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*Unveiling the HIV/AIDS metaphors: a cognitive linguistics perspective*

oral presentation in Workshop: 105 Embodied cognition and experiential approaches to communication, written and spoken discourse analysis. From hypothesis and empirical data to theoretical issues (Antoine AUCHLIN, Nathalie ILIĆ & Tea PRŠIR)

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The epidemic is not about medicine or public health. Barnett & Whiteside (2006:30)

## **UNVEILING THE HIV/AIDS METAPHORS: A COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS PERSPECTIVE**

BY

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### **Abstract**

This paper examines the ubiquitous usage of HIV/AIDS metaphors in the works of epidemiologists, feminists, anthropologists, political analysts among other scholars, by analysing their image-schemas and cultural conceptualizations of HIV/AIDS. Lakoff (1982) mentions in passing that man's conceptualization of phenomenon inclusive of illnesses is guided by image schemas, however in-depth cognitive analyses of the conceptualizations of ailments such as HIV/AIDS in Lakoffian works remains unexplored. Although studies by Semino, Heywood and Short (2004) have attempted to explore conceptual metaphors used in reference to cancer for instance THE SPREAD OF CANCER WITHIN THE HUMAN BODY IS A JOURNEY metaphor. It is undeniable that there exists a lacuna on the cognitive frames designed for HIV/AIDS metaphors in various cultures. In this regard, the goal of this paper is to investigate the pre-existing metaphors and cognitive models used in reference to HIV/AIDS. The paper uses a cognitive lens in arguing for the existence of a cognitive frame upon which the HIV/AIDS figurative discourse is premised, hence enriching Sontag's (1988) work titled *AIDS and its metaphors*.

**Keywords:** HIV/AIDS metaphors, figurative language and cognitive models

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In cognitive linguistics, the ubiquity of metaphors in discourse is regarded as a necessary evil, meaning that metaphors are not in any way linguistically deviant as once alleged by classical rhetoricians (cf. Black, 1979; Sperber & Wilson, 2006: 171). Undeniably, metaphors figuratively capture image schemas by which man conceptualizes his embodied experiences as attested in the works of numerous scholars, for instance, Lakoff & Turner (1987: 20) generously provide numerous examples of conceptual metaphors and their respective linguistic metaphors in discourse, cases in point are PEOPLE ARE PLANTS metaphor is linguistically expressed as *he is in the budding stage of his career*, LIFE IS A JOURNEY metaphor as in *we have travelled this far*, DEATH IS SLEEP metaphor like in the expression *he is finally resting in the Lord*. Gibbs (1994) discusses the conceptualization of anger as ANGER IS HEATED FLUID IN A CONTAINER in an expression such as *she was burning with rage*. Besides the metaphorical conceptualization of anger, Evans & Green (2006) contend that death is construed as the reaper, devourer or destroyer. Moreover, Kövesces

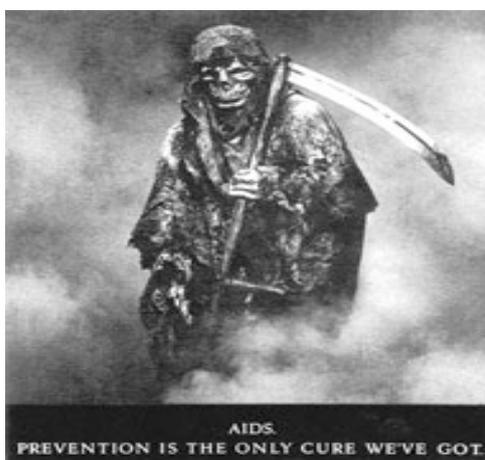
(2006) confirms that the Chinese conceptualize happiness under the conceptual metaphor of HAPPINESS IS HAVING FLOWERS IN THE HEART, whereas in English HAPPINESS IS UP as in the linguistic metaphors *I am in high spirits* or HAPPINESS IS LIGHT as exemplified by the expression *Today Sandra is beaming with happiness*. In the light of the examples discussed above, the paper investigates metaphors used in reference to HIV/AIDS. Examples are derived from written works of epidemiologists, anthropologists, and feminists who have unconsciously used linguistic metaphors in their literature on the AIDS pandemic. In this respect, the ultimate goal is to construct an HIV/AIDS cognitive model by which HIV/AIDS metaphors live by, by espousing arguments from cognitive linguistics. The subsequent sections broadly examine AIDS metaphors under the following headlines AIDS IS DEATH personified, THE SPREAD OF AIDS IS A JOURNEY, CONTRACTING AIDS IS AN ACCIDENT and HIV/AIDS IS WAR.

## 2.0 THE AIDS CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS IN THE AIDS COGNITIVE MODEL

### 2.1. AIDS IS DEATH PERSONIFIED

HIV/AIDS is a killer disease alongside other potential killer diseases such as cancer, tuberculosis and so forth. Going by historical literature, HIV/AIDS is not the sole epidemic to bedevil humanity. In the fourteenth century, the bubonic plague, virtually halved Europe's population. Also included in the same list of ailments with plague-like affiliations entail diseases such as syphilis, cholera and influenza. Moreover, sexually transmitted diseases such as gonorrhoea, syphilis, herpes and now HIV/AIDS naturally cohabit with the following implicatures: perversion, immorality, unfaithfulness and moral decadence (cf. Sontag, 1988 and Doka, 1997). In an attempt to capture the grim picture painted by AIDS-related deaths, behaviour change communicators in Australia and Kenya have respectively conceptualized HIV/AIDS as Grim reaper as shown in pictorial metaphors in *Posters 1* and *2*.

