

Rosanna Tramutoli

University of Naples “L’Orientale”
ORCID 0009-0006-0535-6614

Cultural metaphors of emotions in Swahili and Zulu: language, body and healing practices

ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes cultural metaphors of emotions related to traditional healing in two Bantu languages, Swahili and Zulu, considering the relationship between language and cultural conceptualizations. Cross-linguistic studies have shown that emotional language and descriptions of character traits are an echo of cultural practices, ethnomedical resources, traditions and beliefs. Taking into account traditional healing practices in Swahili (*uganga*) and Zulu (*umuthi*), the author seeks to illustrate the cultural conceptualizations of the body that are involved in describing emotions, in order to shed light on the problematic correspondence between linguistic expression and cultural context in metaphorical processes. Examples of cultural metaphors in the two languages will show how the description of emotions draws from humoral theory, color symbolism and medical practices, which are also relevant to the treatment of diseases.

KEYWORDS: cultural metaphors, emotions, traditional healing, Swahili, Zulu

1. CULTURAL METAPHORS: LANGUAGE AND MEDICAL PRACTICES

This study analyzes cultural metaphors, i.e., conceptual metaphors that are culturally constructed (Sharifian 2017), in the wider cultural context of Swahili and Zulu ethnomedical practices to see which cultural traditions correspond to conceptual metaphors of emotions in these languages.¹

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, Swahili data analyzed in this paper are taken from Tramutoli (2020). Zulu data are mainly derived from bibliographical sources (e.g., Ngubane 1977; Donda 1997).

The term “metaphor” is used in this paper as a general label that also includes metonymies, idioms and semantic extensions in a broader sense since the purpose here is not to classify these expressions from a linguistic point of view but rather to reflect on the relationship between language and cultural conceptualizations.

We start from the assumption that the ways in which different languages encode complex abstract concepts, such as love, sadness, anger or surprise, are not isolated but form a part of a conceptual system that is influenced by the social and cultural environment both in a synchronic and diachronic dimension. According to Sharifian, historical cultural practices, like ethnomedical practices, have left traces in the current language, some of which are in fossilized forms that may no longer be analyzable. In this sense, language is a “memory bank” for storing and communicating cultural conceptualizations (Sharifian 2014: 476).

It would undoubtedly be too simplistic to assume that there is a perfect correspondence between linguistic and cultural practices, but it is possible to observe references to ancient medical practices and beliefs in some conceptualizations of the body and linguistic expressions, especially in emotional and body metaphors.

Traditional healing practices, known in Swahili as *uganga* (or *tiba ya asili*) and in Zulu as *umuthi*, encompass practices, remedies, ingredients and procedures of all kinds that enable people to cope with diseases through the use of traditional herbs and medicines. The Swahili and Zulu terms for ‘traditional healer’, *mganga* and *inyanga*, respectively, derive from the same proto-Bantu root **xanga* ‘to cure’ (Donda 1997: 123), as does the Swahili noun *uganga* ‘traditional healing practices’, belonging to class 11 (noun prefix *u-*), which is typical of abstract nouns.

Mganga/inyanga is an expert in traditional medicine who has acquired medical knowledge accumulated over generations and knows how to use plants, roots and herbs to treat various types of illnesses, both physical and mental. Indeed, traditional healers can cure illnesses that have biological origins or are caused by witchcraft or environmental factors.

The Zulu term *umuthi* is not semantically limited to ‘medicine’ since it also refers to ‘the tree and its parts, all substances used to restore health, the art of healing practices’ in general. Specifically, two types of *umuthi*

can be distinguished: *umuthi wokuphilisa* ‘medicine for healing’ and *umuthi wokubulala* ‘medicine for killing’ (Ngubane 1977: 22).

In this study, we will show that although linguistic data, especially linguistic descriptions of emotions and feelings, largely reflect cultural conceptualizations, cultural metaphors are often difficult to examine because some expressions are “fossilized” conceptualizations that do not allow for any cognitive mapping from the source domain to the target domain (Lakoff and Johnson 1980), nor do they imply that current speakers are aware of the cultural roots of these expressions.

