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EXPLORING WEATHER IDIOMS IN BAMANANKAN

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Résumé

Le présent article s'intéresse aux locutions dérivées du temps en Bamanankan. L'objectif de cette étude est d'identifier les différentes locutions-temps en Bamanankan, leurs caractéristiques et comment elles sont comprises dans diverses situations d'usage de la langue. L'étude est orientée par la théorie systémique fonctionnelle proposée par Halliday (1973). Les données ont été collectées à travers l'observation participante. L'analyse qualitative a permis de classer les expressions selon les thématiques 'pluie', 'vent', et 'chaleur'. Les résultats révèlent que les phénomènes naturels tels que le vent, la foudre, et la température ont un impact considérable sur la production de certaines expressions spécifiques en Bamanankan. De plus, l'étude a démontré que certaines locutions étudiées sont exclusivement populaires parmi les jeunes alors que d'autres sont polysémiques et s'apparentent à des euphémismes.

Mot clés : Bamanankan, contexte social, expressions idiomatiques, locution-temps.

Abstract

This study investigated idioms derived from weather. Its aim was to find out the different weather idioms in Bamanankan, their characteristics, and how they are understood in various situations of language use within the framework of the systemic functional theory (Halliday 1976). Participant observation was utilized to collect data. The undertaken qualitative analysis permitted to tabulate data and organize them under the themes 'rain, wind, and heat'. The results revealed that natural phenomena such as the wind, the lightning, and temperature have a significant impact on the production of some specific expressions in Bamanankan. Moreover, the results showed that some idioms under study were exclusively popular among youngsters while others were polysemous and they looked like euphemisms.

Keywords: Bamanankan, idiomatic expression, social context, weather idiom.

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Introduction

Language users are sometimes confused when they come across certain word combinations. This is so because the meaning of such word groups –idioms - is difficult to grasp. Nonetheless, those speakers who succeed in understanding idioms easily are qualified as having reached a high level of fluency. Expressions such as *get along*, *look into*, *put up with* or *pay through the nose* are routinely used by the English language speakers. However, the meanings of these phrases cannot be interpreted literally; rather, they are understood in terms of the linguistic and cultural background of the person using them. These expressions belong to a specific linguistic category called idioms. In this regard, the current paper analyses another dimension of fixed expressions, particularly the idioms relating to the description of weather in Bamanankan. Idiomatic expressions are parts of our daily conversations in mentioning activities, attributes, or feelings. English phrases such as “**get wind of something**” and “**on cloud nine**” do not literally refer to wind or cloud; they translate “**overhear something about someone or something (often gossip)**” and “**very happy**” respectively. Similar

expressions are found in Bamanankan in which terms relating to natural phenomena are employed in word combinations to express different concepts. Thus, this study is designed to describe the use and meaning of idioms as they pertain to the wind or temperature. As a result, the study of weather related idioms in Bamanankan is of paramount significance in that it helps learners of Bamanankan as a second language to make sense of fixed expressions. Many researches have been carried out on idioms from different perspectives. Examples include Strassler (1982), Isserlis (2008), Liontas (2015b, and 2017). However, few, if not any, have focused on idioms derived from weather terminology in Bamanankan. Therefore, this investigation aims at exploring idiomatic expressions derived from terms relating to weather.

1. Theoretical framework

Several studies have recognized the importance of context for understanding language. The appreciation of the relationship between language and social context is necessary for effective and smooth communication. The study of language in

relation to contexts and socio-cultural setting enables a thorough interpretation of various linguistic units. The systematic functional theory, henceforth (SFT), propounded by Halliday (1973) is the theoretical stance of this study. In fact, the SFT focuses on the study of languages from the perspective of context (Glory et al., 2019). The systematic functional theory broadly accounts for the way language functions to convey meaning reflecting languages users' intent in a given context. That is why, Halliday's approach to language and context is adopted in this study to highlight the relationship between forms and functions. This theory also showcases the connectedness between the context of meaning and culture which are essential to the interpretation of meaning in a language. This research examines how the linguistic environment and culture work in concert in order to adjust the meaning of idiomatic expressions. Since the SFT relates language to contexts, it, accordingly, provides the framework for the understanding of the idiomatic expressions based on weather in Bamanankan.