Poster 1: Australian AIDS poster



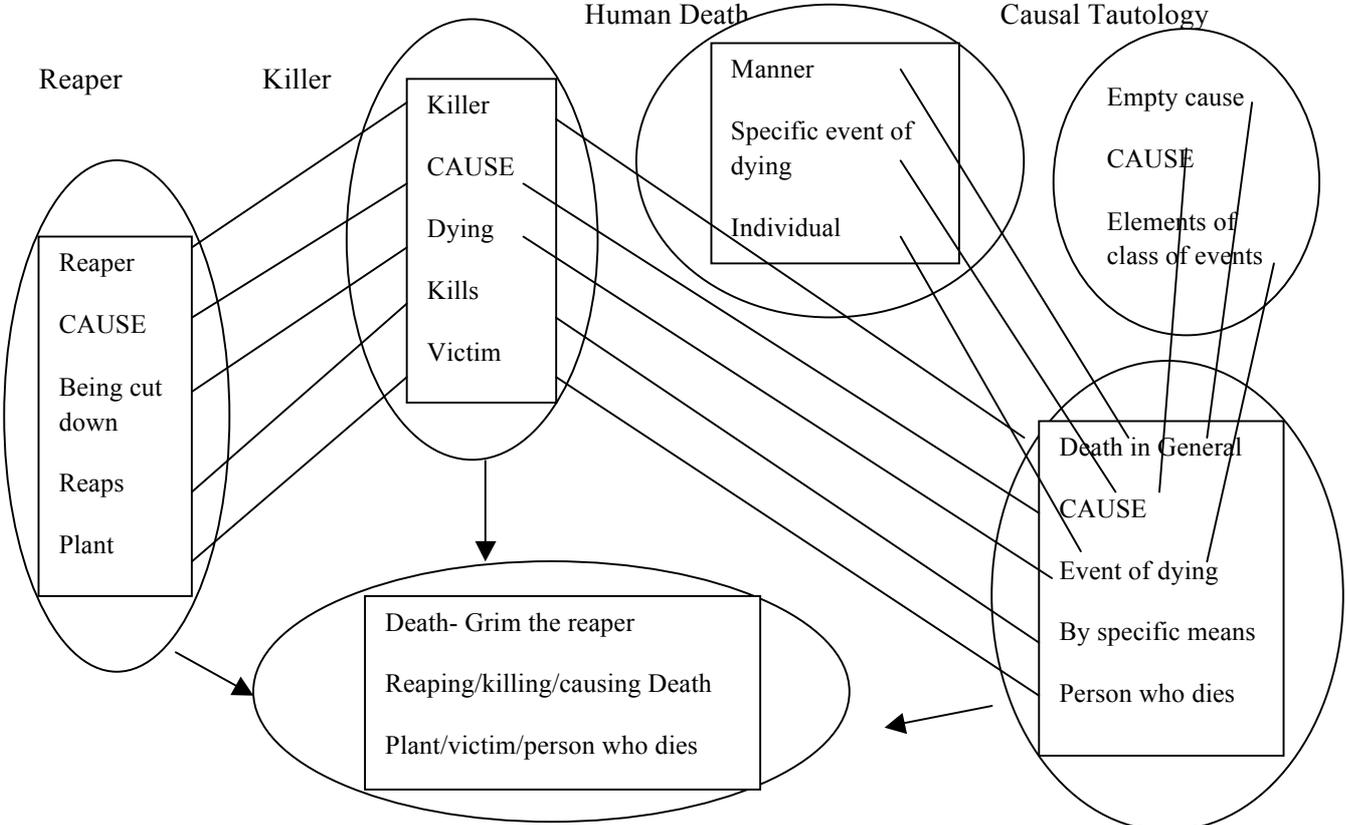
Source: AIDS ACTION (2008)

Poster 2: A 1993 Kenyan AIDS poster



Media Materials ClearingHouse (2010)

In *Poster 1*, AIDS is conceptualized as Grim reaper in a 1987 AIDS poster used in sensitizing Australians on the dangers of HIV/AIDS. Grim reaper represents the angel of death armed with a scythe, which is his weapon of execution. In terms of physical appearance, Evans & Green (2006) contend that grim reaper hosts metonymic aspects. First and foremost, the skeleton stands for death, in fact according to Geerareats (2010) it is the image of death which is the target domain and while Grim reaper and the killer are the source domains. In other words, death is personified as a reaper. In this scenario, the reaper has seemingly lost its positive connotation of harvesting plants and has instead acquired a negative aspect of being a killer. Second, the hood covering the reaper’s facial features represents concealment typical of murderers who wear masks to conceal their faces. Third, the scythe stands for the manner grim executes his killing indiscriminately. Further using a conceptual blend developed by Fauconnier and Turner (2002) for Grim reaper, the blend comprises numerous parts as shown in *Figure 1*



