SHONA METAPHORS CREATED DURING THE ZIMBABWE CRISIS: A COGNITIVE GRAMMAR ANALYSIS

Maxwell Kadenge
School of Literature and Language Studies, University of the Witwatersrand
Private Bag X3, WITS 2050, Johannesburg, South Africa
maxwell.kadenge@wits.ac.za

and

George Mavunga
Academic Development Centre, University of Johannesburg
P.O Box 17011, Doornfontein 2028, South Africa
gmavunga@uj.ac.za

ABSTRACT

Shona is a Southern Bantu language that is spoken by about 75% of Zimbabweans. This article discusses the nature of metaphors that were created by Shona speakers in speaking of the Zimbabwean political and socio-economic crisis. The data for this study were collected from August to December of 2008 and their analysis derives from Cognitive Grammar theory, which considers metaphor as a conceptual and linguistic phenomenon that involves a mapping relation between the source domain and the target domain of language. We adopt the cognitive view of metaphor as one of the basic human strategies in conceptualizing our environment using concrete phenomena such as *moto* 'fire' and *kudhakwa* 'to drink' to represent abstract concepts such as difficulties and confusion. This type of metaphorical extension is worth examining as it plays an important role in the development of the language's lexicon.

Keywords: Shona, metaphor, cognitive grammar, source domain, target domain, Zimbabwe crisis

RÉSUMÉ

Le shona est une langue bantoue du sud qui est parlé par à peu près 75% des habitants de Zimbabwé. Cet article discute des métaphores qui ont été créées par les locuteurs du shona dans leurs références à la crise socio-économique et politique de Zimbabwé. Les données linguistiques proviennent des enquêtes faites entre août et décembre 2008 et sont analysées dans le cadre de la théorie de la Grammaire cognitive, qui traite la métaphore comme un processus de créer des liens 'cartographiques' entre les domaines de source et de cible linguistiques. La métaphore est un stratège de base intellectuel qui sert à représenter le monde en employant des notions concrètes comme *moto* 'feu' et *kudhakwa* 'intoxication', et *kurova* 'être battu' pour représenter des conceptes abstraits comme les difficultés et la confusion. Cette sorte d'extension métaphorique mérite l'analyse car elle joue un rôle important dans le développement du lexique.

Mots-clés : le shona, métaphore, grammaire cognitive, domaine de source, domaine ciblé, crise au Zimbabwe

BDD-A24835 © 2010 Atlantic Provinces Linguistic Association
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.239 (2026-11-04 13:48:46 UTC)

1. Background of the study

This study considers the creation of metaphors during the crisis in Zimbabwe in 2008 by speakers of Shona, a Southern Bantu language that is spoken by about 75% of Zimbabweans (Hachipola 1998:1). Metaphors are pervasive in everyday language and the way people conceptualize reality is metaphorical (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). Cognitive Grammar sees metaphors as a basic human strategy for dealing with our environment in that we utilize existing physical concepts to represent abstract concepts, such as pain and confusion. The use of metaphors in everyday life is so ordinary that "we use them unconsciously and automatically, with so little effort that we hardly notice. They are omnipresent: metaphors fuse our thoughts, no matter what we are thinking about" (Lakoff and Turner 1989: xi). The widespread usage of metaphor during the crisis throughout the social ladder of Zimbabweans was not surprising because traditional and modern Shona society encourages stylized communication that is distilled to obviate possible open confrontation when talking about sensitive issues such as politics, HIV/AIDS, religion and conflicts in the family. A competent Shona speaker is fully aware of speaking norms that prohibit verbal reference to certain words and events, whose direct verbalization could unleash forces of instability or stir grief. Before we analyze the Shona metaphors, we will briefly describe the crisis in Zimbabwe during the time of this study.

Zimbabwe has been facing a socio-cultural, political and economic crisis since the 'Black Friday' of October 1997 when the Zimbabwe dollar crashed to an all-time low against major currencies. The crisis originated in several problems: the payment of unbudgeted gratuities to the veterans of the armed liberation struggle in 1997, participation in the war of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) beginning in 1997, the unplanned land reform programme, and the breakdown in the rule of law as a result of the attempts by the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) party to hold on to power. It has seen Zimbabweans going through suffering unprecedented in the history of the country.

