Metaphors of Precious Time: Swahili *versus* English[1]

Iwona Kraska-Szlenk
University of Warsaw, Poland

Abstract

The conceptual metaphor TIME IS MONEY represents a strong cultural model of American English and Western culture (Lakoff and Johnson). The entrenchment of this metaphor may be weaker in other languages or even in varieties of English used in different parts of the globe (Mueller). This article focuses on time metaphors in Swahili, the Bantu language of East and Central Africa. A preliminary study has revealed that the TIME IS MONEY metaphor plays an insignificant role in Swahili phraseology and does not comply with discursive strategies nor cultural practices that do not involve *saving* time, but rather generously *sharing* it as a social value (Kraska-Szlenk, "Is Time Money, Is Argument War?"). The present article elaborates this thought in the context of other time metaphors in Swahili using corpus-based methodology and quantifiable data, comparing concordances and collocations of the Swahili lexeme *wakati* 'time' to those of the English lexeme *time*. It will be shown that linguistic usage points to significant differences in conceptualization of TIME in the two languages, while being congruent with sociocultural practices in respective speech communities.

La métaphore conceptuelle LE TEMPS, C'EST DE L'ARGENT représente un modèle culturel fort de l'anglais américain et de la culture occidentale (Lakoff et Johnson). L'ancrage de cette métaphore peut être plus faible dans d'autres langues, voire dans des variétés d'anglais utilisées dans différentes régions du monde (Mueller). Cet article se concentre sur les métaphores du temps en swahili, langue bantoue d'Afrique de l'Est et centrale. Une étude préliminaire a révélé que la métaphore LE TEMPS, C'EST DE L'ARGENT joue un rôle insignifiant dans la phraséologie swahilie et ne correspond ni aux stratégies discursives ni aux pratiques culturelles, lesquelles n'impliquent pas d'économiser le temps, mais plutôt de le *partager* généreusement en tant que valeur sociale (Kraska-Szlenk, "Is Time Money, Is Argument War ?"). Le présent article développe cette idée dans le contexte d'autres métaphores du temps en swahili en s'appuyant sur une méthodologie fondée sur des corpus et des données quantifiables, en comparant les concordances et les collocations du lexème swahili *wakati* 'temps' à celles du lexème anglais *time*. L'étude montrera que les usages linguistiques révèlent des différences significatives dans la conceptualisation du TEMPS dans les deux langues, tout en étant en accord avec les pratiques socioculturelles propres à leurs communautés linguistiques respectives.

Keywords

cognitive linguistics, corpus linguistics, conceptual metaphor, Swahili language, time metaphors
langue swahili, linguistique cognitive, linguistique de corpus, métaphore conceptuelle, métaphores temporelles

Introduction

Research over the past decades has shown that conceptual systems and mental representations are closely connected to linguistic structures and mutually influence one another. In various frameworks, these interdependencies have been analyzed using theoretical constructs such as *linguistic worldviews*, *cultural frames*, *cultural models*, and *cultural conceptualizations* (e.g., Głaz; Holland and Quinn; Lakoff and Johnson; Palmer; Sharifian; Wierzbicka). In this article, the final term will be preferred, as it is closely associated with cognitive linguistics, a general theoretical framework.

Cultural conceptualizations are understood as distributed, conventionalized patterns that organize cognition and are reflected in linguistic structures (Sharifian). They are entrenched in collective memory and guide social behaviors but not in the sense of strict rules. Although cultural conceptualizations may take various forms, considerable attention has been paid in the literature to metaphor as one of the major cognitive mechanisms that enables the transfer of

[1] DOI: 10.61736/alizes.536

knowledge and experience from one domain to another by mapping corresponding elements. The metaphorical mapping is directional, typically from a more familiar, experienced *source domain* to a more abstract, less tangible *target domain*. Cultural metaphors have been widely discussed in the literature, including those characteristic of the English language and Western culture, such as LOVE IS A JOURNEY, ARGUMENT IS WAR, ANGER IS HOT LIQUID IN A CONTAINER, INTERNATIONAL POLITICS IS BUSINESS, A NATION STATE IS A PERSON, and TIME IS MONEY (Kövecses; Lakoff and Johnson; Lakoff; Musolff).

Another important cognitive process involved in conceptualization is metonymy. While metaphor is based on conceptual mapping across unrelated domains, metonymy operates within the same or closely linked domains. It involves the mechanism of substitution, or a mental shortcut, since the source domain (the vehicle) typically conveys a more salient concept than that of the target domain (Barcelona; Kövecses and Radden; Ruiz de Mendoza). Typical cross-linguistic examples include: CONTAINER FOR CONTAINED (cf. *I drank the whole cup*), PLACE/PRODUCER FOR PRODUCT (cf. *I've got new china/a ford*), and PART FOR WHOLE (cf. *England* for 'Great Britain'). Most research focuses on lexical metonymy that considers different contextual meanings of the same word; for example, the Swahili noun *mkono* has the meanings 'hand' and 'handle'. In addition, morphological metonymy relates a base word and its derivative, as in the English nouns *hand* and *handle* (cf. Janda).

Like metaphors, specific *cultural* metonymies are conventionalized in one language but not in another; they also tend to underlie or co-occur with metaphors, as exemplified by conceptualizations of the human body as a source domain (Kraska-Szlenk, "Semantic Extensions," "Embodied Lexicon"). The metonymies PART FOR PROXIMATE PART and PART FOR WHOLE often determine the lexicon of body parts, so that the same term can be used for 'hand' and 'arm', 'eye' and 'mouth', 'eye' and 'face', etc. Metonymy often provides ground for metaphors by helping to correlate experience; through metonymic chains, small contextual changes within adjacent domains may pragmatically strengthen and result in cross-domain mappings. For example, the association of bodily sensations with emotions leads to the conceptualization of culture-specific body parts (e.g., 'heart', 'stomach', and 'liver') as metaphorical CONTAINERS for emotions.

It should be emphasized that various conceptualization patterns occur in specific languages with varying degrees of strength, determined by their level of entrenchment in phrasal expressions and, above all, by their frequency of use. For example, the metonymy-based metaphors FAMILY IS ONE BODY and HARD WORK IS SWEATING are much more entrenched in Swahili than in English.