The purpose of this study is to examine idioms derived from weather terminology in Bamanankan. In this regard, attention is mostly paid to the fact that the weather lexemes stand as the head element in the

idiomatic expressions. Also, idioms that are common to every language user will be explored in addition to their potential of being specifically popular among youngsters. Therefore, the following research questions are formulated:

- What are the idiomatic expressions related to weather in Bamanankan?
- What categories of people use them?

2. Definition of idioms

There is no unified definition of idioms because of their syntactic and semantic behavior. Some definitions of idioms highlight the unpredictability of their meaning as Lehrer (1974, p.184) suggests: "an idiom is a set of words whose meaning is not predicted from the parts". Similarly, Bolinger (1975) points to the grouping of words with a particular meaning by defining idioms as "groups of words with set meaning that cannot be calculated by adding up the separate meaning of the parts" (p.100). From a different perspective, some authorities define idioms on the basis of the ambiguity of their interpretation whereas others focus on distinguishing characteristics of fixed expressions. For example, Moon (1998, p.3) states that an idiom is "an ambiguous term, used in conflicting ways." In other words, this definition entails that an idiom has two main

meanings. First, an idiom is a particular manner of expressing something in language, music, art, and so on, which characterizes a person or group. Second, an idiom is a particular lexical collocation or phrasal lexeme, peculiar to a language. Also, according to Wright (2002), an idiom is an expression that has two features:

-it is fixed and is easily recognized by native speakers;

- it uses language in a non-literal, that is, in a metaphorical way. That is why Langlotz (2006, p. 27) opines that “the interpretation of the idiomatic phrase is dependent on the conceptual correspondences it holds to the literal meaning of movement and place of danger”.

3. The Meanings of Idioms

The meaning of an idiom can be both literal and idiomatic. The literal meaning is the sum of the meanings of the constituent elements. By contrast, the idiomatic meaning is the lexicalized extended meaning of the construction. According to Langlotz (2006, p.3), “Idiomatic construction can be described as complex symbols with specific formal, semantic, pragmatic and sociolinguistic characteristics.” The composite structure of an idiom is: phrases or semi-clauses, idiomatic

compounds (blueprint, raincoat), phrasal verbs (stand by, take over, come across) and proverbs (Birds of a feather flock together) also belong to the group of composite idiomatic constructions. As a special category of English vocabulary, idioms have several general features, the three most frequently mentioned ones being compositeness, institutionalization, non-compositionality (Fernando, 1996; Moon, 1998). By compositeness is meant that an idiom is commonly accepted as a multiword expression, whereas institutionalization refers to the process by which a string or formulation becomes recognized as a lexical item of the language (Bauer, 1983). The third feature, non-compositionality, is what makes idioms difficult for many learners of English. An idiom is characterized as a string of words whose semantic interpretation cannot be derived compositionally from its constituents. In other words, idioms are semantically opaque and cannot be understood by putting all the words in each of them together in the same way in which a non-idiomatic expression like write a letter or drink your coffee can be understood by applying normal grammatical rules (Chang, 2004a, as cited in Chenguang, 214).

4. Idiom and Collocation

An idiom is usually related to collocation. In the eyes of Jackson and Amvela (2000, p. 65), “idioms are a type of collocation which involves two or more words in context”. Collocation itself refers to a structural or syntagmatic relation. The meaning of relation here is a word contracts with other words occurred in the same text. Collocations are words which co-occur with each other naturally and which are perceived by language users, through custom and practice, as normal and acceptable strings of words. The distinction between collocation and idiomaticity lies in the “(stability of) collocation is a high degree of contextual restriction whereas idiomaticity is a strong restriction on the selection of a sub sense” as noted Weinreich (1969, p. 44) in Moon (1998, p.12). Furthermore, the study about collocation is called corpus linguistics. That is why Yule (2006, p.108) postulates: “the study of which words occur together and their frequency of co-occurrence has received a lot more attention in corpus linguistics.” Interestingly, Philip (2011, p.36) distinguishes the two concepts by arguing that “idioms are semi-pre-constructed phrases that constitute single choices, even though they might appear to be analyzable and that ‘collocations are short semi pre-constructed segments put side by side”.