BDD-A24835 © 2010 Atlantic Provinces Linguistic Association
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.239 (2026-11-04 13:48:46 UTC)

Outstanding among the symptoms of this crisis is hyperinflation, which reached a record 231 million percent in January 2009 (www.smh.com.au/news). This resulted from the abysmal failure of such measures as the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe's (RBZ) knocking zeroes off the value of the Zimbabwe dollar and the price controls enacted through the National Incomes and Pricing Control Commission (NIPC). Hence, Sachs (2008) states that Zimbabwe's hyperinflation is among the world's five worst, along with Germany in the 1920s, Greece and Hungary in the 1940s and Yugoslavia in 1993.

The crisis led to a severe contraction of the economy. Some companies operated at as low as 10% by January 2009 (www.zimbabwesituation.com), leading to shortages of basic commodities such as sugar, cooking oil and the staple maize meal. This caused widespread hunger, and a large percentage of the population, especially in the rural areas, survived on food handouts from donor agencies. A high unemployment rate also resulted, estimated at 94% by March 2009 (www.zimbabwesituation.com). Neither was the public sector spared by the crisis. The Zimbabwean government increasingly failed to provide services that it used to afford before the crisis, leading to the collapse of services such as education, health and the prison system. A crippling brain drain, strike actions by civil servants, and the non-availability of drugs, equipment and food in hospitals also ensued. Most state schools, colleges, universities, hospitals and clinics closed for long periods of time.

The Zimbabwe crisis was also political. The emergence of a strong opposition led by Morgan Richard Tsvangirai's Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) saw the then-ruling ZANU (PF) party devising all forms of measures to hold on to power. This led to an increase in government repression and a severe assault on people's freedoms perpetrated through state security institutions such as the police, the army, and the Central Intelligence Organization (CIO), which many perceived as having become highly politicized in favor of the then-ruling party. Government repression was also seen in the enactment of draconian legislation such as the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) and the Public Order and Security Act (POSA).

The crisis plunged the people into a "Darwinian struggle to get by" (www.nytimes.com). Many were reduced to peddling and paupership, hawking and hustling on the black-market, eating just one meal or two a day, their hollowed cheeks a

BDD-A24835 © 2010 Atlantic Provinces Linguistic Association
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.239 (2026-11-04 13:48:46 UTC)

testament to their hunger. Such levels of poverty naturally led to hopelessness in the people, on the one hand, but on the other, also to the emergence of a multiplicity of ways of earning a living, most of them illicit. Terms such as 'meltdown', 'free-fall', 'comatose' and even 'genocide' have been used to refer to various aspects of the deteriorating situation in the country.

Together with changes in the activities people engaged in order to earn a living also emerged Shona terms to describe their everyday experiences and activities. Examples of such expressions are *kubhena mari* 'burning money', *kumhanyisa* 'to cause someone or something to run or move fast' and *kurova pasi petsoka* 'beating the underside of one's feet' came to metaphorically mean 'electronic money transfer', 'selling something fast' and 'exorbitant prices', respectively, during the crisis. There seemed to be several reasons why people created indirect or metaphorical language, one of which was to safely talk about their everyday activities, many of them illegal.

This paper demonstrates that the Shona language changed in response to societal change, as language by its nature is a reflection of society and it is also a window through which we can have access to people's everyday experiences. Hence, the traditional submission of Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf that the "words of a language act as a mirror to the life of the community using the language…the vocabulary more or less faithfully reflects the culture whose purpose it serves…" (Alo 2004:78) is validated.

This article builds onto existing studies on everyday Shona metaphors such as Mawadza (2000), Mberi (2003), Chikanja (2006) and Chapanga (2004). While these other studies focus on phenomena such as body-part metaphors (Mberi 2003) and war metaphors used in soccer commentaries (Chapanga 2004) this article examines those that were created to name various aspects of the Zimbabwe crisis. We present first the traditional and modern views of metaphor followed by a characterization of the data collection and analysis methods that were adopted in this study. We then present and discuss our findings. The following section briefly presents the traditional view of the concept metaphor and its implications for the "contemporary theory of metaphor" (Lakoff 1993:202) that is adopted in this investigation. This is done in order to show that the traditional understanding of metaphors differs considerably from the contemporary thought of the subject.