This article is devoted to the conceptualization of time in Swahili (or Kiswahili), the Bantu language of the Niger-Congo phylum, which is spoken by c. 100 million speakers in East and Central Africa and used by large communities in diasporas worldwide. Specific features of Swahili will be contrasted with conceptualization patterns and data on language usage in American English.

On the one hand, time is a fundamental notion, since everything we do and perceive occurs within a certain temporal framework. On the other hand, time is a very abstract notion that lies beyond direct observation and bodily experience. For these reasons, the topic of conceptualizations of time across various cultures and languages has received much attention in philosophical, anthropological, and linguistic research. In cognitive linguistics, most studies have focused on conceptualizations of time *via* metaphor (e.g., Evans; Lakoff and Johnson; Sweetser and Gaby). It has been shown that some metaphors, for example, TIME IS A MOVING OBJECT, TIME IS A CONTAINER, and TIME IS SPACE, are widely distributed across world languages. In contrast, others are culture-specific and closely linked to the social values of individual communities. The metaphor TIME IS MONEY, also phrased in the literature as TIME IS A VALUABLE

COMMODITY, is a case in point, occurring in English and some other languages. This particular metaphor will be the focus of this article.

While the TIME IS MONEY metaphor in American English will serve as a reference point for the Swahili data, the philosophical concept of "African time" (Mbiti) will provide another perspective, as discussed in the next section. The following section will also provide a brief comparison of phrasal expressions in English and Swahili that reflect the TIME IS MONEY metaphor, based on previous research. Then, the main sections of the article will discuss conceptualization patterns of time in English and Swahili using corpus-based analyses of concordances and collocations of the English lexeme *time* and the Swahili lexeme *wakati* 'time'. Subsidiary material on English and Swahili proverbs will also be examined. The discussion section will explain the results.

Mbiti's Concept of "African Time" and its Critical Reception

The most well-known and influential work devoted to the concept of 'time' in the context of African cultures and languages is Mbiti's book *African Religions and Philosophy*. In this approach, time is interconnected with an anthropocentric ontology in which God (the Originator and Sustainer of Man) permeates the universe along with the spirits (who explain the destiny of Man). The environment, Animals, Plants and natural phenomena provide means for Man's existence but also for mystical relations, when needed. In addition to these ontological categories, the universe is filled with the "force" attributed to and controlled by God but also manipulated to some extent by certain powerful humans, for example, medicine men or priests (Mbiti 16).

Mbiti's conception of "African time" comprises *actual time* and *potential time*. The former can only refer to events that have already occurred or are about to occur, hence the past, the present, and the immediate future. In contrast, the remote future can be considered either a *potential time* zone, when there is a high probability that certain events will occur, for example, seasonal changes, or *no-time* at all, when there is no such probability. Mbiti also emphasizes the important connection between time and events. He says "[m]an is not a slave of time; instead he makes as much time as he wants," and he points to a misunderstanding of this concept on the part of Europeans and Americans who perceive Africans as sitting doing nothing: "Those who are seen sitting down, are actually *not wasting* time, but either waiting for time or in the process of 'producing' time" (Mbiti 19).

Mbiti's philosophical ideas about time not only lead to the conclusion that "time is a two-dimensional phenomenon with a long *past*, a *present* and virtually no *future*" (Mbiti 16), but they also align with a positive evaluation of past time, since "people set their minds not on future things but chiefly on what has taken place" (Mbiti 17). This is supported by linguistic evidence. Using the example of tenses in two Bantu languages, Kikamba and Gikuyu (Kikuyu), Mbiti demonstrates that the most remote future tense does not go beyond six months from now, while no such restriction holds for the past. African religions also focus on the past through the worship of ancestors' spirits and not on future reward, as in Christianity. This conceptualization of time, with a focus on the past rather than the future, has led to stereotypes such as "African peoples have no 'belief in progress'" (Mbiti 23) and that they are unconcerned with the distant future.

While Mbiti's "Bantu philosophy" has received wide recognition and appreciation, his conception of "African time" has not been unanimously accepted. For some scholars, it does explain a general disrespect for time and underdevelopment. For example, Ikechukwu Kanu says: "We are often more concerned with a history that has passed than with a future that is full of opportunities. If the greatest emphasis of the African is on the past rather than the future, and if on the future at all, on the immediate future, it means that the vision that Africans have for

themselves cannot but be limited. And obviously, where there is no vision, there is no development. While we may disagree with Mbiti on some fronts, it cannot be denied that one of the main reasons for the continuing underdevelopment of Africa is our nonchalant attitude to time" (Kanu 7).

According to some authors (Kanu; Nnajiofor), the notion of "African time" has so strongly influenced Africans that they use it as an excuse for being unpunctual. Moreover, the widespread acceptance of the "African time" philosophy goes hand in hand with the practice of announcing the start times of work meetings and social gatherings well in advance of their scheduled times to avoid unnecessary waiting for latecomers (cf. Alumona and Alumona 120). However, other researchers argue that the notion of "African time" is a colonial imposition that is not justified by precolonial ideas about time or African traditions (e.g., Dlamini; Iroegbu; Alumona and Alumona). Dlamini says: "Like many things attributed to some ancient, but still prevalent social norm, African Time does not stand up to scrutiny. If you go to even the simplest village you immediately realise just how much the village folk respect time. If there is a gathering, the ordinary folk will all be there on time. What is more, even the unemployed villager will be up at the crack of dawn to make the most of his day. So African Time is nothing but a myth." In a similar vein, Alumona and Alumona (122) comment: "Africans' punctuality predates the western clock time because when given an assignment to perform certain sacrifices at a designated location at midnight, for instance, he goes to wait for midnight to meet him there. Again, once it is planting season, no one reminds him of his responsibilities. As he saw the different kinds of migrations taking place among animals, he would apply some 'traditional astrological skills' and brace up for planting without wasting time."

As illustrated by the above examples of "African punctuality," the strict link between time and events refers to activities that have a communal character and bring profit not as much to the individual as to the whole community. This contrasts with the attitude expressed by the Western-style metaphor TIME IS MONEY discussed in the following section.

