aesthetic value (Wonkyi 2021) whilst simultaneously embedding a social ideology wherein beads signify wealth and status in Akan culture, thereby projecting these connotations onto the yam and aligning it with prestige (Mensah 2020). The schema additionally serves a cognitive function, as the standardised bead shape renders yam quality readily recognisable and communicable, consequently facilitating trade transactions through shared cultural reference points.

This naming practice situates the yams within a cultural category designated herein as artefact-referenced tubers, a classification that groups yams according to their resemblance to culturally valued objects whilst assigning both cultural and economic significance. The category embeds an aesthetic ideal whereby the perfect roundness of a bead becomes the evaluative standard for a quality yam, thereby framing the harvest as an object of beauty rather than merely a utilitarian foodstuff. This categorisation simultaneously fulfils an economic function, as linking the yam to a symbol of wealth instantaneously signals its market value, transforming a staple crop into a cultural commodity that operates within networks of both subsistence and symbolic exchange.

The name is constructed upon a cultural metaphor, YAM IS A BEAD, which frames farming as a skilled craft whilst aligning with the commemorability principle by elevating the yam through its association with beauty and value (Sekyi-Baidoo 2024). This metaphor performs functions beyond mere identification, as it assigns cultural value and aesthetic judgement (Bisilki 2018), thereby articulating an agricultural philosophy in which beauty constitutes a core value. The metaphor simultaneously provides direct economic guidance, given that the round, bead-like morphology represents a marketable trait that demonstrates how aesthetic perfection enhances commercial value. This conceptualisation differs from alternative metaphorical frameworks in that it does not foreground resilience or life force but rather prioritises beauty and artistry, revealing a worldview wherein human skill and natural form converge such that a staple crop is transformed into a cultural artefact.

5.3.2 Makyese ‘Matchbox Yam’

The Akan yam **Makyese**, meaning 'matchbox yam', derives its name from a comparison between small, cube-shaped yam sets and a matchbox, thereby connecting agricultural practice to modern objects present within the Akan material environment. Unlike **Apuka** ('bead yam') or **Efu** ('hump yam'), which draw upon organic and bodily referents, Makyese employs an industrial reference that instantiates a schema of 'functional miniaturisation', utilising a small, quotidian object to signal extensive conceptual information through what is recognised as lexical economy (Caesar 2019). A single lexeme, 'matchbox', conveys the yam's morphology, dimensions, and agricultural potential, rendering complex information accessible for transmission and recall (Ollennu et al. 2022). This schema contrasts markedly with alternative Akan classificatory models, wherein **Asɔbayer** ('toe yam') employs the human body as its primary referent, whilst **Apuka** ('bead yam') relies upon a pre-colonial artefact with its focus on aesthetic value and trade significance. **Makyese** differs fundamentally through its deployment of a post-colonial, industrial object, a shift that reveals a dynamic material culture responsive to historical change (Habibli 2023). The schema now privileges industrial efficiency and standardised form, demonstrating a naming system characterised by adaptability that integrates innovative conceptualisations emerging from a transformed socio-economic landscape.

The categorisation of Makyese within an 'industrial' taxonomic group reveals the dynamic nature of cultural classification systems, demonstrating that naming practices are not static but evolve in accordance with shifting cultural contexts. Whereas the Ibibio and Tiv organise animals according to admired attributes such as strength (Mensah 2023), Makyese is categorised through its functional relationship to a modern object, reflecting broader patterns of nomenclatural adaptation observed across diverse societies. This process finds parallels in the Beni Sakhr tribe of Jordan, whose adoption of modern nomenclature accompanied transformations in their lifestyle (Aljbour & Al-Haq 2019), suggesting that the Akan incorporation of an 'industrial' category represents a comparable adaptive mechanism through which post-colonial material culture becomes integrated into pre-existing agricultural cosmologies.