**Figure 1: Conceptual blend of Grim the Reaper (Source: Fauconnier & Turner, 2002:292)**

Fauconnier & Turner (2002) present a mental representation of Grim reaper’s conceptualization with the aid of a conceptual blend comprising five spaces shown in *Figure 1*. Their argument holds that first space captures the reaper in a harvesting scenario. The second space, contains elements describing a stereotypical killer, the third space labelled

human death presents the image of a dying person by capturing the actual state of dying. The fourth and fifth spaces under the label of causal tautology contain an abstract pattern of causality, where particular events lead to someone's death. The final space presents Grim reaper's image as death personified, hence in *Poster 1* bearing the message *AIDS prevention is the only cure we have got*, the message sensitizes the audience that using protection is the surest way of avoiding AIDS-related deaths. In *Poster 2*, coined in Kiswahili reads *Ikiwa UKIMWI haukutishi wewe, hebu fikiria vile UKIMWI unaweza kumdhuru mtoto wako, hebu fikiria* (if AIDS does not scare you, just think about how AIDS can affect you child, just think about it). The message uses repetition or epizeuxis<sup>i</sup> (cf. Sperber & Wilson, 1986: 219) for emphatic purposes, in its repetition of the words *just think* in the statement *just think about how AIDS can affect your child, just think about it*. The repetition both implies and is consistent with just give HIV/AIDS some serious thought. Moreover, the message is accompanied by a pictorial metaphor of a strategically positioned python with its fangs exposed in preparation to strike an innocent child that it has tightly encircled. A python normally encircles and immobilizes its victims by breaking its bones, and once its prey is weakened, the python engulfs its victim. The python will remain immobile until it has digested its prey. Likewise, the manner in which the python engulfs its victim interpretively<sup>ii</sup> represents the manner in which the AIDS virus remains asymptomatic in the human body only to slowly weaken the body by opportunistic infections leading to one's death. According to Lakoff & Turner (1989: 17), images of a beast trying to devour its victims as in *Poster 1* or threatening one's life like in *Poster 2*, are personifications of death and since HIV/AIDS is a killer disease, using scary images depicting HIV/AIDS as skeletons or snakes is bound to reinforce its stigmatization.

## **2.2 THE SPREAD OF HIV/AIDS IS A JOURNEY metaphor**

Literature on HIV/AIDS by scholars such as Sabatier (1988), Mann, Chin, Piot and Quin (1989), Doka (1997) contend that AIDS-related cases are reported worldwide, which serves as evidence of its propagation from one region to another. In connection to this, Sabatier (1988: 33) cites the former Zambian president Kenneth Kaunda in 1987 using THE PROPAGATION OF HIV/AIDS IS A JOURNEY conceptual metaphor argued that *What is important than knowing where this disease came from is where it is going*, to suggest that as scientists were busy trading accusations on the origin of HIV/AIDS, the disease was spreading its tentacles worldwide. A more elaborate application of THE SPREAD OF HIV/AIDS IS A JOURNEY metaphor is captured in some linguistic metaphors used in reference to a seropositive person by some Luhyia<sup>iii</sup> dialects of Kenya namely; Lusamia, Lutsotso, Lunyala, Lumarachi, Lwisukha, and Lukisa (Kobia, 2008). Apparently, the metaphors source domain is the journey domain, they figuratively trace the journeying process from its beginning to the end, right from the queuing at the bus station, acquisition of the bus-ticket, being at bus stage with one's luggage, the actual journey, the travelling process and the final destination. To capture the journey process as outlined, there is a Lutsotso expression *yatira ilaini* (*on the queue*) that is used in reference to a seropositive person's status to denote the queuing process necessary for obtaining a ticket to travel to a particular destination. Said differently, one's seropositive status, it is culturally conceptualized as the genesis of the journey towards his or her maker.

Then prior to the boarding of a bus, obtaining a ticket is imperative, therefore acquiring a seropositive status is once again equated to having bought or acquired a ticket to travel towards one's maker because death is inevitable for an incurable disease like HIV/AIDS. A similar expression to the Lutsotso term is found among the Lunyala speakers who have the expression *Okhukhalaka tikiti* (he has the bus ticket). Once a passenger has a ticket, he has to patiently wait for his bus at the stage as captured in the Lusamia dialect's expression *Ari khusitendi* (at the bus stage waiting for "death bus"). Also the Lumarachi dialect has the expression *Ali khusitendi* (one is at the bus stop, waiting to board) or even in the Lwisukha's dialect *yari bindu bie mustendi* (he has put his luggage on the bus stage). At this point, it is important to stress that for the Lumara dialect the mode of transport is not a bus but a car as in their expression *ali musitendi alindanga omutoka* (at the stage waiting for a car). Just before one's departure, it is natural to bid someone farewell, the Lutsotso dialect uses the expression *oli omusebute* (goodbye), in reference to a seropositive person. Moreso, the onset of the journeying process is noted by the Luwanga expression *yasumukha oluchendo* (he has began the journey) and also Lunyore expression *atsitsanga* (he is going). However, the cited expressions do not overtly state the journey's destination. Contrastively, in the Lukisa dialect the destination is overtly stated in the expression *yakhala itikiti yo mwikulu* (he has the ticket to go to heaven) that explicitly suggests that the journey's destination is towards one's creator. In brief, according to Kobia (2008) the mentioned Luhya dialects have image schemas of AIDS metaphors within the journey source domain.