The Metaphor TIME IS MONEY

The metaphor TIME IS MONEY was first analyzed in the context of American English by Lakoff and Johnson within the framework of their Conceptual Metaphor Theory. The metaphor is tied to the Western style of life and specific factors such as high individualism, a capitalist economy, and a work ethos particularly bound up with the Protestant religion. These values influence the conceptualization of time metonymically linked to work and profit; hence, they shape a strong negative bias toward unproductive, "wasted" time, while "saving" time is socially appreciated. Even though the metaphor TIME IS MONEY is reported to exist in many languages, including those of non-Western cultures (e.g., Chinese, Guo), it is generally assumed that other languages, spoken by people with different value systems, do not embrace it and, therefore, it is not reflected in linguistic expressions. The speech of English-language communities across the globe supports the proposition that this metaphor is strongly culture-dependent. Mueller's corpus-based research demonstrates that expressions reflecting the TIME IS MONEY metaphor are more frequent in Western countries (Great Britain, Canada, New Zealand, and Singapore) than in non-Western countries (the Philippines, India, and East Africa). For example, *SPEND+time* expressions occur twice as frequently in Western countries as in non-Western countries (158 tokens per million words to 74 tokens per million words).

I have shown elsewhere (Kraska-Szlenk, "Is Time Money, Is Argument War?") that the TIME IS MONEY metaphor is neither deeply entrenched in Swahili nor does it conform to cultural norms. As Table 1 demonstrates, some of the Swahili equivalents of typical English expressions instantiating this metaphor occur sporadically in language usage. However, others are not

readily accepted in Swahili (as indicated by the question marks), whether used with the noun *muda* '(specific) period (of time)' or the more general abstract noun *wakati* 'time',

Table 1: Time expressions in American English and Swahili (Kraska-Szlenk, "Is Time Money, Is Argument War?" 659)

English examples	Swahili examples
You're wasting my time.	Unapoteza muda/wakati wangu.
I have no time.	Sina muda/wakati.
I wasted a lot of time.	Nilipoteza muda/wakati mwingi.
Thank you for your time.	? Asante kwa muda/wakati wako.
It costs me a lot of time.	?? Inanigharimu muda/wakati mwingi.
I want to save some time.	?? Ninataka kuweka akiba muda/wakati.
I don't have the time to give you.	?? Sina muda/wakati wa kukupa.

Patterns of verbal interaction in Swahili-speaking areas are not accompanied by behaviors intended to *save* time (in keeping with the TIME IS MONEY metaphor). Instead, the emphasis is on *being generous* with one's time to enhance social interaction, which is captured by a different metaphor: TIME IS SOCIAL VALUE (Kraska-Szlenk, "Is Time Money, Is Argument War?"). Accordingly, greetings, forms of address, introductions, and conventionalized small talk are more elaborate, take considerably longer than in a typical Western cultural setting, and may also be more meaningful. More complex verbal interaction that would "consume" or "waste" time in the Western conceptual system is often used in Swahili and other African languages to respect rules of politeness and to strengthen social ties. Therefore, it has a positive, not negative, value.

Similar rules govern Swahili discourse strategies that tend to involve repetitions of arguments phrased in multiple variants and decorative forms, in a style that can be captured by the ARGUMENT IS DANCE metaphor (Kraska-Szlenk, "Is Time Money, Is Argument War?"), in contrast to the Western ARGUMENT IS WAR metaphor (Lakoff and Johnson). In sum, the preliminary results based on phrasal expressions, cultural norms, and discursive styles indicate that the Swahili cultural model construes time as *precious*, not as a valuable commodity to be used for individual profit, but rather as a factor that enables social interaction to proceed properly. The following section investigates whether the corpus data support this difference between American English and Swahili and whether there are other differences in the conceptualization of time between the two languages.

Usage Patterns of 'Time' Lexemes in English and Swahili

English corpus data

To pinpoint specific cultural features of the Swahili model versus the American English one, usage patterns of the two languages were compared using corpus data. For each language, 500 random concordances were examined, as well as collocations. American English data were drawn from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). In the sample, 40 concordances were found with expressions based on the TIME IS MONEY metaphor, such as *spend time* (23), *waste time* (9), *save time* (3), *buy time* (2), *thank you for your time* (1), *monopolize time* (1), and *prime time* (1), as illustrated in (1).

(1)

a/ where youths spend a lot of time
b/ that saves time
c/ do not waste time with people who just want to talk
d/ but he monopolized too much

It could be argued that the above instantiations of the TIME IS MONEY metaphor are not very significant since they constitute only 8% of the corpus data and are not diversified in form. In addition, the most frequent of them, namely *spend time*, is so conventionalized that it hardly feels metaphorical. However, the significance of these concordances becomes evident when compared to other frequent expressions in the English corpus. It is striking that the sample concordances often contain phrases in which *time* is objectified and quantified, in accordance with the metaphor TIME IS A THING, thereby providing a first step toward further metaphorization of time as a valuable commodity. The metaphorical reification of *time* as something possessed is observed in the frequent use of verbal phrases, such as *have time, run out of time, take the time, give time, find time,* and *[be] out of time*. In addition, the noun *time* often occurs with possessive pronouns, such as *my, their*, etc. The corpus data also provide examples of the manipulation of *possessed time*, as seen in phrases such as *slow down time*, *extend/lengthen time, split time*, and *fix time*. Very frequently, *time* is used with quantifiers, as illustrated by the following phrases, typically used several times each in the corpus: *all this/the time, more/less time, first/last time, plenty of time, a long/short/brief time, the whole time, all time, (not) enough time, a little time, the beginning of time, (how) much/little time, most of our time, separate time periods, [some] percentage of the time, five years' time, time coverage, varied amounts of time, amount(s) of time, the limited time available*, *a brief unit of time*, etc. In sum, all such concordances total 209.

On the other hand, *time* is rarely conceptualized in the corpus data as an independent force that people cannot possess or manipulate, as in the following examples: *[w]hen the time comes*, or, *[i]t's time to do something*. The expression *from time to time* is also based on this conceptualization, but it occurs only five times in the corpus data. Relatively rarely, the lexeme *time* occurs with modifiers describing its quality, whether positively connoted, as in the expressions *a better time, a good time,* and *a nice time*, or negatively charged, as in the expressions *a bad time, a critical time, a rough time,* and *a dark time*. Additional examples of the TIME AS AN INDEPENDENT FORCE conceptualization are shown in (2).