BDD-A24835 © 2010 Atlantic Provinces Linguistic Association
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.239 (2026-11-04 13:48:46 UTC)

2. Traditional and Cognitive Views of Metaphor

The study of metaphors has a long history but it seems that work on this subject has been carried out mainly with specific reference to English and that the findings have been claimed to be applicable to all languages (Chakanja 2006:1). Little has been done on African metaphorization and, to our knowledge, there are few studies that have specifically focused on Shona metaphors (see also Mberi 2003; Chapanga 2004).

The traditional view sees metaphor as a linguistic phenomenon which falls largely in the realm of "poetic" or "figurative" language and it relegates this phenomenon to the level of an "ornamental device used in rhetorical style" (Ungerer and Schmid 1996:114). Aristotle claimed that a metaphor has two discursive locations, the place of origin and the place to which it has been transferred; further, meaning is easily extracted because all metaphors can be stated as similes and all similes as metaphors (Mberi 2003:74). However, it is not always the case that all metaphors start from literal language. Black (1962) develops an alternative view, the interactionist theory. He refers to the Aristotelian view as a comparison theory in which there are pre-existing similarities between compared terms. According to Black, two expressions, the literal and the metaphorical one, are equivalent and that the metaphor can then be translated by means of an exhaustive paraphrase. For instance, when we say that 'man is a wolf' we do not simply project the pre-existing characteristics of a 'wolf' onto 'man' but rather newly involve man in a system of commonplaces: the metaphor 'man is wolf' influences both our idea of man and wolf. However, metaphor theory has undergone significant changes in recent years.

Since the development of the cognitive or conceptual view of metaphor, the traditional view of metaphor has been challenged (see Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Langacker 1987; Hein 1997; Svorou 1994). Modern scholars argue that metaphors are not simply stylistic devices but a critical component of meaning generation in human communication. Lakoff and Johnson (1980), Lakoff (1993) and Lakoff and Turner (1989) develop the cognitive view of metaphor, which sees metaphor as a mode of

BDD-A24835 © 2010 Atlantic Provinces Linguistic Association
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.239 (2026-11-04 13:48:46 UTC)

conceptualizing experience. This study sampled those analytical tenets of this theory that directly informed our data analysis.

Taylor (2002) notes that the study of metaphorical expressions has played an important role in the development of Cognitive Linguistics in general, and cognitive grammar (CG) theory in particular. According to Lakoff (1987), Lakoff and Johnson (1980), Langacker (1987), Taylor (2002, 2003), Ungerer and Schmid (1996), Mberi (2003), Khumalo (2007) and Chabata (2007), metaphor is not just a way of speaking but is intrinsic to abstract thought. Metaphoric processes are defined as "understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (Lackoff and Johnson 1980:50). "Metaphors allow us to understand one domain experience in terms of another. To serve this function, there must be some grounding, some concepts that are not completely understood via metaphor to serve as source domains" (Lakoff and Turner 1989:153). A typical metaphor uses a more concrete source to describe and understand a more abstract target. CG considers language to be intrinsically or inherently symbolic, i.e., linguistic expressions stand for conceptualizations (see Langacker 1987, 2000; Taylor 2002; Chabata 2007; Mberi 2003; Khumalo 2007). Also, it is believed that language provides speakers with a set of resources for representing thought. Language is a set of resources that are available to language users for the symbolization of thought and for the communication of these symbolizations (Taylor 2002:3). Therefore, what we experience everyday and what we do is much a matter of metaphor. Human communication is based on the conceptual system we use in thinking and acting and language communicates this system.

Most cognitivist scholars of metaphor refer to the Lakovian or 'domain mapping theory', supported by Johnson and Turner (see also Lakoff and Johnson 1980) wherein metaphor is a conceptual phenomenon that involves a mapping relation between two domains, the source domain (SD) and the target domain (TD). A TD is structured and understood with reference to another, more basic domain, the SD. The SD is conceived as concrete concepts that can be experienced or perceived directly, while the TD is more abstract, i.e., it concerns subjective experience. Thus, Lakoff notes,

> "…the locus of metaphor is not in language at all, but in the way we conceptualize one mental domain in terms of another. The

BDD-A24835 © 2010 Atlantic Provinces Linguistic Association
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.239 (2026-11-04 13:48:46 UTC)

> general theory of metaphor is given by characterizing such cross domain mappings. And in the process, everyday abstract concepts like time, states, change, causation and purpose also turn out to be metaphorical" (1993:203).