We find examples of fossilized expressions related to humoral theory (Swartz 1992; Geeraerts and Grondelaers 1995) and medical practices also in European languages, for instance, in Italian *umore* ‘humor’, *flemmatico* ‘phlegmatic’; in Dutch *zwartgallig* (lit. ‘bilious black’) ‘sad, depressed’; in English *spleen* ‘sadness’, *phlegmatic* (*phlegm*) ‘calm, apathetic’; in French *avoir du sang dans les veines* ‘be brave’. Even though speakers are no longer familiar with ancient practices, they still use these expressions, which have undergone a process of reinterpretation over time.

Indeed, Cardona (2006: 126) acknowledges that

[i]t almost never happens that the explanation given by the speaker follows exactly that which we could establish scientifically, that is, going back to older stages of the language ... the speaker usually does not have, nor can he have, awareness of the older forms of his language (unless he is a professional scholar and has access to written documents) and cannot explain the form that within the language he speaks at that moment.²

In addition to being linked to humoral theory, many of these beliefs find their roots in a more universal schema of cold-hot opposition (Cardona 1995), so it would be superficial to assume that some cultural practices (such as the use of cold and hot substances) are derived exclusively from the humoral theory. Since this opposition has been attested in languages

² “Non accade quasi mai che la spiegazione data dal parlante ricalchi esattamente quella che noi potremmo stabilire scientificamente, cioè risalendo a stadi più antichi della lingua ... il parlante non ha, nè può avere, coscienza, per solito delle forme più antiche della sua lingua (a meno che non sia un letterato di professione e abbia accesso a documenti scritti) e non può spiegare la forma che all’interno della lingua che egli parla in quel momento”.

from different regions of the world (Africa, Australia, New Guinea), it could be considered a universal conceptual model (Cardona 1995).

Moreover, in many Bantu languages, the concept of purification is semantically related to “cold” and thus “cure” (Parkin 2013), like the Swahili verb *-pona* and its Zulu counterpart *-pholisa*, both of which mean ‘to cool, to heal’.

2. THE BALANCE OF HUMORS IN SWAHILI

Although it seems to be a universal thing to consider the body as a container of emotions, we should nevertheless note that, despite the similarities at the generic level, the specific container metaphors are composed of greatly differing elements (Kövecses 1995). Thus, when analyzing emotion expressions, it is important to take into account the cultural background of our concepts of emotions (in our case, the humoral theory) (Geeraerts and Grondelaers 1995), that is, we should consider the significance of the body in Swahili culture, where specific organs, such as *ini* ‘liver’, and bodily fluids, like *damu* ‘blood’ and *nyongo* ‘bile’, play a prominent cultural role.

The Swahili view of the body’s functioning is based on Galen’s ideas about physiology, which influenced Swahili through Islamic culture (Swartz 1992, 1997; Parkin 2000). The Swahili humoral theory sees four *matabia* ‘elements’ or ‘characters’, i.e., *baridi* ‘cold’, *hari* ‘hot’, *yabisi* ‘dry’ and *rutuba* ‘wet’,³ as the basis of the body’s functioning (Swartz 1992: 41). According to this view, the body functions properly only when the four elements are all in balance (*muutadil* or *mizani*) (Swartz 1992: 41). Each of the four *matabia* is associated with a bodily fluid, a body part and a character trait (Swartz 1992: 41):

<i>baridi</i> ‘cold’	phlegm – lungs – impassive
<i>hari</i> ‘hot’	blood – liver – courageous
<i>yabisi</i> ‘dry’	black bile – spleen – moody, depressive, suspicious
<i>rutuba</i> ‘wet’	yellow bile – gallbladder – proud, quick-tempered

³ Swartz (1992: 41) spells it *rughtha*.

In addition to body organs, bodily fluids seem to be culturally relevant in Swahili conceptualizations of emotions since they are also associated with people's feelings and character traits.