(2)
a/ that pain deserves to be healed over time
b/ No doubt it is time to pray for our nations' leaders
c/ At the time of the meeting/At the time of her death
d/ By the time they'd reached Cold Harbor
e/ From time to time she would stop at a table or slot machine

The corpus data confirm that *time* in American English is very often reified (*via* the ontological metaphor TIME IS A THING) and conceptualized as a precious thing (*via* the TIME IS MONEY metaphor). To verify this result, in addition to 500 random concordances, *time* collocations were also examined.

The collocates for *time* in the corpus align with the observations drawn from the concordances. The most frequent collocates are (in descending order): *period, amount, magazine, waste, frame, travel,* and *length* for nouns; *spend, waste, devote, bide, unsubscribe,* and *allot* for verbs; and *long, hard, short, given, spare, extended, countless, hands-on, real-time, playing, ample, down, best-selling, specified, wasted, immemorial, turbulent, spending, trying,* and *borrowed* for adjectives. Thus, many collocates point directly to either the TIME IS MONEY metaphor or the conceptualization of *time* as something manipulable, controllable, or owned.

Swahili corpus data

Swahili data were drawn from the ACALAN corpus, which is based on standard Swahili texts written mostly in the second half of the twentieth century, with only a limited representation of more recent additions. The majority of the corpus material was compiled from literary works by prominent Tanzanian writers. A random sample of 500 concordances for the lexeme *wakati* 'time' was used in the analysis. In a few cases, the noun appeared in the plural form, viz., *nyakati*.

Even though, as demonstrated in the previous section, a few phrasal expressions reflecting the TIME IS MONEY metaphor occur in Swahili, not a single concordance of this kind appeared in the corpus data. This only confirms that such expressions are rare in language usage and perhaps calqued from English, with an embedded foreign conceptualization and a low frequency of use. This claim is supported by extremely infrequent concordances that point to the ontological metaphor TIME IS A THING. Only one concordance was found in which *wakati* is manipulable, literally 'put (out)', as shown in (3a). It is striking that even though the noun *wakati* may take modifiers such as *mwingi* 'much, a lot', *mrefu* 'long', or *mfupi* 'short', not a single instance of the relevant phrases *wakati mwingi* 'much/a lot of time', *wakati mrefu* 'a long time', or *wakati mfupi* 'a short time', occurred in the sample data. As for expressions with quantified time, four concordances of the modifier *wote* 'all' and one of *kila* 'all (every)' appeared, as well as single concordances of the numeral *mmoja* 'one' (in the sense of 'the same time') and of the adjective *awali* 'first, initial', as illustrated in (3b–d). Only in two cases was *wakati* used with a possessive pronoun, in each case *wake*[2] 'his/her', cf. (3e). Altogether, the metaphor TIME IS A THING is instantiated only in ten of the concordances in the corpus.

(3)

a/ walichelewa kuvuna karafuu kwa wakati uliowekwa
'they were late in harvesting cloves by the designated (lit. put) time'

b/ wakati huo wote mwanamke anakuwa anajifunza
'all this time the woman is learning'

c/ kubeba madoo ya maji kila siku na kila wakati
'to carry buckets of water every day and at all times (lit. every time)'

d/ nataka kuisimamia jumuiya katika wakati huu wa awali
'I want to guard the community during this initial time'

e/ ni wakati wake wa kuonesha mafanikio
'it is his/her time to show the results'

However, many other kinds of modifiers used with *wakati* appear frequently in the corpus. These include demonstrative pronouns and various qualifying modifiers, such as *wakati huu/huo* 'this time', *wakati huo huo* 'the same time', *wakati mwingine* 'other time', *wakati mwafaka* 'suitable time', *wakati mgumu* 'difficult time', *wakati mbaya* 'bad time', *nyakati tofauti* 'different times', *wakati wa mvua* 'time of the rain', *wakati wa asubuhi* 'morning time', *wakati wa sherehe* 'celebration time', *wakati wa ujazito* 'pregnancy time', *wakati wa shida na raha* 'time of trouble and rest', *nyakati za jioni* 'evening times', etc. As these examples illustrate, the modifier may take the form of a genitival construction consisting of the genitival particle *wa*, in agreement with the noun *wakati* of class 10, or the particle *za*, if the plural *nyakati* of class 9 is used. Very often, deverbal nouns, as well as gerund forms,[3] are used in such structures, cf. the corpus examples: *wakati wa ziara* 'time of the visit', *wakati wa utawala wa Nyerere* 'time of Nyerere's ruling', *wakati wa ufunguzi wa semina* 'time of the opening of the

[2] There was also one case of the phrase *wakati wake* with the homophonous pronoun *wake* referring to the noun *wakati* in the sense of 'it's his/her time', i.e., suitable, adequate time.

[3] In Swahili, the gerund with the prefix *ku-* is formally treated as a class 15 noun.

seminar', *wakati wa kuandika makala* 'time of writing an article', *wakati wa kupiga kura* 'time of voting', *wakati wa kufanya kazi* 'time of working', etc. Constructions of this kind may occur as descriptions of time *per se*, as illustrated in (4a). More typically, however, they function as adverbs of time, providing additional information on the simultaneity of the action expressed by the main verb and some event or other action, cf. the example in (4b) where *wakati* is modified by a noun, and (4c) where the modifier is a gerund. This use of *wakati* is fairly grammaticalized and can be rendered in English by expressions such as 'in/at the time of', 'during', or 'while'.

(4)

a/ Ni wakati wa kutoka nje na kuota jua !
'It is time to go out and sunbathe (lit. time of going out and sunbathing)!'

b/ Mwinyi alikuwa akihutubia wakati wa sherehe za Maulidi
'Mwinyi was giving a speech during the Mawlid celebrations'

c/ walisema hayo wakati wa kujadili bajeti
'they said this while discussing the budget'

In the vast majority of concordances, the same function of *wakati* is expressed with the finite form of the verb in the clause, as shown in (5). As the examples in (5a–b) demonstrate, in certain tenses *wakati* optionally co-occurs with the relative pronoun *-po-* 'when' infixed in the verbal complex. In some cases, further grammaticalization of *wakati* can be observed when the focus is no longer on simultaneity between two actions, but rather on a causal relation, as illustrated in (5c–d).