Idioms are expressions that generally challenge language users when it comes to decode the meaning of fixed expressions. They do not comply with common sense interpretation, hence their non-compositionality. In this regard, Cacciari and Tabossi (1988) state:

An idiom is characterized as a string of words whose semantic interpretation cannot be derived compositionally from the interpretation of its parts. Idiomatic expressions defy the standard view of language comprehension according to which understanding a sentence entails at least recognizing the individual words in the sentence, retrieving their meanings from the mental lexicon, and combining them according to their grammatical relations (p.668).

In distinguishing idioms from collocations, Bruening (2019) relies on the opposition between literal, non-literal meaning, and substantiality. Her distinction is based on phrasal idioms and phrasal collocations. In substance, she holds that:

Phrasal idioms are typically identified as fixed expressions consisting of multiple morphological (or prosodic) words that, just when they occur together, have a nonliteral interpretation. For instance, kick the bucket has the non-literal meaning ‘die,’ and when used in this sense, does not involve any literal kicking or any actual buckets. In contrast, phrasal collocations like cost a fortune are interpreted literally (even if somewhat hyperbolically), and their component parts merely co-occur with a high degree of frequency and are recognized as conventionalized expressions by speakers of the language (p. 3).

5. Previous studies

Cacciari and Tabossi (1988) investigated the access of idiomatic expressions in three cross-modal priming experiments. First, experiment 1 was designed to ask 33 undergraduates to paraphrase 15 sentences containing idioms. The undertaken analysis showed that 95% of the sentences were accurately paraphrased. Second, experiment 2 revealed that when idioms are decontextualized, subjects interpret them literally. Finally, experiment 3 proved that when no cues are provided, some time is needed for the activation of the meaning of an idiomatic expression. From a historical perspective, Isserlis (2008) addresses his attention to the process by which the highly specialised language (the one of mariners) has influenced the wider English speaking discourse community. In particular, he examined the impact of the Britain's maritime history on the English language as spoken and written throughout the English speaking world. Following an assessment of the historical and social conditions that led to the prominence of maritime expressions in English, the study looks at twenty examples, dividing them into "transparent" and "opaque" categories as propounded by Moon (1998). Isserlis' study reveals that there exist distinctive differences of usage in the major English speaking counties of Britain,

America, Canada and Australia. The study eventually provides insights into the processes of change, as particular expressions develop new meanings or adapt to accommodate the requirements of the modern discourse community.

The claim that idioms are flexible is equally discussed in Chae (2015). In a paper presented at the 29th Pacific Asia Conference on Language, Information and Computation, she questions the popular beliefs and maintains that idioms are syntactically flexible, ranging from word-like idioms to those which are like almost regular phrases. Nevertheless, she opines that their meanings are not transparent, i.e. they are non-compositional. In her eyes, there are some phenomena which can only be handled under the assumption that the component parts of idioms have their own separate meanings even though she demonstrates that all the phenomena, focusing on the behavior of idiom-internal adjectives, can be accounted for effectively without assuming separate meanings of parts, which confirms the non-transparency of idioms.

In more recent years, new idioms have developed to cope with the new challenges and development imposed by language. With this in mind, Akanmu (2019) investigates issues expressed with idioms as well as the

strategy for using them for various modern alcoholic drinks in Yoruba land based on Mukarovsky's theory of Standard Language. This theory explains the deviant nature of the new Yoruba idioms as well as the differences between the language of everyday conversation and Literary Language. Akanmu collected data from different beer joints in Lagos State and Ogun State respectively. The stylistic analysis he undertook reveals that sex is the only issue that was expressed on all the alcoholic drinks and occurs in the context of 'eroticism', 'vulgarity', 'sexual style', and 'sexual positioning'. His study concludes that these idioms are the reflection of dynamism and modernity-constrained stylistic choices among the Yoruba.

The reviewed literature highlights the difficulties in understanding idioms alongside their flexibility. The literature reveals also that the strategic use of idioms is relevant to new constraints of language use. However, weather idioms are yet to be explored in Bamanankan. Apart from Coulibaly (2021) no specific study has been carried out on the use of idioms in Bamanankan. Therefore, this investigation focuses on idioms as they are derived from natural phenomena among Bamanankan speakers in Mali.