A person's character is determined by his/her particular balance of bodily fluids, which react differently to changes in food, weather conditions, seasons and, if they are unbalanced (meaning that the person is ill), to the specific properties of medicinal herbs. Each person's character/temperament predisposes him/her to certain emotional responses. For instance, someone with a "hot" temperament may commit terrible acts under certain circumstances. Seasons also indirectly influence the functioning of the body since external temperature affects digestion: foods that increase body heat are more easily absorbed in summer, and vice versa. Even foods and beverages are classified according to the four elements; not according to the substances of which they are composed but according to the effect they have on the functioning of the body. For example, ice is not "cold" but "dry", and honey is "hot" (even if it has just come out of a fridge).

Both the functioning of the body and the morality of social relations are described using the same "balance" metaphor. Thus, language usage supports the hypothesis that there is an important correspondence between these two theories (Swartz 1992).

3. THE BODY AS THE *LOCUS* OF EMOTIONS IN SWAHILI

There are several Swahili expressions in which body organs/bodily fluids appear as the *locus* of emotions or in metonymical descriptions of character traits. From a diachronic perspective, *nyongo* 'bile, gallbladder' and *ini* 'liver' of the *matabia* theory, with their related bodily fluids (bile and blood), seem to play a significant role in Swahili body conceptualizations. In particular, *nyongo* 'bile', which in the humoral theory is linked to depression (*yabisi* 'dry') and anger (*rutuba* 'wet'), has several connotations in Swahili as the seat of negative emotions (anger, resentment):

- (1) *Ana mtimanyongo.* lit. 'S/he has a bile-heart' (s/he feels resentment).
- (2) *Ana kinyongo.* lit. 'S/he has bile' (s/he feels resentment).
- (3) *Kutumbukia nyongo.* lit. 'To fall into the bile (of someone)' (to get angry).

As can be seen from the above examples, many similarities exist between the humoral theory and Swahili metaphorical expressions, although there are also notable differences. In (1), the two types of bile of the humoral theory (black bile and yellow bile) are combined and located in the heart rather than in the liver (*mtimanyongo*). The bile is not a source domain for the abstract concept of resentment, but it is the origin of resentment according to the humoral theory; indeed, the same term (*kinyongo*) is used for both ‘bile’ and ‘resentment, anger, hate’. In other words, body parts are not simply an easier notion to grasp but are the seat or even the cause of an emotion or a disease.

Thus, we observe that Swahili expressions such as (1)–(3) are “fossilized” body metaphors influenced by the humoral theory and ethnomedical traditions that have left traces in the language. Speakers are not aware of the cultural and historical sources of the metaphorical expressions involving bile and use them in their extended emotional meaning, i.e., ‘resentment’, without knowing anything about the functioning of the bodily fluids and their traditional medical value.

This link with ancient medical traditions and the balance of bodily humors can be clearly seen in the descriptions provided by Swahili *waganga* (‘traditional healers’, plural of *mganga*) during interviews:

[*Majimaji ndani ya mwili*] ... *tunaita nyongo* ... *nyongo ni kitu fulani nyeusi ambayo iko ndani ya moyo ambayo inatengeneza hasira, chuki na mambo kama haya.*

[The fluids in the body] ... are what we call bile ... bile is something black that is inside the heart and causes anger, hate and things like that.

Moreover, *nyongo* is further described as “*uchungu, acid nyeusi ndani ya moyo, hasira, chuki. Mtume ametolewa nyongo*” (“bitterness, black acid in the heart, anger, hate. The Prophet has no bile”).

These *waganga*’s descriptions recall the yellow bile of the humoral theory, located in *nyongo* ‘gallbladder’ and associated with the *tabia* ‘character’ of a proud, quick-tempered person and with the element of *rutuba* ‘wet’, which is described as *majimaji* ‘fluid’ or *uchungu nyeusi* ‘black acid’.