The name is constructed upon a cultural metaphor, **YAM SETT IS A MATCHBOX**, which maps the matchbox's shape, size, and utility onto the yam to frame the tuber as a product of standardised, efficient design, thereby aligning with Wonkyi's (2021) finding that metaphor functions as a principal Akan naming mechanism through which simple, effective labels are created for complex agronomic concepts. Comparable to metaphors employed in Nzema death-prevention names (Yakub 2024), this designation serves a clear cultural objective, specifically the promotion of an agronomic principle asserting that diminutive size does not preclude potency. This industrial metaphor diverges sharply from alternative conceptualisations, bearing no resemblance to **Butuabaso's** biological metaphor **YAM IS AN EGG**, which encodes notions of nurture, nor to **Nankabayer's** ecological metaphor **YAM IS A PYTHON**, which conveys natural power. Whilst Akan Sea creature nomenclature employs the metaphorical mapping **SEA CREATURES ARE LAND ANIMALS** (Wonkyi et al. 2021), **Makyese** establishes a novel conceptual framework through **AGRICULTURAL OBJECTS ARE INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTS**, thereby reflecting a contemporary, mechanised worldview that marks a significant departure from traditional organicist metaphorical systems.

This analysis reveals three key implications for understanding contemporary Akan agricultural nomenclature. Firstly, it demonstrates an industrialised farming lexicon wherein modern objects now shape traditional naming practices (Sharifian, 2017), a phenomenon that differs markedly from pre-industrial designations such as **Efu** 'hump yam'. Secondly, the name operates on a functional basis, as **Makyese** prioritises practical utility over natural form or aesthetic considerations. Finally, the nomenclature preserves agricultural knowledge by encoding principles of efficient propagation and waste prevention (Bisilki 2018). By connecting traditional farming practices to industrial imagery through its matchbox metaphor, **Makyese** represents modern

resourcefulness whilst maintaining cultural continuity. This analysis consequently frames the name as a cultural artefact that captures the Akan's dynamic relationship with their land and their adaptive responses to a changing world.

5.3.3 Asahina 'Water Pot Yam'

The Akan name **Asahina**, meaning 'water pot yam', establishes a connection between the yam's rounded morphology and a household pot, thereby framing the yam as a vital source of sustenance that integrates agricultural and domestic spheres of life. The name instantiates a cultural schema of the domestic container, whereby household objects serve as classificatory frameworks for understanding nature through the mapping of the yam's bulbous form onto the shape of a water pot, facilitating immediate visual recognition (Wonkyi 2021). This schema operates at a deeper conceptual level by linking the yam's role as a nutrient repository to the pot's function of holding water, consequently framing the yam as a container of life-sustaining energy (Bisilki 2018). Through this metaphorical structure, the schema integrates agricultural and domestic domains, presenting the field and the hearth as components of a single, continuous system (Mensah 2020).

This naming practice situates the yams within a cultural category designated here as domestic-artefact tubers, a classification that groups yams according to their resemblance to household items and thereby establishes a direct conceptual link between the farm and the domestic sphere. The categorisation demonstrates lexical economy by employing the common term **hina** 'pot' to convey the yams' morphology, thus facilitating ease of identification, whilst simultaneously merging symbolic roles through the mapping of the water pot's associations with sustenance onto the tubers, thereby underscoring their vital function in food security.

The name is constructed upon a cultural metaphor, YAM IS A WATER POT, which frames the yams as a fundamental source of life whilst commemorating the core cultural value of nourishment (Sekyi-Baidoo 2024). Functioning as an ideological statement, this metaphor prioritises sustenance as a societal imperative (Boluwaduro 2020) and integrates the domestic and agricultural domains through its conceptual mapping. The metaphor simultaneously provides practical guidance, as the pot-like shape signals a quality yam preferred in market contexts, whilst asserting that the yams' primary value lies in their life-sustaining role. This metaphorical framework differs from alternative conceptualisations in that it does not foreground aesthetic qualities, as exemplified by **Apuka**, nor labour, as demonstrated by **Asobayer**; rather, it centres upon the fundamental purpose of food, reflecting a worldview wherein a crop's ultimate value resides in its capacity to nourish the community.