6. Methods

The methodological approach adopted in this research was guided by two important points raised in Halliday's SFT that language is totally dependent on the context in which it is used and that meaning in language is interpretable in terms of function and culture. Data were collected from participant observation undertaken in a mechanic garage of Bamako. Participant observation always takes place in community settings, in locations believed to have some relevance to the research questions. This method of data collection is distinctive because the researcher approaches participants in their own environment rather than having the participants come to the researcher (Coulibaly, 2013). The people observed included not only the head mechanic but also seven (7) mechanic's apprentices (youngsters who come to learn mechanics as they go along), six (6) car owners or drivers who came for the maintenance of their vehicles. Three (3) individuals from neighboring families got accustomed to the place and whenever their time table permitted it, they came to the garage to have tea with the garage clients. However, it should be noted that not all these people met at the same time. Some would leave while others would come. Those who remained in the garage discussed back and forth and the language of communication was

mainly Bamanankan even though some participants code-switched French and Bamanankan.

The people, object of the observation, have all the characteristics of a “grin” though the apprentices formed a separate group; the researcher could observe how they discussed. The apprentices constituted the first strata of the participants and they were mostly primary school dropouts aged between 10 and 20 years. They were in charge of making tea for the head mechanic and clients who formed the second strata. The members of this group were aged between 28 and 57; they were of different professions: businessmen, civil servants, and taxi drivers.

In Mali, a “grin” is a group of people (particularly men of the same age group) that gathers to discuss back and forth around tea. The members of the targeted “grin” were all

native speakers of Bamanankan. As an insider of the “grin”, the researcher asked the group members to provide as many expressions as they could containing terms referring to natural phenomena such the cloud, lightening, the rain, and the wind.

7. Analysis of Data and Discussion

The qualitative analysis of data permitted to classify the idiomatic expressions into three broad themes as follows: rain-derived idioms, wind-derived idioms, and heat-derived idioms.

7.1 Rain-Derived Expressions

The table below displays seven (7) rain-related utterances. Of particular interest are the last two expressions that were repeatedly used by the mechanic’s apprentices the researcher observed. The literal and figurative meanings of idioms are provided.

Table 1: literal and figurative meanings of rain-derived idioms

Idiomatic expressions	Literal meaning	Figurative meaning
Sanji koro wosi	perspiring under rain	Unfruitful, unappreciated act
Sangosi	Rain beating	Raincoat
A ka teli I ko kabamine	He is quick as sky light	he is very quick
Ka a gosi i ko sankise	beat as raindrop does	To give a good beating to someone
Sanjiko ye here ye	there is happiness after rain	Every cloud has a silver lining
Ne be jigi i kan iko sanji	I descend on you like raindrop	I’ll beat him thoroughly
San finna	the sky has gone dark	When the subject of gossip shows up

Sanji, which literally translates “the water from the sky”, is a rich source for the production of idiomatic expressions in Bamanankan. When it rains, everything normally gets wet, so even if someone works hard and perspires under rain, the efforts he makes are hard to observe because of the raindrops falling on him. The sentence below exemplifies this:

(1) Madu b’a koro - w dɛmɛ, nka sanjikoro wosi tɛ don

Madu aux pro brother-s help but sky water under sweat neg know

Madu helps his brothers but his efforts are not recognized.

The lightning speed evidences the promptitude with which an activity can be performed. In situations where something was done at once, this expression is used. The sentence below is an illustration:

(2) Eh, a ban-na? Aw teliyara i ko kaba-mine

Eh, pr. finish past? You quickness+ perf like sky light

Eh, is it finished? You have been very quick.

Raindrops are believed to come from a long distance over our heads. Once outside, people cannot prevent raindrops from falling heavily on bodies. In that context, the waterfall that follows is figuratively viewed as providing a bodily punishment. In this light, the sentences below are illustrations.

(3) N bɛ jigi a kan I ko **san +ji**

I aux descend pr3sing on like sky water

I’ll give him a thorough correction.

(4) Ka a gosi iko **san+kisɛ**

Part. pr.3sing beat like rain+drop

To give a good beating to someone.

Sentences (3) and (4) have similar meanings. When used among youngsters, they entail an ironic sense because young people strongly rely on their muscular force. In the same way, **san finna** is very popular among young Bamanankan speakers in contexts where they gossip. The object of their conversation is a person they criticize or simply report matters on that person they cannot say at her presence out of fear or respect. Example (5) evidences this point.

(5) A ye wili, san finna

You aux get up sky go dark

Get up, he is coming.