According to Kraska-Szlenk,

[w]hile ‘heart’ may imply positive feelings, negative emotions, such as envy, malice, bitterness, are cross-linguistically linked to two other inner organs: liver, in which bile is secreted, and gall-bladder, in which it is stored. The folk thinking is not without a medical substantiation – long-termed stress and negative emotions indeed badly affect these organs (Kraska-Szlenk 2014: 169).

Indeed, *ini* ‘liver’ also appears in body metaphors in Swahili, as can be seen in expressions where it is the seat of emotions. In particular, this organ stands for suffering (4) or love (5)–(6), while in the humoral theory, it represents courage and is related to the elements of *hari* ‘hot’ and blood.

- (4) *Alinikata maini.* lit. ‘S/he has cut me to the liver’ (s/he has made me suffer).
 (5) *Nyonga mkalia ini.* lit. ‘The hip sitting on my liver’ (my love).
 (6) *Kipande cha ini.* lit. ‘A piece of my liver’ (my love).

The explanation of expression (4) given by a Swahili speaker highlights the function of the liver in the human body, namely, the fact that it is the seat of interiority that can be negatively affected by poisonous substances, thus causing deep suffering:

Mtu amesikitika sana, amepata athari ya ndani, kama sumu ilimwingia. Ini kazi yake ni kunyonya sumu inayoingia mwilini, [maumivu] yalikuwa sumu kwa sababu yaliathiri ini pia siyo moyo tu, alipata athari ya ndani.

A person has suffered a lot, s/he was internally affected, as if poison had entered him/her. The function of the liver is to suck out the poison that enters the body, [the pain] was poisoning because it also affected the liver, not just the heart, s/he was affected internally.

This image-schema of *ini* as “deep interiority” is also attested by the process of grammaticalization of this term, which has become the most common locative suffix in Swahili (*-ni*) (Heine and Kuteva 2002: 198).

Ini is thus conceptualized by speakers as the seat of emotions and interiority in general. Nevertheless, the body parts that recur most frequently in the linguistic description of emotions are *moyo* ‘heart’ and *roho* ‘spirit, soul’, even though they are not relevant in the humoral theory since they

are not containers of bodily fluids. They are used in the conceptualization of emotions especially in combination with the color association where black and white recall the concept of black bile (spleen) versus yellow bile (gallbladder) of the humoral theory. However, while in the humoral theory, black bile is related to the melancholic temperament and yellow bile to anger, in (7) and (8), the color white seems to have a positive meaning.

- (7) *Ana roho/moyo nyeusi/mweusi.* lit. ‘S/he has a black soul/heart’ (s/he is a bad, selfish person).
 (8) *Ana roho/moyo nyeupe/mweupe.* lit. ‘S/he has a white soul/heart’ (s/he is a good, generous person).

Moreover, *damu* ‘blood’ and *mishipa* ‘veins, nerves’ are also sources of metaphorical expressions of fear, anxiety, desire. While in the humoral theory, blood is related to the liver, the “hot” element and courage, in expressions such as (10) and (11), we find it associated with the “hot” (*ilichemka* ‘boiled’) or “cold” (*ilisisimka* ‘cause the blood to run cold’) elements that express fear. *Mishipa* ‘veins’, which do not seem to be relevant in the humoral theory, occur in idiomatic expressions related to shame (12) and anxiety or fear (13).

- (9) *Kulazia damu.* lit. ‘To make the blood sleep’ (to calm the desire).
 (10) *Damu ilichemka.* lit. ‘My blood boiled’ (I was afraid).
 (11) *Damu ilisisimka mwilini.* lit. ‘The blood was running cold in the body’ (s/he was afraid).
 (12) *Hata mshipa wa aibu hana.* lit. ‘S/he does not even have the vein/nerve of shame’ (s/he has no shame).
 (13) *Mikono imesimama mishipa.* lit. ‘His/her hands show raised veins/nerves’ (s/he is anxious, worried).