(5)

a/ akitoa hotuba yake wakati alipofungua mashindano
'she was giving a speech when she opened the competition'

b/ hotuba zake ambazo alikuwa akizitoa wakati nchi inapata uhuru
'the speeches he was giving at the time the country gained independence'

c/ baadhi ya vijana kujihusisha na vitendo viovu wakati wanapokosa ajira
'some youths engage in criminal activities when they are unemployed'

d/ Nani anataka trekta wakati hata baiskeli hana ?
'Who wants a tractor when they don't even have a bicycle?'

In addition to the prevailing conceptualization patterns described above, the corpus data include a few cases of the TIME IS A MOVING ENTITY metaphor, used with verbs of motion, such as *fika* 'arrive', *ja* 'come', *pita* 'pass', or *fuata* 'follow', as illustrated in (6). I assume that, even though this conceptualization does not, in principle, exclude the reification of *wakati*, it does not presuppose it[4]; hence, it is very different from the previously discussed metaphor TIME IS A THING in English usage. No modifiers of the possessive character occur in such structures, either. As is explicit in (6b), constructions of this kind are typically used in contexts of time designated for something.

(6)

a/ tupigane kwa nchi yetu wakati umefika
'let us fight for our country [when] the time comes'

b/ kila ufikapo wakati wa uchaguzi
'every [time] when the time of elections comes'

c/ baadhi ya sheria zilionekana wazi kupitwa na wakati
'some laws clearly appeared to be outdated (lit. passed by time)

Among the collocations of *wakati*, neither the verb *tumia* 'use, spend' nor any other that reflects the TIME IS MONEY metaphor appeared. The following collocations occurred most frequently, relating to different word classes: *uchaguzi* 'elections', *kampeni* 'company', *tofauti*

[4] In addition to a moving thing, *wakati* in such contexts may be conceptualized as a force, a human, or an animal.

'difference', *muafaka* 'suitable' (noun right); *mwaka* 'year', *jambo* 'matter' (noun left); *fika* 'arrive', *wa* 'be', *zungumza* 'talk', *endelea* 'continue' (verb right); *pitwa* 'be passed', *fika* 'arrive', *tokea* 'appear' (verb left); *gumu* 'difficult', *ingine* 'some/other', *fulani* 'some'; (adjective left); and *kila* 'every', *gumu* 'difficult', *kali* 'hard' (adjective right). None of them explicitly points to the metaphor TIME IS A THING.

This section has shown that the conceptualizations of American English *time* and Swahili *wakati*, as reflected in language usage, are markedly different, as elaborated in the following sections.

Swahili and English Proverbs of Time

This section discusses conceptualizations of the lexeme *wakati* in Swahili proverbs, with a brief comparison to English proverbs with the lexeme *time*. The largest electronically available collection of *Methali za Kiswahili* provided the Swahili data, comprising 4,855 proverbs. This is an expanded version of the published anthology compiled by Scheven. Twenty-two proverbs with the lexeme *wakati* were found in the collection. In most proverbs, *wakati* is conceptualized as time designated for an activity, a specific period in someone's life, or a season of natural phenomena. This conceptualization goes with the evaluation of time as positive or negative. The former appears in seven proverbs in which *wakati* connotes favorable circumstances or time appropriate for a certain activity, cf. the examples in (7a) and (7b). The examples in (7c) and (7d), which personify *wakati*, indicate a generally positive evaluation of *wakati*.

(7) Positive connotations of *wakati* in proverbs

a/ Fua chuma wakati kingali na moto.
'Strike the iron while it is still hot.'

b/ Vunja mifupa [wakati] ungali na meno.
'Break bones while you still have teeth.'

c/ Wakati tabibu.
'Time is a healer.'

d/ Wakati mkufunzi.
'Time is a tutor.'

A negative connotation is visible in eight proverbs, illustrated by the examples in (8). In (8a) and (8b), *wakati* refers to adverse circumstances that lead to bad results. In (8c) and (8d), time is conceptualized as an obstacle or as a person who obstructs someone from achieving a goal.

(8) Negative connotations of *wakati* in proverbs

a/ Wakati wa hari, watu hugombana kisima kimoja.
'In the dry season people quarrel over one well.'

b/ Mvua hunyesha wakati huna mwavuli.
'It rains when you don't have an umbrella.'

c/ Wakati hauna saburi.
'Time has no patience.'

d/ Sishindane na wakati.
'Do not fight against time.'

In addition, six proverbs are based on antithesis, when positive action can be taken to tackle a challenging time, as in (9a) and (9b), or *vice versa*, when a difficult or unpleasant event ends a period when things were going well, as in (9c) and also in (9d), which refers to inevitable punishment after wrongdoing.

(9) Positive-negative antithesis in proverbs

a/ Shujaa hutambulikana wakati wa magumu.
'Courage proves itself in difficulties.'

b/ Ukitaka chakula wakati wa masika, ujikaze.

'If you want food during the rainy season, start working.'

c/ Maisha huondolewa wakati yakiwa matamu.
'Life is taken away when it is sweet.'

d/ Wakati hufichua yote.
'Time uncovers all.'

The three types of *wakati* evaluation, illustrated in (7)–(9), reflect Mbiti's idea of the Bantu concept of 'time for something' as opposed to the linear time proceeding at the same pace. Only one Swahili proverb of twenty-two alludes to time as a precious thing through the phrase *poteza wakati* 'waste time', which is used in the context of worship by *true*, not *pretended* prayer, cf. (10). Nonetheless, even in this case, *wakati* is conceptualized as a precious thing used for a good cause, not as a valuable commodity, as in the TIME IS MONEY metaphor.

(10) Conceptualization of *wakati* as a precious thing

Abudu mungu kwa njia ya kuabudu, ukiwa huwezi usipoteze wakati wako.
'Worship God in the [proper] way of worshipping; if you cannot do so, do not waste your time.'

