

# The cultural conceptualization of *jini* ‘blood’ in Hausa

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## Abstract

This paper analyses linguistic expressions that instantiate the embodied metaphors and metonymies of the body part term *jini* ‘blood’ in Hausa. While Hausa is one of the most studied African languages, most of the studies, so far, have focussed on the structural aspects, hence the need for further cognitive studies of the language. The data in this paper was collected from written sources, while spoken sources have been used to validate these selected expressions. Based on the Cultural Conceptualization model (Sharifian, et. al, 2008), the body part term *jini* ‘blood’ is found to be extended into several conceptual domains, including the domains of life, kinship/relations, emotions, sacrifice, and character traits.

Keywords: Hausa, embodiment, metaphor, metonymy, cultural conceptualization

## 1. Introduction

Hausa is genetically a Chadic language, widely spoken in several West African countries, predominantly in Nigeria, but also in Niger, Chad, Ghana, and Cameroon. The exact number of Hausa speakers is not certain, but Simons and Fennig (2017) estimate both its first and second language speakers to be around 60 million. The seven Hausa regional dialects are divided into Eastern (Kano, Zaria, Bauchi, and Daura) and Western (Sokoto and Gobir) dialects, all in Northern Nigeria and Southern Niger. The data used in this study, however, is based on the Kano dialect, which is approximate to the standard variety used in formal writing and the media.

Although some studies have been conducted on Hausa body part terms, the chronicles of Hausa literature, such as Newman (1991) prove that most of these works were structural descriptions, as the field of cognitive linguistics in general, and in African languages in

particular, is still in its infant stage. Looking at the cognitive linguistic literature on Hausa reviewed in section two, it appears that so much is left to be done on this aspect of the language, hence the need for further cognitive studies on the language.

The aim of this paper is to study the figurative senses in which the body part term *jini* ‘blood’ is used in Hausa from the perspective of the *embodiment hypothesis*. The data used in the study is collected from written sources, including textbooks and novels to ensure that the expressions represent the standard variety of the language. Verbal expressions have been collected to corroborate the selected written expressions.

About fifty expressions involving the term *jini* ‘blood’ were collected in the first instance. They were then divided into literal and figurative expressions. The figurative expressions were further sorted and grouped into various cognitive domains of usage and were analyzed, accordingly.

### **1.1. The embodiment hypothesis**

Cognitive linguistics investigates the connection between human cognition and language, both at the mental and linguistic levels. Research in the field over the decades has yielded sufficient evidence on the role of the human body in linguistic conceptualization and encoding. This subtheme of the field is often referred to as *embodiment hypothesis*.

This idea, which was first proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and further developed by subsequent research within and beyond cognitive linguistics (see for instance, Csordas 1994; Gibbs 2006; Kövecses 2005; Kraska-Szlenk 2014; Rohrer, 2007; Sharifian et al. 2008; McPherron & Ramanathan 2011; Yu 2008, among others) is widely investigated across various languages of the world, with substantial positive results of its validity in terms of linguistic conceptualization and expression.

The theoretical foundation of the linguistic *embodiment* is known as *experientialism*, which assumes that the human bodily experience within its environment is the foundation of human linguistic conceptualization. Understandably, the human experience must be encoded via cognitive mechanisms that allow for the processing of these experiences within the human mental faculty, further aiding these refined experiences to understand various concepts connected to the experiences that finally develop linguistic constructions to express these concepts.

There are, therefore, two levels of conceptualization: mental concepts and the linguistic expressions that instantiate and communicate these experiences. It is at this level that cognitive linguists talk of metaphor and metonymy, i.e. mental, cognitive processes that allow for human cognitive conceptualization and linguistic expression.

On the one hand, metaphor – as understood in cognitive linguistics – is a process in which one cognitive domain is understood in terms of another domain. In this process, the source domain A is *mapped* onto the target domain B in order that B is understood and expressed in terms of A. Metonymy, on the other hand, involves accessing a part of a conceptual domain *via* another part of the same domain.

Although bodily experience and cognitive mechanisms aid linguistic conceptualizations, they do not account for the variations that exist among speech communities. Thus, whereas all humans have basically the same body structure, languages do not have the same forms and kinds of conceptualizations, because the environment, and therefore, experiences, differ significantly.

The difference in experiences within the environment leads to cultural variations among speech communities, which in turn, accounts for the variation in conceptualizing and expressing various linguistic notions. This would mean that languages will not have the same pattern and systems of linguistic *embodiment* despite the sameness in the physical human body.