The examples analyzed above show that there are different conceptual constructs with respect to how the body and embodied concepts are understood. Linguistic data regarding body terms, such as *moyo*, *ini* or *damu*, can give insights into the conceptualization model of Swahili culture and highlight correspondences and discrepancies between cultural conceptualizations and linguistic representation.

4. SWAHILI METAPHORS OF EMOTIONS AND HEALING PRACTICES

There is a number of Swahili metaphors describing a state of intense anger, rage, confusion and lack of self-control in general, often involving the verb *kupanda* ‘to climb up’ (also in causative form *-pandisha* or passive form *-pandwa*). In addition to being currently used to express anger (19), they reflect cultural conceptualizations related to Swahili spirit possession and ethnomedical practices. This is evident in (14)–(18), where the terms *pepo*, *mzuka*, *shetani* ‘spirit’ indicate the idea of being overwhelmed or overcome by a particular emotion. The state of extreme rage is expressed through the image of a spirit climbing on someone (14)–(16) or filling their body (17) and thus causing a lack of self-control.

- (14) [*Shetani*] *amempanda kichwani.* lit. ‘[A spirit] has climbed on his/her head’.
 (15) *Pepo/mzuka/shetani amekupanda.* lit. ‘A spirit has climbed on him/her’.
 (16) *Amempandisha shetani wake.* lit. ‘S/he has made his/her spirit come up’.
 (17) *Alijazwa pepo.* lit. ‘S/he was filled with spirit’.
 (18) *Anaumwa shetani.* lit. ‘S/he is suffering from the spirit’.
 (19) *Alipandwa na hasira.* lit. ‘S/he was climbed/overcome by anger’.

In the context of spirit possession cults, the verb *kupanda* recalls the movement of the spirit within the patient’s body during the rituals. Erdtsieck explains the role of *pepo/shetani* within the human body, highlighting the physical and spiritual dimensions of a disease:

Pepo is an internal force, an internal spirit of the human being, whose quietness is important in order to have a good life ... *pepo* is something that can cause the origin of a mental or physical illness (Erdtsieck 2001: 3).⁴

Spirit possession thus involves both physical and “spiritual” matters since both the body and the spirit of the patient (and the spirit’s “movement” within the body) are interlinked from the very beginning of the process of falling ill (Topan 1992: 58). According to Topan (1992: 58), *maradhi*

⁴ “*Pepo ni nguvu ya ndani, roho ya ndani katika binadamu, ambayo utulivu wake ni muhimu ili mtu apate maisha mazuri ... pepo ni kitu ambacho kinaweza kuwa sababu ya chanzo cha ugonjwa wa akili na/au mwili*”.

‘illness’ is “the primary signal of a spirit’s presence in a human body”, as inferred from the explanation given by a *mganga* from Zanzibar:

*Shetani anaingia mwilini ... kichwani anapanda ... yule mtu anapiga kelele ...
anaumwa shetani, sisi tunamfanya dawa anapata afadhali.*

The spirit enters the body ... he climbs on the head ... that person cries ...
s/he is suffering from a spirit, we prepare a medicine for him/her so that
s/he gets better.

The traditional healer explains that when someone is affected by *shetani*, he usually gives them a specific *dawa* ‘medicine’. In this description, *maradhi* ‘illness’ linked to spirit possession is conceptualized as a physical disease, which is treated with specific medicines/practices, such as *dawa za majani* ‘herbal medicines’, and, in some cases, with the support of Qur’anic medicines, such as (holy) medicinal verses (*kombe*),⁵ Qur’anic charms written on the clothes worn by the patient (*hirizi*), prayers (*dua*), etc.