For comparison with Swahili, English proverbs were analyzed, using the online collection of *1000 Proverbs and Sayings in English* compiled by Sacheen Jahagirdar. The anthology contains twelve proverbs with the lexeme *time*, including one in the plural form *times*. One proverb is the literal metaphor TIME IS MONEY, cf. (11a). Four other proverbs in (11) also reflect this metaphor, alluding to the conceptualization of time as a factor that enables the achievement of something beneficial or, when not available, causes loss.

(11) English proverbs of precious time

a/ Time is money.

b/ Procrastination is the thief of time.

c/ A stitch in time saves nine.

d/ Friends are thieves of time.

e/ Lost time is never found again.

In the remaining proverbs, *time* usually has a positive evaluation, as illustrated in (12a) and (12b), where it is conceptualized similarly to the earlier Swahili examples in (7c–d). Rarely, it provides background on states or events that may have a positive connotation, as in (12c–d), or a negative one, as in (12e).

(12) Other examples of English proverbs

a/ Time is the great healer.

b/ Time works wonders.

c/ With time and patience, the leaf of the mulberry becomes satin.

d/ Happiness takes no account of time.

e/ No man is wise at all times.

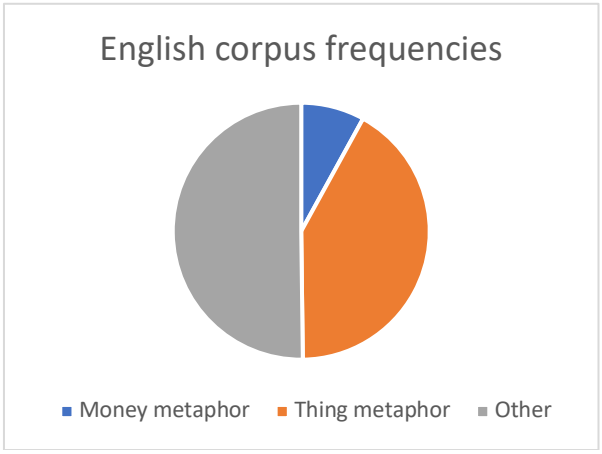
The comparison of Swahili and English proverbs reveals differences between the two cultures in their conceptualization of time. In Swahili, *wakati* is more often linked to specific events, with roughly the same proportions of positive and negative evaluations of time. The data also corroborate the earlier conclusion about the strong entrenchment of the metaphor TIME IS MONEY in English and its virtual absence in Swahili.

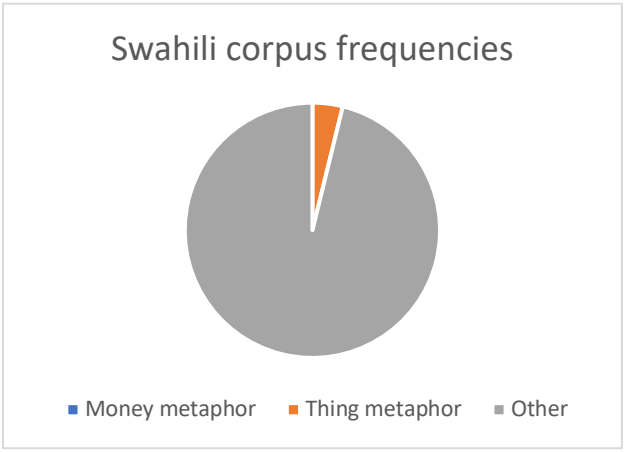
Discussion

The comparison of American English and Swahili usage patterns for the lexemes *time* and *wakati* has revealed noticeable differences in how time is conceptualized in the two cultures. In the American English corpus, 40 concordances illustrate the TIME IS MONEY metaphor. As many as 209 other concordances explicitly point to the TIME IS A THING metaphor, which together constitute half (49.8%) of all uses of the *time* lexeme in the corpus. This result is strikingly different from the Swahili concordances for *wakati*, in which the former metaphor does not

occur at all. The latter metaphor amounts to 10 instances, hence only 2% of the total, cf. Figure 1.

Figure 1: English versus Swahili conceptualizations of 'time'





While in American English, time is so often possessed, controlled, and manipulated by people, in Swahili these conceptualizations are extremely rare; hence, time cannot be shortened or extended, nor can it be given or taken. This also explains why *wakati* so rarely appears in the sample with quantifiers, although it freely occurs with other modifiers, such as qualifiers or demonstratives. On the other hand, only in Swahili, and not in English usage, is TIME strongly tied to events, in keeping with Mbiti's philosophical interpretation of "African time." Like space, time provides a framework that is in essence available *a priori* and in its own right, in the appropriate form and amount. Consequently, it is not superordinate with respect to actions and events, but the other way around: they use as much time as necessary. This conceptualization is independently supported by discourse strategies in Swahili and norms of politeness and respect, which do not "save" time but take as much of it as needed, even if this may cause inconvenience due to delays (Kraska-Szlenk, "Is Time Money, Is Argument War?"). English and Swahili proverbs also partly support the above-mentioned conceptualizations of time in the two cultures, although the differences are less conspicuous than in the corpus data. This is most likely due to the specific style of the literary genre of proverbs and their characteristic philosophical content. Nonetheless, even though some of the proverbs on time have similar forms and meanings in the two languages, the metaphor TIME IS MONEY is observed in five English proverbs, which constitutes as much as 41.7% of the total sample of twelve, and (arguably) only in one Swahili proverb out of twenty-two (4.5%). Also, Swahili proverbs

strongly support the idea of time designated for particular tasks and other actions, whereas in English proverbs this conceptualization is less entrenched.

Different conceptualizations of *time* and *wakati* also affect lexicalization and grammaticalization processes in the two languages. Characteristically, English *countable time* can be used with numbers, as in *three times*, whereas this semantic extension is not possible with *wakati*. On the other hand, Swahili *wakati*, with the embedded conceptualization of *designated* time, often occurs in highly grammaticalized meanings corresponding to the English words *during, when,* or *while*. Even though many instances of this were found in the corpus data, it is worth emphasizing that the use of *wakati* is not obligatory in this kind of construction, given that Swahili has alternative means of expressing these grammatical notions. One of them, namely the relative pronoun *-po-* of class 16, has already been mentioned and is illustrated by the example in (13a). The lexeme *wakati* may co-occur with it, as in (13b), or may stand by itself, as in (13c). All three versions of the sentence are stylistic variants of a similar propositional content. Therefore, if a speaker uses a variant with *wakati* in such contexts, it is by choice, not a necessity imposed by strict grammatical rules. However, this choice goes hand in hand with the overall conceptualization of *wakati* as 'time for'.