The variations in linguistic *embedment* across languages are accounted for by *cultural conceptualization models* (cf. Sharifian, et. al. 2008), which by default encode varied experiences in accordance with the unique culture of the speakers of a given language. That is why, for instance, a given body part term, say the *heart*, which is found in all human bodies, would be conceptually exploited to understand, and express varied abstract concepts, based on the prevailing, distinct culture of the speakers of a given language.

Thus, while the body provides a universal template for the understanding and expression of abstract concepts, cultural conceptualizations account for the unique experiences of speech communities. It is through the prism of the *embodiment hypothesis* that this paper analyses the cultural-linguistic conceptualization of *jini* ‘blood’ in the Hausa language.

## **2. Previous cognitive studies on Hausa and the body part term ‘blood’**

Most of the literature on Hausa studies is based on structural and descriptive linguistics. There has been, however, a constant growth of interest in the cognitive aspects of the language. Some of the handiest works on body part terms in Hausa include Almajir (2013), Batic (2006, 2011, 2017), Batic and Baldi (2015), Pawlak (2009, 2014), Gwarzo (2015), Ibrahim (2018), Will (2019), Shehu (2018, 2019, 2020), among others.

Among these, Pawlak (2014) discusses the notion SELF in Hausa, whereas Almajir (2013) discussed polysemy of body part terms, just as Gwarzo (2015) and Ibrahim (2018) focus on metaphor and emotions, and Shehu (2020) and Will (2019) discuss the conceptualizations of the terms *ido* ‘eye’ and *kai* ‘head’ in Hausa, respectively. Shehu (2019) introduces a comparative study of the body part terms between Hausa and Fulfulde by analysing the conceptualization of *baki* and *hunnduko* ‘mouth’ in Hausa and Fulfulde.

There is a huge body of literature on body part terms based on various linguistic approaches and perspectives, and on various languages of the world. Some of these studies are generic, in that, they focus on conceptual domains, so that various body part terms are involved in their data and analysis. The term for ‘blood’ appears regularly in these kinds of works. For instance, seminal works on cognitive linguistics such as Kövecses (1990), Lakoff & Kövecses (1987), Turner (1977), among others, have all reported the prevalence of ‘blood’ metaphors in various languages.

Charteris-Black (2001) shows that the term for ‘blood’ is used in the conceptualization of various emotional concepts in Malay. Both positive and negative emotions are expressed in relation to “blood”. Expressions such as *darah manis* ‘to deal easily with danger’ (lit. ‘blood sweet’), *darah merah* ‘brave’ (lit. ‘blood red’), *darah perwira* ‘very brave’ (lit. ‘blood hero’), *darah hati* ‘annoyed’ (lit. ‘blood liver’), *darah panas* ‘short tempered’ (lit. ‘blood hot’), *darah kering* ‘cruel’ (lit. ‘blood dry’), *darah tersembur* ‘startled’ (lit. ‘blood ejected from the mouth’), and *darah muda* ‘impetuous’ (lit. ‘blood young’) are found to be widely entrenched in the language.

Kraska-Szlenk (2004) provides extensive examples of the figurative usage of the term for ‘blood’ in the domain of kinship/relation across languages. The Polish term *krewny* ‘kin, relative’ and *pokrewieństwo* ‘kinship’ derive from *rew* ‘blood’, *więzy krwi* ‘ties of blood’ (i.e., kinship), as in the expressions *w ich żyłach płynie ta sama krew* ‘they are related’ (lit. ‘the same blood flows in their veins’), *moja krew* (lit. my blood) to speak about one’s child, etc. are all figurative usages of the body part term ‘blood’ in this domain.

Kraska-Szlenk (2004) provides further cross-references on the occurrence of similar conceptualizations in other languages, such as in Swahili *uhusiano wa kidamu* ‘blood (i.e.

kinship) relation’, *huyu ni damu yangu* ‘(s)he is my blood (i.e., child or other close relative)’, *Damu nzito kuliko maji* (proverb) ‘blood is thicker than water’. Amharic’s *däm*, German’s *Blut*, and Turkish’s *kan* are all terms for ‘blood’ reported to have been figuratively extended into the domain of kinship/relations.

Similar studies report the use of the terms for blood in various conceptual domains. Maalej (2008) reports the instantiation of TEMPERAMENT IS BLOOD metaphor in Tunisian Arabic, found in expressions, such as *damm-u sxun* (lit. his blood is hot) ‘he is hot-blooded’ and *damm-u baarid* (lit. his blood is cold) to mean an individual is easily irritable, and not irritable, respectively.