Moreover, the patient’s helplessness in the face of *maradhi* ‘physical and spiritual illness’ is reflected in the use of passive constructions involving, for instance, the passive verb *-umwa* (lit. ‘to be bitten’), usually followed by a body part (20) and occurring in Swahili descriptions of physical pain; in (21) and (22), on the other hand, the cause of the disease and the illness itself are represented by *shetani* ‘spirit’:

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| (20) <i>Anaumwa kichwa.</i> | lit. ‘His/her head hurts’. |
| (21) <i>Anaumwa shetani.</i> | lit. ‘S/he is suffering from a spirit’. |
| (22) <i>Ana ugonjwa wa pepo.</i> | lit. ‘S/he has a disease of the spirit’. |

In (22), the term *ugonjwa* ‘disease’, usually associated with various types of disease (e.g., *ugonjwa wa ukimwi* ‘HIV’, *ugonjwa wa sukari* ‘diabetes’), followed by the noun *pepo* (*ugonjwa wa pepo* ‘spiritual disease’), represents the physical and spiritual dimensions of the illness.

These cultural conceptualizations shed light on the correlation between linguistic expressions of emotions, spirit possession rituals and

⁵ Qur’anic verses written with saffron on a plate, which is washed, and then the liquid is drunk by the ailing person.

ethnomedical practices. The examples analyzed above show how during spirit possession rituals, the body plays a central role, being concretely involved as a “container of emotions”, losing its allusive or figurative character.

5. ZULU MEDICINE AND COSMOLOGY

According to Lambert (1995), at the basis of traditional Zulu medicine, as in the Hippocratic tradition of ancient Greece, lies the principle of balance, which Ngubane (1977) calls “ecological balance” (*-lungisa*) since in Zulu society, there is a special relationship between the lives of people, animals and plants in their environment. This balance must also be preserved between people and their ancestors; the disease can be caused by the anger of ancestors and other mystical forces that cause “pollution” (Lambert 1995: 76).

Unlike the Hippocratic system, which does not involve the supernatural, the concept of balance in the Zulu tradition seems more inclusive, holistic; disease is rooted in a social context that includes the living and the dead (Lambert 1995).

According to Ngubane (1997), three elements can cause diseases: natural, moral and mystical/spiritual. Natural illnesses (*umkhuhlane*) cannot be controlled by the patient, who has no agency.

“Ecological” diseases, called *ukufa kwabantu* in Zulu, are the “illnesses of the Africans”, not in the sense that they affect only Africans but because their interpretation is linked to the views on health and illness present in Zulu cosmology. Indeed, according to the Zulu, this type of illness is unknown to the people in the West.

The moral dimension of a disease depends on the social situation. For instance, an illness can be caused by witchcraft or immoral behavior contrary to the rules of society. It can be prevented and cured by people with a good moral balance, that is, *balungusiwe* (lit. ‘those who are correct, in order’).

Finally, the mystical element occurs when people are not considered ill due to the malfunctioning of some body organs but rather because of an existential crisis and so are seen as “victims of impurity”.

Color plays a dominant role in the symbolism related to the treatment of spiritual diseases. In particular, black, red and white have important symbolic value and are always used in this order, each assigned special powers. Black medicines (*imithi emnyama*) and red medicines (*imithi ebomvu*) are ambiguous as they can signify both positive and negative elements, whereas white medicines (*imithi emhlophe*) always represent what is good. Healing with these “colored” medicines is aimed at restoring the balance between the person and the environment. Black and red medicines are used to expel what is harmful from the organism and to strengthen it against other possible attacks, while the white ones serve to heal it. According to Ngubane (1977), the symbolism of colors is closely correlated with the cosmic order of day and night and with the bodily functions of eating and excreting. White means light, good health, birth, eating, while black means darkness, death, excretions, all that is the antithesis of society. This is attested by expressions used on a daily basis. The term *umnyama* indicates ‘the color black; the darkness of the night; pollution/impurity’; in fact, “impure” people are called *banomnyama* (lit. ‘are with, have darkness’), the adjective *-mnyama* meaning ‘black/dark’.