(13)

a/ ni-li-po-fika
1SG-PAST-REL16-arrive

b/ wakati ni-li-po-fika
time 1SG-PAST-REL16-arrive

c/ wakati ni-li-fika
time 1SG-PAST-arrive
'when I arrived'

The frequent use of the Swahili lexeme *wakati* in the context of events must surely influence conceptualization, and it is natural to assume that these usage patterns enforce the conceptual link between time and events. Since the former is far more abstract than the latter, it is natural to believe that time is conceptualized through the vehicle of events and not *vice versa*. The metonymic conceptualization of time through events is not only common in African cultures, as Mbiti observes, but also finds many cross-linguistic parallels, for example, in Amazonian languages (Silva Sinha et al.) and in Chinese (Zhong and Liu). In many languages, the metonymic EVENT FOR TIME underlies contextual uses of 'event' to mean 'the period the event lasts', for example in the English expression *after class*, or its Swahili equivalent, *baada ya darasa*.

Even though the case of the Swahili lexeme *wakati* discussed in this article neither involves metonymic substitution nor morphological metonymy, it can be argued that its conceptualization is based on metonymy understood as a cognitive, organizational principle, since the vehicle of 'event' provides a mental access to a more abstract, less salient concept of 'time'. This metonymic link between the event and the time it lasts is revealed mostly through genitive constructions consisting of the noun *wakati*, the particle *wa* (cl. 11), and the expression of the event, which are understood as 'time of/designated for something'. Accordingly, the major differences between American English and Swahili 'time' consist in the mechanisms of conceptualization. In English, time is most often conceptualized *via* metaphor as a thing, or a valuable thing. In Swahili, metonymy triggers the most characteristic conceptualization of time as correlated with events. In addition, both languages use minor conceptualization patterns, including the widely used metaphor TIME IS A MOVING ENTITY.

In Swahili, the metonymic conceptualization of time through events is congruent with the metaphor TIME IS SPACE, which, although it occurs infrequently in the corpus data, is highly entrenched due to diverse lexical expressions and an advanced grammaticalized construction with the relative pronoun *-po-* mentioned earlier. This construction suggests that, even though

it is not the case at present, the class 16 noun *mahali* 'place' could be used in the past to mean 'time', which would explain why the relative pronoun used in the above-mentioned contexts has the form of class 16 and not the expected shape *-o-* of class 11 in agreement with the gender of *wakati*. The semantic extension from 'space' to 'time' is widely attested in African languages, as shown by numerous grammaticalization studies, and also observed by Mbiti, who says: "[s]pace and time are closely linked, and often the same word is used for both" (26).

The findings in this article demonstrate that, to accurately understand cultural models and conceptualization patterns embedded in language, linguistic data must be analyzed not only qualitatively but also quantitatively, taking into account specific constructions and their frequency of use. At the phrasal level, Swahili and English share several fairly equivalent expressions. Nonetheless, their frequencies vary greatly, suggesting that the overall cultural models of 'time' differ considerably in the two languages. Given that the speakers of each language largely follow these distinct patterns, the present findings may have implications for cross-cultural communication and practical applications in foreign language teaching. In the latter case, it might be advisable to make students of a foreign language aware of specific conceptualization patterns, since linguistic structures and usage practices naturally follow from them and can thus be learned more easily.

Conclusion

Cultural conceptualizations shape mental representations and linguistic structures. As a highly abstract notion, time cannot be directly observed or otherwise sensed; hence, it is conceptualized figuratively. The article has shown that the differences between American English and Swahili conceptualizations of 'time' are most clearly evident when language usage data and frequencies are obtained through corpus methodology, in addition to comparing phrasal expressions. In both cultures, time is precious, but the nature of its value appears different. In American English, time is often reified, and this leads to further conceptualizations of time as a precious thing, something that can be possessed, counted, offered to someone else, lost, found, or manipulated by an individual. In Swahili, reification of time is rare and seldom used for an individual's benefit. The main conceptualization pattern relies on the metonymic link between time and events, which echoes Mbiti's ideas of "African time." The two different conceptualizations of time are reflected in language usage and depend on cultural values. In Western countries, the focus is on individual profit; in Sub-Saharan African cultures, the emphasis is on strengthening social relations and communal benefits.

Bibliography

ACALAN Swahili Corpus, www.kiswahili-acalan.org/. Accessed 3 April 2025.

Alumona, Nicholas Onyemechi, and Grace Ogelenya Chinye Magdalene Alumona. "'African Time' Is Un-African." *NIU Journal of Humanities*, vol. 8, no. 3, 2023, p. 117-124.

Barcelona, Antonio. "On the Plausibility of Claiming a Metonymic Motivation for Conceptual Metaphor." *Metaphor and Metonymy at the Crossroads: A Cognitive Perspective*, edited by Antonio Barcelona, De Gruyter Mouton, 2000, p. 31-58.

Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA, General), www.english-corpora.org/coca/. Accessed 10 April 2025.

Dlamini, Victor. "What Is This Thing Called African Time?" *Daily Maverick*, 21 January 2010, www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionists/2010-01-21-what-is-this-thing-called-african-time. Accessed 22 April 2025.

Evans, Vyvyan. *The Structure of Time: Language, Meaning and Temporal Cognition*. John Benjamins, 2004.

Głaz, Adam. *Linguistic Worldview(s): Approaches and Applications*. Routledge, 2022.

Guo, Yi. "A Corpus-Based Comparative Study of Chinese EFL Learners' Use of Temporal Metaphor in English." *International Journal of English Linguistics*, vol. 9, no. 4, 2019, p. 51-57.

Holland, Dorothy, and Naomi Quinn, editors. *Cultural Models in Language and Thought*. Cambridge UP, 1987.