Besides Kobia's insights on the conceptualization of HIV/AIDS as a journey, it cannot be overstressed that propagation of HIV/AIDS is attributed to various factors, which are rich sources of metonymic expressions, for example the spread of the pandemic is synonymous to certain high risk groups like commercial sex workers (CSW), gay persons and Africans. Hence AIDS is branded *mia mbili* (two hundred shillings) by the Sukuma community of Tanzania as noted by Mshana, Plummer, Wamoyi, Shigongo, Ross and Wight (2006: 50) where the money paid for the services of CSW stands in for the profession. Furthermore, by labelling HIV/AIDS, the gay plague or the African disease (cf. Schoepf, 2004) metonymically generalizes the disease to either the entire gay community or the African community. Other metonymic references to HIV/AIDS are evident in the aerial means by which the disease spread in the eighties as terms such as the charter disease, the jet age disease and the jumbo jet disease were coined in reference to HIV/AIDS (Adagazi, 1989). In the natural course of journeys, accidents or any other misfortunes are inevitable therefore the conceptualization of HIV/AIDS as a misfortune has been observed in numerous expressions for instance Silberschmidt (2004: 240) when interviewing men on AIDS and Masculinities in Tanzania, a male respondent said " *You never know if you will be run over by a matatu or dala dala (local bus in Kenya and Tanzania respectively) tomorrow... why should this prevent you from walking in the street*". For the Tanzanian respondent, one's multi-partnered sexual lifestyle that exposes one to HIV/AIDS is associated with an unprecedented road accident under CONTRACTING AIDS IS AN ACCIDENT conceptual metaphor. A closely related example to this metaphor is Frankenberg's (1998: 26) example, which makes reference to Princess Anne, Queen Elizabeth's daughter, conceptualization of the AIDS pandemic as a misfortune in her expression *mankind has scored an own goal against itself*. In the field of soccer, it is

sacrilegious for one to score against one's own team and in most cases such a move is accidental. Therefore, Princess Anne's singles out one of the football crimes from her embodied experience with the British fanaticism with soccer to register her personal conceptualization of HIV/AIDS. In conclusion, the HIV/AIDS IS A JOURNEY metaphors are used unconsciously by various scholars from diverse fields in linguistic metaphors used in reference to HIV and AIDS.

### 2.3 HIV/AIDS IS WAR metaphor

Scientific literature affirms that HIV/AIDS triggers immuno-suppression within the human body. According to Sontag (1988) the human body is conceptualized as fortress and is vulnerable to attacks from micro-organisms. Any incoming ailment is perceived as an alien invasion of microscopic organisms in the forms of bacteria, viruses and protozoa (cf. Warwick, Aggleton and Homas, 1988). This calls for the human body to respond by organizing immunological defences. In this regard, under the ILLNESS IS WAR metaphor, the invasion of the virus in the human body will naturally trigger a fight between the white blood cells and the alien micro-organisms. Warwick, Aggleton and Homas, (1988: 114); Farmer, (1992: 12); Bujra, (2002: 227); Kauffman & Lindauer, (2004) and De Waal, (2006: 17) have provided instances capturing the FIGHTING OF HIV/AIDS IS WAR metaphor. In Warwick, Aggleton and Homas (1988) study on the way youth aged between sixteen and twenty one years perceive the HIV/AIDS pandemic in the North and South West of England, the youths employed militarist metaphors to denote the destructiveness of HIV within the human body as in (1)

#### (1) Responses from British youths on their perceptions of HIV/AIDS

Sue: You actually die from AIDS anyway, coz what it is... it's a virus that breaks down your resistance.

IW: So you die from other things.

Sue: And it kills your resistance, but you don't actually die from AIDS, you can die from bronchitis or pneumonia or something like that.

Joe: AIDS destroys your immune system...you die of something else entirely.

Terri: AIDS kills off one lot of cells and leaves other cells defenceless and therefore your body doesn't die from AIDS, it's a disease that puts you at risk from anything else. Cuts down your chances from it and you die from more or less anything else

(adapted from Warwick *et. al*, 1988: 114)

Taking note of the expression such as breaks down your resistance (under HIV/AIDS IS A DESTRUCTIVE FORCE conventional metaphor), *kills your resistance*, *leaves the other cells defenseless* and *cuts down your chances* alerts us that we are dealing with a destructive ailment that virtually destabilizes the body's defence system.

As HIV/AIDS gained currency in the United States, numerous gay organizations employed war metaphors by advocating for "War on AIDS" in an effort to call for rigorous measures in dealing with the epidemic. The HIV/AIDS IS WAR metaphor has been effectively employed

in countries like Ghana, Haiti, Uganda and Switzerland (cf. Farmer, 1992, Bujra, 2002; and De Waal, 2006). In Haiti, Farmer (1992: 12) notes down comments of a seropositive man known as Dieudonné on his view on AIDS as cited below:

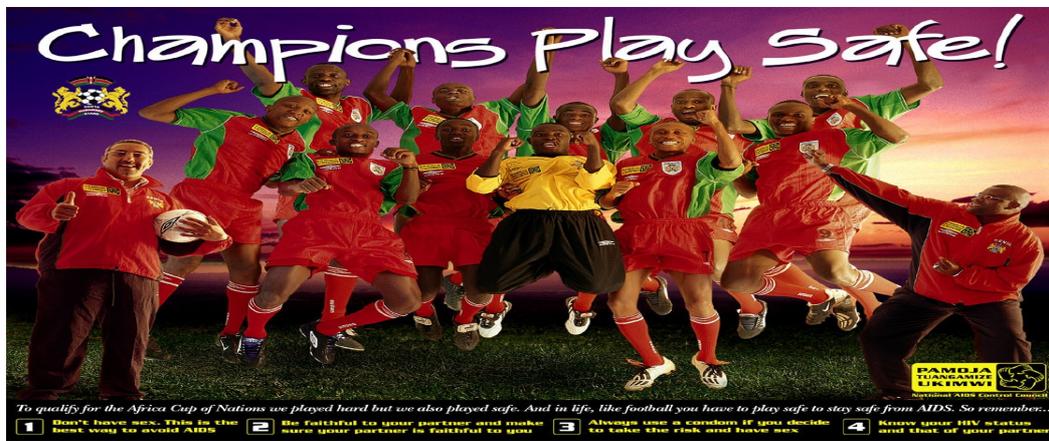
“ ...What I see is that poor people catch it more easily. They say that the rich get SIDA (AIDS). I do not see that. But what I see that the poor person sends it to another. **It is like the army (firing on civilians), brothers shooting on brothers...**”

In this scenario, Dieudonné, adopts a simile in representing his conceptualization of HIV/AIDS, whereby the viral propagation is likened to a death sentence under its conceptual metaphor of HIV/AIDS TRANSMISSION IS A MILITARY EXECUTION. In different words, spreading HIV/AIDS is interpretively perceived as a military execution with the army firing at innocent persons instead of foes, and thereby “by brothers shooting brothers”, one is faced with a state of hopelessness whereby HIV/AIDS spreads indiscriminately to unsuspecting victims be it the old, young or the unborn. Similar war-like statements have even been expressed by the former UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan who opines that “the impact of AIDS is no less destructive than that of warfare itself, and by some, measures, far worse.” (UNAIDS, 2000: 39). In Ghana, Bujra (2002) affirms the existence of an AIDS campaign designed for the military personnel bearing the message *put the boot on AIDS* or *takes the firing squad on AIDS*. According to De Waal (2006: 17), the AIDS is war metaphor was used by Ugandan Muslim clerics as early as 1989, as they pushed for a “jihad on AIDS”, and cross-checking with the New Encyclopaedia Britannica (2003: 550) *Jihad* (Jehad) has its etymology in Arabic and denotes to *fight* or *a battle*. Its central sense means a religious warfare undertaken by Muslims to spread Islam by waging war against non-believers. Through semantic broadening, its extended sense accommodates the concept of an aggressive campaign or a crusade for some cause in four perspectives namely: by heart, tongue, hand and sword. First and foremost, by heart is more of a spiritual purification where one engages in a spiritual warfare aimed at denouncing evil. Second, by tongue means proclaiming Islamic doctrines with the goal of propagating Islam. Third, by hand, is a way of supporting Islamic ideologies by correcting what is wrong. And finally, by sword, implies fulfilling one’s duty by waging war physically to non-believers. Armed with this information from our background cognition, when one talks of Jihad on AIDS in the context of an epidemic, one is actually declaring a total war against the disease, but when juxtaposed with normal wars where missiles, tanks, machine guns and any other weapons of mass destruction that anyone can ever think of will be pertinent in such a scenario. The “Jihad on AIDS” cognitively invites other “weapons of mass destruction” in the following manner: by heart, one has a personal decision to either fight HIV/AIDS by abstaining or opt for safe sex. Second, by tongue, necessitates that one becomes an AIDS ambassador charged with the duty of spreading the gospel on the pandemic by sensitizing ignorant persons on the disease. Third, by hand, overtly invites financial, medical and moral assistance channeled towards HIV/AIDS related projects. In the same vein, it also calls for condemning actions frustrating the fight against the killer disease, a typical example being the AIDS-related stigma. And finally, the physical war on HIV/AIDS is a matter of exploring prevention techniques like using protection, abstinence, transfusing only screened blood and other interventions.

### 2.3.1 THE PRO-HIV/AIDS IS WAR METAPHORS, THE COUNTER HIV/AIDS IS WAR METAPHORS and semantic extensions of the AIDS IS WAR metaphor

As clearly stated in section 2.3, under the HIV/AIDS IS WAR metaphor, there are two types of discourse around the fight against HIV/AIDS notably; the PRO-HIV/AIDS IS WAR metaphors and the COUNTER-HIV/AIDS IS WAR metaphors. On one hand, the PRO-HIV/AIDS IS WAR metaphors are found in discourses or campaigns supporting the use of protection as well as abstinence when talking about HIV/AIDS for instance in the Kenyan AIDS Poster 3.

Poster 3: The National AIDS Control Council (NACC) AIDS poster: *Champions play safe!*



Source: NACC (2010) Website: <http://www.narc.org.ke/2007/index.php>

Poster 3 bearing the message *Champions play safe!* has two levels of interpretation and is coined under the conventional metaphor of SEX IS A GAME metaphor. According to Fernández (2008: 107), SEX IS A GAME metaphor is realized in various linguistic metaphors such as *play away* denoting “to be sexually active”, *to score* meaning “to copulate” and *play the field* means “to be promiscuous”. It naturally follows that in the HIV/AIDS era, the playing field has become risky, hence using protection is now imperative in fighting HIV/AIDS. The other level of interpretation is that the poster uses the image of the Kenyan football team as an ostensive stimulus for its audience, marked by images of the Kenyan football team inclusive of their renown football coach Jacob “Ghost” Mulee (positioned on the right hand side of the poster) and together with the former Minister of sports, Honorable Najib Balala. These are good examples or paragons in the Kenyan society representing a category of prominent personalities. In the Lakoffian perspective, they are cognitive models having prototypical effects given that they are taking necessary precautions in their sexual life in fighting HIV/AIDS. Likewise, addressees are also encouraged to emulate such respectable members of the society to be champions in fighting HIV/AIDS in Kenya. Another PRO-HIV/AIDS metaphor has been observed in Uganda during the onset of HIV/AIDS, people were encouraged to “zero graze” (cf. Montagnier & Gallo, 1989, Mann *et. al*, 1989 and Obbo,