However, other cognitive studies are specifically on the body part term for ‘blood’ in a given language or domain of conceptualization. A good example of this category is a comprehensive corpus-based study of the usage of the term ‘blood’ in the Bank of English conducted by Charteris-Black (2001) which concluded that three fundamental conceptual domains of usage are widely found in English.

These domains, referred to as ‘conceptual keys’ by Charteris-Black (2001) are potentially universal, in that, they have been found to be relevant in many languages of the world. These are domains of ancestry, life, and temperament, which are based on three metonymies, namely, BLOOD FOR ANCESTRY, BLOOD FOR LIFE, and BLOOD FOR TEMPERAMENT.

Subsequent studies on the term in various languages and cultures seem to agree with the idea that the term for blood is primarily – but not only – extended into these domains. For instance, Owiredu and Adu (2020) studied the metaphoric and metonymic structures of the term ‘blood’ in the Bible, exploring the various figurative senses in which the term was used in the scriptures. Taking expressions from the Bible, the study highlights the various context in which the term infers meanings and was used to express distinct linguistic concepts.

Kóczy (2020) studied the term *Vér* ‘blood’ in Hungarian, from a cognitive perspective. The term *Vér* ‘blood’ as would be seen from her paper is entrenched in Hungarian, given that it is used for the conceptualization and expression of various concepts in the language. According to her findings, the domains in which the term *Vér* ‘blood’ is extended in Hungarian include the domains of *colour, death/war, kinship, human nature, life force/essence, emotions and intensity*.

In a similar approach, Zibin (2021) analysed blood metaphors and metonymies in Jordanian Arabic, and further provided a comparison of Arabic conceptualizations with those of English. Based on Kövecses’s (2010) notion of main meaning focus, Zibin analysed

40,000 words specialized corpus of Jordanian Arabic, the results of which were used for comparative analyses with other languages studied in the literature.

The results of the study indicate that the body part term for ‘blood’ is used as the source domain for the conceptualization of various domains, mainly CHARACTER TRAITS, ESSENCE and EMOTION. These conceptualizations were found to be widely reported across other languages, such as English.

Another comparative study of the body part terms for blood is Bosman and Elsabe (2021) who studied the cognitive conceptualization of the terms for blood in Afrikaans and Northern Sotho. Deploying dual methodological approaches, the authors report that the body part terms for blood in the two languages were found to be extended mostly into the domains of life, emotions and inheritance. The conceptual metaphors underlying these extensions include LIFE AS BLOOD, EMOTIONS ARE BLOOD, AND INHERITANCE AS BLOOD.

Interestingly, Simó (2011) provides a similar cross-linguistic study of the metaphoric and metonymic conceptualizations of the terms for blood, but this time in two major European languages: English and Hungarian. Adopting a corpus-based approach, Simó shows that American English and Hungarian exhibit similarities and differences in the extension of the terms for blood. Based on the results, she suggests “the usage of mixed corpora, and imply a vital need to investigate the context of metaphorical expressions in order to bring to light the conceptualizations inherent in them”.

### **3. The conceptualizations of *jini* ‘blood’ in Hausa**

#### **3.1. *Jini* ‘blood’ as life/death**

The Hausa cultural model of linguistic conceptualization attributes the term blood to human life. The term *jini* which literally means ‘blood’ is used to understand and talk of life itself. This conceptualization is prominent in other cultures, such as Arabic, where life is understood and talked of in terms of human blood.

In the following expressions (1a – d) the term *jini* represents human life, where in (1a) the life (lit. blood) of an individual is said to be not permissible for another person, whereas in (1b), life (lit. blood) becomes permissible. These expressions are in relation to the religious injunctions that permit and/or forbid the killing of an individual.

Thus, in (1c) the blood (i.e., life) of an individual is said to be in another’s hands, if that person is assumed to have killed the said individual. It is on this basis that in (1d), one is



The figurative meaning of the term *jini* ‘blood’ is further extended into the domain of kinship and family relations. This metaphoric understanding of kinship in terms of human blood stems from the natural role of blood in human life formation. Thus, since human formation begins with blood, which is also known to be the major aide of life, people who are related by family ties are said to ‘share’ the same blood as seen in (2b), so that an individual who is related to another person is said to be his blood (i.e. relative) as in (2a).