Iroegbu, Pantaleon O. *The Kpim of Time*. Hope Publications, 2004.

Janda, Laura A. "Metonymy in Word-Formation." *Cognitive Linguistics*, vol. 22, no. 2, 2011, p. 359-392.

Kanu, Ikechukwu A. "Time in African Ontology." *Tansian University Journal of Arts, Management and Social Sciences*, vol. 6, 2019, p. 1-9.

Kövecses, Zoltán. *Metaphor in Culture: Universality and Variation*. Cambridge UP, 2005.

Kövecses, Zoltán, and Günter Radden. "Metonymy: Developing a Cognitive Linguistic View." *Cognitive Linguistics*, vol. 9, no. 1, 1998, p. 37-77.

Kraska-Szlenk, Iwona. "Semantic Extensions of Body Part Terms: Common Patterns and Their Interpretation." *Language Sciences*, vol. 44, 2014, p. 15-39.

Kraska-Szlenk, Iwona. "Embodied Lexicon: Body Part Terms in Conceptualization, Language Structure and Discourse." *Language in Educational and Cultural Perspectives*, edited by Barbara Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk and Marcin Trojszczak, Springer, 2023, p. 177-198.

Kraska-Szlenk, Iwona. "Is Time Money, Is Argument War? Swahili Cultural Conceptualizations and Language Usage." *The Handbook of Cultural Linguistics*, edited by Alireza Korangy, Springer, 2024, p. 655-671.

Lakoff, George. "Metaphor and War: The Metaphor System Used to Justify War in the Gulf." *Peace Research*, vol. 23, 1991, p. 25-32.

Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson. *Metaphors We Live By*. University of Chicago Press, 1980.

Mbiti, John S. *African Religions and Philosophy*. Heinemann, 1969.

Methali za Kiswahili – Swahili Proverbs (based on Scheven 1981), www.maktaba.org. Accessed 14 June 2025.

Mueller, Simone. "Time Is Money – Everywhere? Analysing Time Metaphors across Varieties of English." *Metaphor in Communication*, edited by Elisabetta Gola and Francesca Ervas, John Benjamins, 2016, p. 79-104.

Musolff, Andreas. *Metaphor and Political Discourse: Analogical Reasoning in Debates about Europe*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

Nnajiofor, Osita G. "Justification of the Concept of Time in Africa." *Ogirisi: A New Journal of African Studies*, vol. 12, 2016, p. 253-281.

1000 Proverbs and Sayings in English, compiled by Sacheen Jahagirdar, suratiundhiyu.files.wordpress.com. Accessed 22 June 2025.

Palmer, Gary B. *Toward a Theory of Cultural Linguistics*. University of Texas Press, 1996.

Ruiz de Mendoza Ibáñez, Francisco J. "On the Nature and Scope of Metonymy in Linguistic Description and Explanation: Towards Settling Some Controversies." *The Bloomsbury Companion to Cognitive Linguistics*, edited by Jeannette Littlemore and John R. Taylor, Bloomsbury, 2014, p. 143-166.

Sharifian, Farzad. *Cultural Linguistics: Cultural Conceptualisations and Language*. John Benjamins, 2017.

Silva Sinha, V., et al. “Event-Based Time Intervals in an Amazonian Culture.” *Space and Time in Languages and Cultures II: Language, Culture, and Cognition*, edited by Kasia M. Jaszczolt and Luna Filipović, John Benjamins, 2012, p. 15-35.

Sweetser, Eve, and Alice Gaby. “Linguistic Patterns of Space and Time Vocabulary.” *The Cambridge Handbook of Cognitive Linguistics*, edited by Barbara Dancygier, Cambridge UP, 2017, p. 625-634.

Wierzbicka, Anna. *Understanding Cultures Through Their Key Words*. Oxford UP, 1997.

Zhong, Lingli, and Zhengguang Liu. “Metonymic Event-Based Time Interval Concepts in Mandarin Chinese: Evidence from Time Interval Words.” *Frontiers in Psychology*, 2022, p. 1-18.

Iwona Kraska-Szlenk

Iwona Kraska-Szlenk (i.e.kraska-szlenk@uw.edu.pl) is Professor at the University of Warsaw, where she teaches courses on general linguistics and Swahili language and literature. Her research interests focus on embodiment and language-culture connection, lexical semantics, phonology-morphology interface, and usage-based methodologies. She has authored several books, including : *Analogy : The Relation between Lexicon and Grammar* (LINCOM 2007) and *Semantics of Body Part Terms : General Trends and a Case Study of Swahili* (LINCOM 2014), and edited a number of multi-authored volumes, including : *Embodiment in Cross-Linguistic Studies : The ‘Head’* (Brill, 2019), *Body Part Terms in Conceptualization and Language Usage* (Benjamins, 2020), *Embodiment in Cross-Linguistic Studies : The ‘Eye’* (with Melike Baş, Brill, 2021), and *Embodiment in Cross-Linguistic Studies : The ‘Foot/Leg’* (with Mateus de Carvalho, Brill, 2025).

Iwona Kraska-Szlenk (i.e.kraska-szlenk@uw.edu.pl) est professeure à l’Université de Varsovie, où elle enseigne la linguistique générale ainsi que la langue et la littérature swahilies. Ses recherches portent sur l’incarnation et le lien langue-culture, la sémantique lexicale, l’interface phonologie-morphologie et les méthodologies fondées sur l’usage. Elle est l’auteure de plusieurs ouvrages, dont : *Analogy : The Relation between Lexicon and Grammar* (LINCOM, 2007) et *Semantics of Body Part Terms : General Trends and a Case Study of Swahili* (LINCOM, 2014). Elle a également dirigé la publication de plusieurs ouvrages collectifs, dont: *Embodiment in Cross-Linguistic Studies: The ‘Head’* (Brill, 2019), *Body Part Terms in Conceptualization and Language Usage* (Benjamins, 2020), *Embodiment in Cross-Linguistic Studies: The ‘Eye’* (avec Melike Baş, Brill, 2021), et *Embodiment in Cross-Linguistic Studies: The ‘Foot/Leg’* (avec Mateus de Carvalho, Brill, 2025).