Similarly, *-mhlophe* ‘white, bright’ is associated with ‘good, good luck’. In the middle, we find *-bomvu* ‘red’ (from *ibomvu* ‘red ochre’), which is less explicit than the black-white opposition in representing good and evil but still belongs to the fundamental colors as there can be neither night nor daylight without twilight in between. Red signifies a bridge across which a sick person comes back to life; it represents transformation, transition, birth. Being sick (spiritually) is like passing from the light of day through the twilight of dusk to the darkness of night. In order to heal, it is necessary to go backward through this cycle from one point (night) to another (day), thus healing with black, red and white medicines is a continuous process, not a sudden change from “black” to “white”. Another symbolic opposition associated with colors is that between hot–disease–black medicines (*iyaphekwa* ‘cooked’) and cold–white medicines (*ayiphekwa* ‘raw’). Cooked black medicines are also associated with the moral element of “losing balance”.

6. ZULU METAPHORS AND HEALING PRACTICES

In Zulu, the description of states of mind and feelings is often associated with colors; *mnyama* ‘black’, *bomvu* ‘red’ and *mhlophe* ‘white’, in particular, play an important role in the symbolism related to the treatment of spiritual diseases, as each is believed to have special “powers” (Ngubane 1977: 113). Zulu color symbolism and the related cosmological order are reflected in linguistic expressions usually involving *inhliziy* ‘heart’, used with adjectival function, as in (23)–(25):

- (23) *-nhliziyomnyama* (lit. ‘black heart’) ‘melancholic, depressed, with no appetite’
 (24) *-nhliziyomhlophe* (lit. ‘white heart’) ‘calm, peaceful, honest’
 (25) *-nhliziyobomvu* (lit. ‘red heart’) ‘angry, irritable, bad-tempered’
 (Doke et al. 2001)

As can be seen from the above examples, *mnyama* ‘black, dark’ is symbolically associated with a negative state of mind and is used to express feelings of melancholy, depression and lack of appetite (23). The color white describes a peaceful, honest person (24), while red represents the conceptualization of anger; being “red-hearted” (*-nhliziyobomvu*) means being angry, irritable and bad-tempered (25). According to Taylor and Mbense (1998: 202–203), the Zulu expression *-nhliziyobomvu*, similar to *wavukainja ebomvu* ‘turns into a red dog’, is all the more remarkable because dark-skinned people (unlike those with fair skin) do not literally “turn red” with increased blood circulation.

Moreover, in Zulu, as in Swahili, natural illnesses (*umkhuhlane*) are described using passive constructions; for example, in (26) and (27), we note the use of the verb *-phatha* ‘to hold’ and *-khwela* ‘to go up’ (similar to the Swahili *-panda*) in the passive form, followed by the agentive *y-* and the term indicating the affected body part, in this case, *ikhanda* ‘head’:

- (26) *Ukuphathwa yikhanda.* lit. ‘Be controlled by the head’ (have a headache).
 (27) *Ukukhwelwa yikhanda.* lit. ‘Have gone up from the head’ (have a headache).
 (Donda 1997: 88)

These passive constructions, reminiscent of the Swahili examples (20)–(21), reflect the idea of the patient’s inability to control the natural disease.

However, diseases are also conceptualized as enemies that the patient must fight; an ill person can win or lose the battle. In (28)–(31), the disease is indicated by the infinitive noun *ukufa* ‘to die, death’, and in (32) by *isifo* ‘death’, the corresponding deverbal noun from the same root *-fa* ‘to die’.

- (28) *Ukuhlathswa wukufa.* ‘Be stabbed by the disease’.
 (29) *Ukudutshulwa wukufa.* ‘Be affected by the disease’.
 (30) *Ukunqotshwa wukufa.* ‘Be defeated by the disease’.
 (31) *Ukunqoba ukufa.* ‘Defeating the disease’.
 (32) *Ukuhlaselwa yisifo.* ‘Be attacked by the disease’.

(Donda 1997: 22)

In addition, diseases caused by witchcraft of unknown origin are referred to by the term *ilumbo* (lit. ‘magical element’), from the verb *-lumba*, like in (33)–(35). Passive constructions are also used in this context, involving the intransitive verbs *-ngena* ‘to enter’ and *-dla* ‘to eat’, which metaphorically depict the disease “entering” or “eating” the body.