5.4. Narrative/Proverbial Metaphors

In Akan culture, narrative and proverbial metaphors elevate ordinary food names into vibrant reflections of social values, humour, and emotional experiences. The yam named **Kyeremedansibew** (show me a building site) exemplifies this tradition, employing hyperbole to illustrate its remarkable flavour, so enticing that it sparks a desire to relocate. Through the lens of Cultural Linguistics, we explore how these metaphors encapsulate cultural schemas (*food appreciation*), categories (*yam as consumer reaction*), and conceptual mappings (TASTE AS A LIFE-CHANGING EXPERIENCE).

5.4.1 Kyeremedansibew 'Show Me a Building Site'

The Akan name **Kyeremedansibew** means 'show me a building site.' The name **Kyeremedansibew** contains the forms **Kyerε** 'show'- 1SG 'me'-**dan**- 'house' **si**- 'build' **bew**- 'place'. The name humorously praises a yam for its extraordinary taste, demonstrating how nomenclature encodes social emotion and supreme value through hyperbolic expression. By instantiating a cultural schema of experiential hyperbole, wherein exaggerated statements convey heightened sensory value, the name employs the core metaphor TASTE IS A LIFE-CHANGING EVENT to map flavour onto a profound existential concept, thereby framing the yams' taste as an experience capable of

redefining one's life (Wonkyi 2021). This schema encodes an extreme emotional response through what is not a literal claim but rather a culturally recognised exaggeration that communicates exceptional quality via powerful human emotions tied to place and belonging (Mensah 2020). In contrast to nomenclature prioritising physical description, this schema foregrounds subjective experience as the primary criterion for agricultural valuation.

This naming practice situates the yams within a cultural category designated here as affective-response tubers, a classification that groups yams according to the social and emotional reactions they provoke rather than by morphological characteristics, thereby defining their identity through social impact. This categorisation embeds cultural values directly into the crop itself, whereby a yam's quality is measured by its capacity to shape human relationships and desire, with the ultimate significance of the yam residing in this social power.

The name is constructed upon a cultural metaphor, YAM IS A COVETED TREASURE, which frames the yam as a potent temptation by identifying its capacity to inspire intense, disruptive desire through hyperbolic expression that conveys supreme value. The humorous phrase equates consuming the yams with achieving a significant life goal, thereby conveying desirability by mapping sensory pleasure onto social aspiration (Sekyi-Baidoo 2024). Beyond its symbolic function, the metaphor provides social and economic guidance by signalling superior quality, influencing trade through elevated market value, and reflecting social tensions surrounding scarce, desirable resources (Mensah 2020). This metaphorical framework differs from alternative conceptualisations in that it does not foreground nurture or utilitarian function; rather, it emphasises pure, taste-driven craving, revealing a naming system that captures a crop's profound social and emotional impact within the community.

6. Findings

Our analysis of Akan tuber names reveals a sophisticated system of cultural conceptualisation in which metaphors serve as the primary mechanism for encoding ecological knowledge, social values, and practical instruction. The findings are organised below according to the dominant source domains identified: animals, body parts, objects/artefacts, and narrative proverbs.

The data revealed that animal metaphors project traits of strength, vitality, and nurturing onto tubers, thereby creating a symbolic kinship with the natural world that structures agricultural practice and ecological understanding. The name **Nankabayer**, meaning 'python yam', exemplifies this phenomenon through its coiled form, which mirrors a resting snake, with farmers asserting that the yam is the python that lies upon the ground. This constitutes not merely a description, but rather the establishment of a YAM IS A PYTHON metaphor, wherein the recognition that pulling the yam straight out would break its back teaches a careful harvesting method, whilst framing the tuber as a powerful entity deserving of respectful treatment. In contrast, **Butuabaso**, meaning 'incubated eggs', employs a different animal domain by comparing a yam cluster to a hen's eggs, thereby highlighting concepts of fertility and fragile potential through a LIFE-SOURCE metaphor that guides agricultural action. Consequently, farmers manage these yams gently and preserve them for planting, a practice that frames farming as an act of nurturing future growth rather than mere extraction.