The rain or sky is metaphorically used to refer to the person who is object of the conversation. What is important here is the person's absence, be it a supervisor at a work place or simply any other individual who is not present at the moment of discussion. The claim that some of the idioms under study are only used by young people can be gathered from Casas and Campoy (1995, p. 53-54) that

Table 2: wind-derived idioms

Idiomatic expressions	Literal meaning	Figurative meaning
ka fɪɛ bila	To wind let	To fart
Ka fɪɛ ta	To wind take	Something has gone empty
ka fɪɛ kɛ i yeleso ye	May horse be your mount	safe journey
fɪɛ kɛɲɛjiri	a tree resisting to wind	of someone who is financially very strong to perform charity activities
fɪɛ bɛ a nun kɔɔ	Wind is under his nose	Very arrogant person
fɪɛ bɛ a sen kɔɔ	Wind is under his feet	Very fast running person
A bɛ fɪɛ taafan don	he knows where the wind goes/blows	the direction of the wind/ the end result

(6) kan' a to barada ka **fɪɛ** ta,
 Neg pr.sing let teapot aux wind take
 dɔ bɛ kɔfɛ.
 someone be behind

Make sure the teapot does not go empty, someone will come later.

groups of users or occasions of use, the situations in which they are normally used being variable factors”.

7.2 Wind-derived expressions

Table 2 below shows seven (7) instances of idiomatic expressions out of which three (3) expressions, namely, “ka fɪɛ bila”, “Ka fɪɛ ta” and “fɪɛkɛɲɛjiri” were used by the group of young people. The remaining idioms were employed by the adults (the head mechanic, clients, and neighbours).

Sentence (6) is popular among youngsters while they are having tea as described earlier in section 6. This idiomatic expression is used in situations where the interlocutors are mechanics and they refer to the difficulties drivers face when a diesel engine happens to be short of petrol. In such situations, the petrol

pump is supposed to contain air and, accordingly, it will be very difficult to get the engine start. This use of idioms relies on Casas and Campoy (1995, p.54) that “idioms are good indicators of the speaker’s attitude towards the person or events denoted”. This point is exemplified in the sentence below:

(7) a bɛ I n’a fɔ do ye fiɲɛ bila

It aux pron. say someone aux wind let out

It seems someone has farted.

7.3 Heat-derived idioms

Six (6) idiomatic expressions are displayed in table 3 below. They pertain to temperature (the cold, and the heat). The last three (3) expressions in the table are near in meaning even though the context of use and the speaker’s intent may bring nuances.

Table 3: Heat-derived idioms

Idiomatic expressions	Literal meaning	Figurative meaning
A sumaya n kɔ	Dampen (cool) it for me	Do not hurry me
I sumalen do bi	You are cold today	you are calm today
A ka so ka kalan bi	His house is hot today	There is problem in his house today.
N tun ka kalan	I was hot	I was in a hurry
U y’a bilen a kɔ	They heated to red behind him	They cornered/rushed him
K’a gan a kɔ	Get things warm behind him	Spur on/drive someone

In the sentences U y’a bilen a kɔ and K’a gan a kɔ in table 3, the terms ‘**bilen**’ and ‘**gan**’ are near in meaning. Similarly, in A ka so ka kalan bi (There is problem in his house today). And N tun ka kalan (I was in a hurry), the word ‘**kalan**’ (hot) is repeated, but its meaning varies depending on the context of use. Thus, in

(8)

a. baara -yɔrɔ ka **kalan** bi dɛ!

Work place part. hot today part.

There is a real problem at the workplace today.

b. I **kalan**-ya

you hot-post posit.

Be quick.

c. a **kalayalen** do an bolo bi.

it hot post posit. Aux we hand today

The word 'kalan' is polysemous because it translates trouble (8a, hurriedness (8b), and having much to do (8c) respectively. Any native speaker of Bamanankan can use and understand them provided the context is clear.

Conclusion

This study provided an insight into the situational use of idiomatic expressions pertaining to weather in Bamanankan. The link between natural phenomena and idioms is the evidence according to which the

Bamanan people accommodate their language to how they perceive environment. Culture is expressed through language. From this observation, it is obvious that weather idioms are the reflection of real-life experiences among Bamanankan speakers. The research revealed that some idioms are prone to be used by youngsters only and that others are polysemous. In short, the interpretation of the heat, rain, and wind-derived idioms relates to how language users perceive these phenomena.

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