2. (a) Jini            na            ne  
           blood        1SG.POSS    it’s  
           ‘it [s/he] is my relative’
- (b) Jini-n-mu                    ḍaya    da        su  
           blood-GEN-1PL.POSS    one    with    3sg.poss  
           ‘we are family/relatives’
- (c) Jini-n            su                    Malam Mudi    ne  
           blood-GEN    3PL.POSS        Mr.    Mudi    it’s  
           ‘it’s [they are] the family/relatives of Malam Mudi’
- (d) Duk        jinni-n-su                    babu    kamar-sa  
           all        blood-GEN-3PL.POSS    none    like-3SG  
           ‘he is the best among his family/relatives’

Therefore, it makes sense, given the understanding in (2b), that peoples’ relatives, whether distant or close, as far as they are of the same family lineage are said to be the ‘blood’ of the others’, as can be seen in (2c). Thus, a whole family or lineage is described as ‘blood’ as in (2d) where one is said to be the best among his ‘blood’ i.e. relatives/lineage.

### 3.3. *Jini* ‘blood’ as sacrifice

Beyond the bodily basis of conceptualizations discussed above, the term *jini* ‘blood’ is used in encoding the cultural act of sacrifice. The act of sacrifice is entrenched in most, if not all religions, and is enjoined and widely practiced in African traditional religions, as well as Islam, which has become the defector religion in Hausa society.

Sacrifice as a ritual takes various forms, the most prominent being the slaughter of a live animal to attain spiritual goals. This, in fact, is part of Islamic injunctions, as would be seen during the yearly Eid (i.e. Muslim religious celebrations) practiced around the world.

3. (a) A      zubar      da      jini      sadaka  
          to      spill      with      blood      sacrifice  
          ‘sacrifice blood’
- (b) Sadaka-r              jini      ake              yi  
          sacrifice-GEN      blood      3PL.CONT      do  
          ‘the sacrifice should be blood’
- (c) Sai              ku-n              zubar      da      jini-n              sadaka  
          until              3PL.GEN      spill      with      blood-GEN      sacrifice  
          ‘you have to give blood sacrifice’

This cultural practice allows for a model of cognitive conceptualization in which blood itself equates “sacrifice”, as in (3a), whereas it can be an object for sacrifice, as in (3b), which can be mandatory to attain the intended spiritual goal, as in (3c).

### 3.4. *Jini* ‘blood’ in the domain of emotions

The term *jini* ‘blood’ has various usages that connote various forms of emotions in Hausa. Both negative and positive emotions are understood and expressed in terms of human blood. For instance, the concept of hatred is expressed in terms of hating one’s or something’s “blood” as shown in (4a – b).

Whereas the one who hates people is described as hater of people’s blood, as in (4c), the one who is hated by others is described as someone who hates his “blood”, as can be seen in (4d). This shows that the term *jini* ‘blood’ is one of the body part terms used in expressing emotions in the Hausa language.

4. (a) Na        ki        jini-n-sa  
       1SG        hate        blood-GEN-3SG  
       ‘I hate him’
- (b) Na        ki        jini-n        wannan abun  
       1SG        hate        blood-GEN    this        thing  
       ‘I hate this thing’
- (c) Kin        jini-n        mutane        gare shi  
       hating    blood-GEN    people        at        3SG.M  
       ‘he hates people’
- (d) Mutane    su-n        ki        jini-n-sa  
       people     3PL.GEN    hate        blood-GEN-3SG.M  
       ‘people hate him’

Just like negative emotions, the term *jini* ‘blood’ is used in encoding the concept of love and like. For instance, the blood of individuals who happen to have emotional connection are said to have connected (lit. joined) as shown in (5a). In example (5b), love itself is described as connection of blood, which has no end since it is a connection in the flow of blood, as in (5c). The expression in (5d) suggests that those whose blood is connected, cannot but love one another.

5. (a) Jini-n-mu                    ya        haɗu  
       blood-GEN-3PL.POSS    2SG.M    meet  
       ‘we like each other’
- (b) Soyayya    gamo-n        jini        ne

love meet-GEN blood is  
'love is the matching of blood'

(c) Soyayya-r-mu ba ta da karshe don gamo ne na jinni  
love-GEN-1PL.POSS NEG 3SG.F with end because meet it for blood  
'our love is everlasting for it is made of our blood'

(d) In jini ya hadu dole su so juna  
if blood 3SG.M meet force 3PL love each other  
'they will be forced to love each other if their blood matches'

### 3.5. *Jini* 'blood' in the domain of character traits

Like emotions, character traits are abstract concepts that are expressed by body part term conceptualizations. The conceptualization of traits in terms of blood also involves metaphors of colour, in which 'white' and 'black' colours are used to describe the nature of a human blood, which in reality expresses a trait in that person. For instance, 'white blood' – never mind the physical fact that all blood is red – refers to the positive traits of likeability, charm and charisma. The exploitation of colour to describe a body organ, which in turn, is used in the conceptualization of linguistic concepts is a common phenomenon in Hausa. For instance, Batic and Baldi (2015) show that 'white' and 'black' colours regarding body part terms are extremely productive metaphors in the conceptualization of emotions in African languages. The same metaphors of colour apply to blood, in which 'white blood' and 'black blood' infer positive and negative traits, respectively.