- (33) *Ukubutha ilumbo.* ‘Contract a disease (of unknown origin)’.
 (34) *Ungenwa yilumbo.* ‘The disease got into him’.
 (35) *Udliwa yilumbo.* ‘S/he is eaten by the disease’.

(Donda 1997: 102)

7. OTHER CULTURAL METAPHORS OF *UMUTHI*

In Zulu, there are several metaphorical expressions that testify to the connection between medical practices and plants/nature (Donda 1997) and their relation to the cosmological order. As we have shown at the beginning, the term *umuthi* itself refers in Zulu to plants and by semantic extension also to the cures they produce; another term for medicine is *induku* ‘stick, branch of a tree’ (pl. *izinduku*: ingredients used by the *inyanga* to prepare the medicinal compounds), which occurs in proverbs such as (36)–(39), where the superficial meaning, related to traditional medical practices, can be metaphorically extended to the moral sphere.

- (36) *Isihlahla asinyelwa.* lit. 'Do not defecate under a tree'.
 (37) *Wogawula ubheke.* lit. 'Be careful when cutting down (a tree)'.
 (38) *Induku enhle igawulwa ezizweni.* lit. 'Good medicine is found in remote places'.
 (39) *Awumbiwa ndawonye.* lit. '(Good medicine) is not found in one place'.

(Donda 1997: 111–112)

These examples highlight the importance of protecting nature and herbal plants, which are fundamental in maintaining “balance” in Zulu society through good healing practices and moral behavior. For instance, one should not defecate under a tree because its bark and leaves are used to produce medicinal cures, so it would mean soiling *umuthi* (36). Since only trees of certain species, which are scarce and not easy to find, can be used to produce medicine, it is important to keep them clean. The warning in (37) means that we have to be careful when dealing with certain people, just as one has to be careful when cutting down a tree. Expression (38) emphasizes that although forests are everywhere, *izinduku* ‘branches’ (i.e., ingredients for medicine) are only found in remote places; good doctors are needed to make medicinal compounds with good ingredients. Figuratively speaking, anything of value is not easily obtained (used especially in reference to wives). Finally, the meaning of (39) is similar to (38), that is, good medicine is not found in one place only; it must be well mixed, and the ingredients must come from different places.

8. CONCLUSIONS

We have shown that it would be difficult to explain the meaning of certain metaphorical expressions in Swahili and Zulu without taking into account the cultural traditions and medical practices related to the functioning of the body. Both Swahili and Zulu cultures emphasize the concept of “balance” in the functioning of the body in relation to the outside world. In Swahili society, the treatment of diseases (*maradhi*) draws both from the humoral theory, dating back to ancient times, and spirit possession rituals involving the use of specific healing treatments (like Swahili *mitishamba/*

dawa za majani ‘herbal medicines’). The Zulu, in turn, assign symbolic value to certain types of medicines (*imithi*) and the colors associated with them. Zulu expressions, such as *-nhliziyomnyama* (lit. ‘black heart’), indicating a melancholic, depressed person, reflect the interconnection of traditional medical practices (e.g., *imithi emnyama* ‘black medicines’) with the natural and cosmological order, which involves the moral and emotional dimensions. Some expressions (like the Swahili *anaumwa shetani* ‘s/he is suffering from the spirit’) should therefore be read in their concrete sense, related to cultural practices, rather than be considered abstract conceptualizations, that is, it would probably be more appropriate to consider them from the emic perspective, closely linked to specific cultural practices and conceptualizations of the body, rather than “metaphorically”. Indeed, we have shown that the body plays a central role during spirit possession rituals, being concretely involved in the ritual and overcome by the disease. Furthermore, both Swahili and Zulu use similar passive construction strategies to represent the physical and spiritual dimensions of the illness. Finally, some Zulu metaphorical expressions reflect the value of nature and traditional medicine, which are fundamental to preserving the cosmological and moral order in society.

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