2004). Zerograzing springs from the semantic field of dairy farming where cattle feed on hay in paddocks (cf. Collins English Dictionary, 1995). This means their movement is restricted therefore impeding cattle from grazing freely. Nonetheless, Zero grazing is used interpretively within the context of behavior change communication and means confining oneself to one faithful partner as opposed to leading a multi-partnered sexual life.

On the other hand, the COUNTER HIV/AIDS discourse is for instance in the East African region there are two predominant similes that are against the HIV/AIDS prevention discourse by belittling condom use as captured in expressions like *using protection is like eating a sweet with a wrapper* or *using protection is like taking a shower with a raincoat on* (cf. Obbo, 2004:81 and Schoepf, 2004:34). From these comments, a computation of implicit assumptions and their respective conclusions are shown as in (2)

(2) X utters (as basic level explicature): “ Practising safer sex is like eating a sweet with a wrapper”

Higher level explicature: X is suggesting that practicing safer sex is like eating a sweet with a wrapper.

Implicit assumption: Sweets are never eaten with wrappers. If one eats a sweet with its wrapper, he is not in a position to fully appreciate its sweetness. That being the case using protection makes sex less pleasurable.

Implicit conclusion: I will not use protection

A similar procedure is applicable to the expression *using protection is like showering with a raincoat on*. In ordinary situations, people enjoy their shower minus their clothes on. The implicit assumption here is that people shower in the nude. Therefore, if one takes a shower with a raincoat, the body is denied the opportunity of coming into direct contact with water, meaning no showering has actually taken place. Moeschler ( in an informal discussion with the author in 2009), gives the example of France, where the French clergy were opposed to the use of protection and campaigned for their followers to “*Mets les préservatifs à l’index*” (which in an idiom that prohibits condom usage). Extensions of the HIV/AIDS IS WAR is applicable in other domains such as politics, for instance Sontag (1988) cites the case where Le Pen referred to his political enemies as “*ils sont sidatiques,*” suggesting that they were his political rivals, just like HIV is an enemy of mankind.

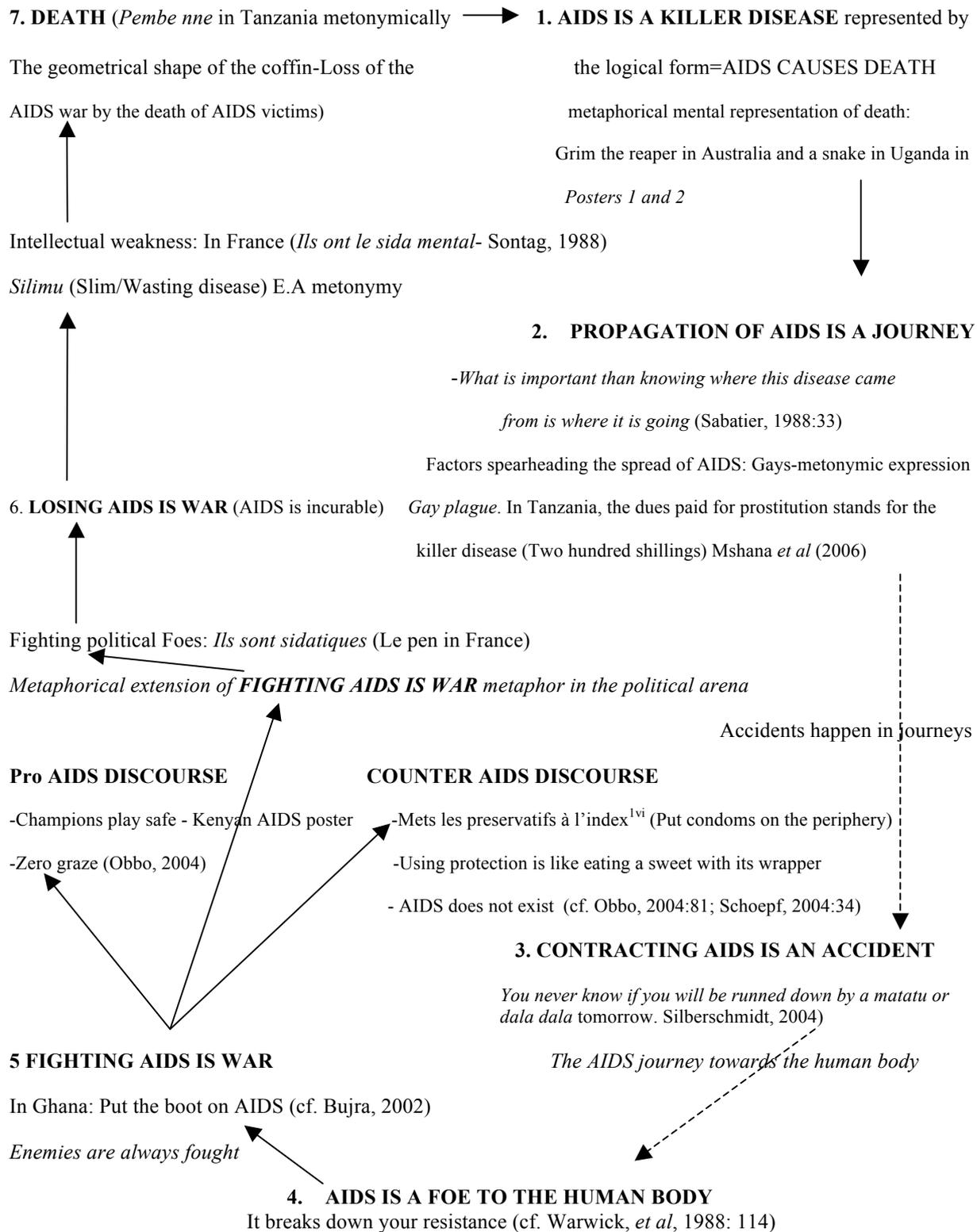
## **2.4 DYING OF HIV/AIDS IS LOSING THE AIDS WAR**