Tuber names frequently employ the human body as a source domain, thereby creating an immediate, somatic frame of reference, as exemplified by **Aniwa-aniwa**, meaning 'eye-eye yam', wherein the sprouting buds are designated as eyes in a manner that frames the yam as a watchful, living entity, a characterisation confirmed by the common assertion that it can regenerate from any portion. Farmers recognise that a yam possessing more eyes demonstrates greater vitality, knowledge that guides their selection of planting material. The name **Tutumeakɔn**, meaning 'uproot me by the neck', casts the yam as a formidable opponent through the YAM IS AN ADVERSARY metaphor, which presents a direct challenge by encoding a precise harvesting technique wherein the tuber must not be extracted by its neck but rather carefully excavated to prevent damage. In contrast, the name **Efu**, or 'hump yam', evokes a different

metaphorical framework, as its curved morphology recalls a camel's hump, thereby symbolising stored energy and endurance through a RESILIENCE metaphor that classifies the yam according to hardiness rather than gustatory qualities and signals its suitability for cultivation in poor soil or preservation against future scarcity.

The findings demonstrate that everyday objects provide a cognitive framework for classifying tubers according to utility and domestic life, as exemplified by the name **Asahina**, meaning 'water pot yam,' whose round form resembles a household water pot. This VITAL SUSTENANCE metaphor operates directly by conceptualising the yam as a container of nourishment, analogous to the pot's function of holding essential water, thereby connecting the field's yield to the household's well-being through a unified domestic schema.

A key finding was that certain names transcend physical description to encode social and emotional responses, as exemplified by **Kyeramedansibew**, meaning 'show me a building site', which employs humorous exaggeration to suggest that the yams' taste is of such exceptional quality that consumption would motivate residential relocation. This TASTE IS A LIFE-CHANGING EVENT metaphor classifies the yams according to their powerful affective impact rather than their morphological characteristics, consequently building reputation and enhancing market value.

Akan tuber names constitute a complex system of cultural knowledge that functions as a pedagogical mechanism, embedding practical farming guidance within animal and tool metaphors whilst preserving core values such as resilience and honouring the dignity of labour. These nomenclatural practices express social identity through humour and narrative, with their integration of modern objects demonstrating a dynamic, living tradition rather than a static archaic system. This analysis confirms that these mundane designations represent significant cultural artefacts that offer a distinctive analytical aperture into the profound interconnections between language, culture, and the natural world.

7. Conclusions

This study examined the deployment of metaphor in Akan tuber naming practices, using Cultural Linguistics to analyse how designations derived from animals, body parts, and objects communicate cultural knowledge embedded within agricultural nomenclature. The findings demonstrate that these names constitute rich cultural artefacts wherein animal metaphors, exemplified by **Nankabayer** 'python yam', link tubers to attributes of strength and fertility, whilst body-part metaphors, such as **Aniwa-aniwa** 'eye-eye yam', employ human corporeal form to express concepts of vitality and resilience. Object metaphors, including **Asahina** 'water pot yam', establish connections between agricultural practice and material culture through their emphasis on the value of nourishment, whereas narrative names, such as **Kyeramedansibew** 'show me a building site', utilise hyperbole to convey social pride and cultural aspiration.

This research demonstrates how language preserves Indigenous knowledge and cultural identity. It contributes to African linguistics and cognitive anthropology by revealing the deep links between agriculture, metaphor, and worldview. Future studies could compare naming practices across other cultures or explore the impact of modern farming on these traditional systems. Documenting these names is vital, as they are repositories of ecological wisdom and cultural heritage.

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