In the expression in (6a) for instance, someone who is said to have 'white blood' is likeable, and loveable, a scenario instantiated in (6b) to talk of a likable girl. In (6c), an individual is described as having 'white blood', to express the extent to which that person is charismatic, loved and adored.

6. (a) Yana da fari-n jini ainun  
3SG.M.CONT. with white-GEN blood a lot  
'he is likeable'

(b) Yarinya ce mai fari-n jini  
girl 3SG.F.OBJ possess white-GEN blood  
'she is a loveable girl'

(c) Fari-n jini-n Buhari ya wuce tunani-n kowa  
white-GEN blood-GEN Buhari 3SG.M pass thinking-GEN anyone

‘Buhari’s popularity is beyond anyone’s imagination’

On the other hand, however, ‘black blood’ infers negative traits, especially lack of likeability, charisma and attraction. These traits are instantiated in expressions such as (7a – c) where an individual with ‘black blood’ is hateful, as in (7a), but not just to himself, but to the world, as in (7b), but that which can be corrected (read: treated) by being generous, as in (7c).

7. (a) Baki-n        jini        gare    shi  
      black-GEN    blood    at        3SG.M  
      ‘he is an unlikeable person’
- (b) Yana                da    baƙin    jini    a    duniya  
      3SG.M.COM. with black    blood    in    world  
      ‘he is hated in the world’
- (c) Magani-n        baƙi-n        jini        kyauta  
      medicine-gen    black-gen    blood        gift  
      ‘generosity is the remedy of hatred’

The term *jini* ‘blood’ is also extended in this domain to express the concepts of behaviour. At the first instance, the concept of wealth and money are conceptualized as human blood, whereas those who drink these resources are said to be drinking ‘blood’.

8. (a) Ya    sha        jini-n-sa  
      3SG    drink    blood-GEN-3SG.M.POSS  
      ‘he has extorted him’
- (b) Sha-n        jini        ya        kawo-su  
      drink-GEN    blood        3SG        bring-3PL  
      ‘they are here to extort/cheat [money]’
- (c) Yan                sanda    akwai    sha-n        jini-n        talaka  
      upspring    stick    have    drink-GEN    blood-GEN    masses  
      ‘the police are extorters of the masses’

This conceptualization is instantiated in the expressions in (8a – c) above, where blood drinkers are figuratively cheaters, as in (8a), those who deceive people in order to get access to their money, as in (8b), and corrupt public officials who collect monetary bribes from the public, as in (8c).

#### 4. Conclusion

This paper shows that the term *jini* ‘blood’ is a productive body part term in Hausa. Like other internal and external body part terms, *jini* ‘blood’ provides a source domain for the conceptualization and expression of various conceptual target domains. The results of this study are largely in tandem with the findings of previous studies on the term ‘blood’ in other languages of the world.

As can be seen from the data and discussions, the term *jini* ‘blood’ is exploited in various senses to express the concepts of death, and the act of killing or sparing a life via LIFE IS BLOOD metaphor. As reported by previous studies on embodiment in other languages, the Hausa *jini* ‘blood’ is deeply entrenched in the domain of kinship/family relations. The metonymy-based metaphor RELATION IS BLOOD provides the basis for various metaphoric expressions some of which have become almost dead metaphors, as their usage is no longer perceived to be metaphoric by day-to-day speakers of the Hausa language.

The cultural model of conceptualization influenced by religious practices provides the basis for the SACRIFICE IS THE BLOOD metaphor, based on which an act of sacrifice, kind of sacrifice, etc. are referred to as ‘blood’. Although most metaphors of emotions in Hausa are related to the heart, the term *jini* ‘blood’ is found to be extended into this domain, too. Finally, *jini* ‘blood’ is extended into the domain of character traits in which one’s demeanours are encoded and expressed through the perceived ‘colour’ of their blood.

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