AIDS is an incurable disease and surest way of curbing it is via prevention mechanisms. It cannot be overstressed that no matter how tirelessly the body fights HIV/AIDS, the disease eventually exerts its toll on the human body because of its wasting nature. In the East African region, HIV/AIDS is referred to as *Slim* or *Silimu*, which metonymically singles out one symptom of HIV/AIDS to represent other opportunistic infections associated with the killer disease. Besides focusing on the general weakness of the body in coining metaphoric or metonymic expression on HIV/AIDS, extended senses of AIDS metaphors have been used in the field of academia, where Sontag (1988) describes striking students as *ils ont le sida mental*

(they are suffering from mental AIDS), and this expression apparently questions their intellectual capacities as university students. As previously mentioned, the incurability of HIV/AIDS is a major headache to the global community because of its high mortality rates making AIDS-related deaths inevitable. No wonder among the Shona<sup>iv</sup> of Zimbabwe Mawadza (2004) confirms the existence of metonymic expressions associated with activities surrounding funeral wakes are used metonymically in reference to seropositive persons. Mawadza makes reference to two expressions namely *tinomunwira manje manje* (very soon couches will be outside) and *tinomunwira manje manje* (very soon we will be drinking beer), which are common activities that characterize any African society whenever one is bereaved. In different words, during funerals many people normally visit homesteads of the bereaved to console them, and because of limited spaces to accommodate many visitors, the hosts are sometimes compelled to provide seats outside for their visitors. During such scenarios, the men and more particularly, the undertakers will engage in drinking to drown their sorrows. Seemingly, such activities associated with funerals among the Shona metonymically represent the seropositive person because HIV/AIDS is an incurable disease. Mshana, Plummer, Wamoyi, Shigongo, Ross and Wight (2006) also observe metonymies associated with death equally exist among the Sukuma<sup>v</sup> of Tanzania, who refer to HIV/AIDS as *pembe nne* (the four corners), whereby based on their embodied experience with numerous AIDS-related deaths, the Sukuma have coined a term for HIV/AIDS derived from the geometrical shape of a coffin or tomb used in reference to the killer disease.

### **3.0 CONCLUSION**

To summarize the lengthy discussion on HIV/AIDS, it cannot be overstressed that HIV/AIDS is both a cultural and global reality. In various ways, we have figuratively captured our embodied experiences with HIV/AIDS as outlined in the above sub-sections and the HIV/AIDS discourse can in summary be presented in the model in *Figure 2*.



**Figure 2: THE AIDS COGNITIVE MODEL**

From an epidemiologist perspective, AIDS is a killer disease, therefore mental schemas associated with death are either used metaphorically or metonymically in reference to HIV/AIDS as shown in *Posters 1* and *2* bearing AIDS IS GRIM REAPER or AIDS IS DEATH PERSONIFIED pictorial metaphors, which figuratively represent the AIDS pandemic. Moreover, it is a truism that HIV/AIDS has extended its tentacles worldwide, therefore both its propagation and even seropositive persons are potential sources of figurative expressions. For instance, Sabatier's (1988) notes down President Kaunda's statement on the global propagation of HIV/AIDS under THE PROPAGATION OF HIV/AIDS IS A JOURNEY conceptual metaphor as follows *what is important than knowing where this disease came from is where it is going*. In a closely related approach to Sabatier (1988) on the PROPAGATION OF HIV/AIDS IS A JOURNEY metaphor, where journeys serve as a source domain for metaphorical constructions used in reference to seropositive persons, Kobia's (2008) study focuses on terms used in reference to seropositive persons among the Luhya dialects of Kenya (cf. section 2.2), Kobia gives the example of Lunyala speakers who refer to a seropositive person as *okhukhalaka tikiti* (he has the bus ticket). This expression implies that the said individual is on a journey towards his maker since AIDS is an incurable ailment. Moreover, factors fuelling the propagation of HIV/AIDS are metonymically made reference to, for instance it was once labelled the gay plague in the 70s, where a few members of the gay were used to stand in for the disease. Further, in Tanzania, commercial sex workers are another high risk group who engage in sex for monetary purposes. Here, the money paid for their services is used in reference to HIV/AIDS (cf. Schoepf, 2004; Mshana *et al* (2006). Just like in any journey, accidents are unplanned, and even with regard to the AIDS discourse, some people have accidentally contracted HIV/AIDS as stated by (Silberschmidt, 2004) who uses the CONTRACTING HIV/AIDS IS AN ACCIDENT metaphors in the following expression *You never know if you will be runned down by a matatu<sup>vii</sup> or dala dala tomorrow*, where in most cases people do not plan to contract AIDS.

The AIDS journey is towards the human body, and once the destructive virus gains access in the human body as represented in an example by Warwick *et al* (1988:144) *Joe: AIDS destroys your immune system...you die of something else entirely*. Thus against such a background, the human body immunological defences are triggered by the white cells. This is conceptualized under FIGHTING HIV/AIDS IS WAR conceptual metaphor as shown by Bujra (2002), whereby the fight against HIV/AIDS is conceptualized as war, as in examples like *put the boot on AIDS, or take the firing squad on AIDS*. In the HIV/AIDS discourse, there are certain discourses that are either productive or counterproductive in curbing HIV/AIDS. On one extreme and with regard to the former, figurative expressions in *Poster 3* such as *champions play safe!* advocate for safe sex as a preventive measure against HIV/AIDS. On the other extreme, expressions like *using protection is like eating a sweet with its wrapper or AIDS does not exist* as observed in Obbo (2004:81) and Schoepf (2004:34) are counterproductive in the fight against HIV/AIDS. There are metaphorical extensions of FIGHTING AIDS IS WAR metaphor in other domains such as politics, as noted by Sontag (1988) who observed Le Pen, a former president of France, who labelled his political enemies as *sidatique* (has being AIDS-like). Here, Le Pen compares his political enemies to the AIDS virus which is an enemy of mankind. Given that AIDS is incurable, the human body

succumbs to the opportunistic infections whereby in most cases, one of the most common symptom synonymous with HIV/AIDS is the drastic weight-loss, otherwise referred to as *silimu* (slim) in Kiswahili as discussed in section 2.4. In other circles, the concept of deficiency as an aspect associated with HIV/AIDS has been applied in the academic arena, like in France Sontag (1988) provides an example of striking students who were referred as suffering from “mental AIDS” (*Ils ont le sida mental*), for lacking the intellectual capacity to avert a strike as aspiring intellectuals. Once HIV/AIDS exerts its toll on the human body one eventually succumbs to the ailment. Put differently, this is another domain of metonymy as shown in expressions such as *pembe nne* (four corners) used among the Sukuma of Tanzania, whereby the geometrical shape of both the tomb and coffin stand in for HIV/AIDS. This stems from the fact that the Shona community, just like most African communities, numerous AIDS-related deaths are a daily occurrence (cf. Mshana *et al*, 2006). Mawadza (2004) also provides metonymic expressions used among the Shona of South Africa, whereby activities associated with funerals, such as the removing of couches outside ones house for visitors to sit on as they console the bereaved like in the expression *tinomunwira manje manje* is used in reference to a seropositive person. In conclusion, AIDS just like cancer lives by its own share of metaphors and metonymic expressions. These figurative expressions linguistically register our embodied experience with the AIDS pandemic.

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## End notes

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<sup>i</sup> Sperber & Wilson (1986: 219) argue that repetition or epizeuxis can be worked out differently, for instance in the construction like *I shall never, never smoke again* denotes *I will definitely not smoke again* and is consistent with the fact that the speaker wanted to indicate that the walk was unusually long

<sup>ii</sup> Interpretive use of language is a concept borrowed from relevant theorists such as Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson (cf. Sperber & Wilson (1986) and Wilson & Sperber, (2000), they advance the thesis of metarepresentation, whereby an utterance can be employed to faithfully represent another utterance or thought, on the basis of their shared logical and contextual implications. For instance, a construction like *John is a lion*, entertains a wide range of weak implicatures such as *John is brave, strong or fearless*. In this regard, by uttering such a construction one merely maps features of a lion onto *John* in describing his strengths which resemble a *lion*.

<sup>iii</sup> This is a Bantu language spoken in Western Kenya and has around 17 mutually unintelligible dialects such as Lulogoli, Lubukusu, Lutachoni, Lwisukha, Lutirichi, Lwitakho, Luwanga, Lumarama, Lutsotso, Lushisa, Lumarachi, Lusamia, Lunyala, Lukisa, Lukabras and Lunyore. (cf. Osogo, 1960)

<sup>iv</sup> According to the National African Resource Center (2014) Shona is a Bantu language spoken in Zimbabwe along the borders of Botswana and Mozambique. Website: [http://www.nalrc.indiana.edu/brochures/shona .pdf](http://www.nalrc.indiana.edu/brochures/shona.pdf)

<sup>v</sup> According to the Ethnologue (2014) Sukuma is a Bantu language spoken between Lake Victoria and Lake Rukwa in Tanzania Website: <http://www.ethnologue.com/language/sna>

<sup>vi</sup> This example was given by my PhD supervisor, Professor Jacques Moeschler during our discussions on the counter AIDS discourse among the French Clergy who were against condom use in France by using the expression *Mets les preservatifs à l'index* (condoms should be put on the periphery)

<sup>vii</sup> Matatu's or dala dalas are used in the East African region as a mode of public transport.