Using this approach, we can conclude that SDs include concrete phenomena like *zvidhinha* 'bricks', *moto* 'fire' and *murungu* 'white person' and physical actions like *kudhakwa* 'drinking', *kudya* 'eating' and *kurova* 'beating', concepts that people experience directly. TDs include abstract feelings such as *kurwadza* 'pain' and *kurasika* 'confusion'. In other words, we often rely on concrete phenomena (SD) to conceptualize and understand abstract phenomena (TD); our conceptualization of abstract categories is "grounded in our experience with the concrete objects and events" (Ungerer and Schimid 1996:121). Therefore, metaphor functions at the conceptual level as a cognitive instrument that we utilize in conceiving our world.

Additionally, Langacker (1987) considers metaphor a matter of semantic extension, which involves a domain shift. The shift typically proceeds from more concrete to more abstract domains. More often than not, the expressions carry literal and non-literal or metaphorical senses. The main assumption is that literal senses are more basic and more concrete when compared to those that are non-literal or figurative. Thus, metaphorical senses, which are generally believed to be a result of semantic extension from literal ones, should be understood with reference to the literal senses. We shall, therefore, examine the conceptual metaphors of the Shona language that were created during the Zimbabwean crisis but first, we outline the data gathering approaches that were employed in this investigation.

3. Data Gathering Procedures

The data for this study were collected from August to December of 2008 and largely drawn from naturally occurring casual speech of Shona speakers that we observed and interviewed in a number of places that we visited in and around Harare, the capital city of Zimbabwe. We collected data in areas such as homes, bars, nightclubs, churches and

BDD-A24835 © 2010 Atlantic Provinces Linguistic Association
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.239 (2026-11-04 13:48:46 UTC)

political rallies. We visited areas such as the Road Port, an international bus terminus at the corner of 4th Street and Robert Mugabe Street, where money changers targeted local people and foreigners who would be travelling into and out of Zimbabwe. Other areas that we visited in Harare were the Ximex Shopping Mall along Angwa Street, the Copacabana bus terminus and the area opposite the Amalgamated Motor Corporation (AMC) showroom at the corner of Julius Nyerere and Kwame Nkrumah Streets where dealing in foreign currency had become rampant. In these areas, we observed and sometimes participated in the processes of exchanging foreign currency.

We noted the various metaphorical terms and expressions that the dealers used to lure customers while avoiding the possibility of alerting the police and other security agents, since it was illegal to be in possession of foreign currency during this period, especially if one were not a licensed foreign currency dealer. The majority of the money changers were men. In some parts of Harare, such as along Third Street, just behind the Meikles Hotel, and along Fourth Street, there was, however, a higher concentration of young and middle-aged women than men. We recorded some of the data for this study at bus termini and in public transport as we were travelling to and from work. This research targeted the language that was being used by the youth, the middle-aged and the old across the gender divide regardless of social status in order to come up with a complete and representative picture of our research target.

More systematic observations were made when the researchers spent time with friends during weekends at various public places. During these periods we took notes regarding contexts as well as transcriptions. Lengthy observations were carried out in public drinking places that the researchers patronized during their free time. Mostly, the conversations that we observed and took part in were between people acquainted with each other, though exceptions included the carrying out of some of the illicit business deals described above. Most of the words that were identified for this study were recorded in pocket books for closer analysis and comparison. Special interest was accorded to the terms that informants used when talking about politics, aspects of the economy such as prices, inflation, unavailability of goods and services as well as poverty, corruption and moral decadency.

BDD-A24835 © 2010 Atlantic Provinces Linguistic Association
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.239 (2026-11-04 13:48:46 UTC)

We supplemented the participant observation method with face to face unstructured interviews, which were aimed at finding out more about the speakers' intuitions about the data that we were collecting. In the interviews, we sought to verify the original or literal meanings of the words and their expanded or metaphorical meanings. The verification process involved native Shona speakers randomly selected from among neighbours, friends, colleagues and students at the University of Zimbabwe but without regard to age, social status or level of education. We did not limit our sampling to a particular demographic variable in order to produce data that is representative.

Since we are native speakers of Shona, we also used our "conscious introspective judgments" (McEnery and Wilson 1996:6) to interpret the original or literal meanings and the new or extended meanings of Shona terms that were analyzed, a typically Chomskyan approach to linguistics. According to Chomsky, introspective judgments are the best tool for measuring a speaker's competence, which is a better guide to the nature and function of a given language. This study used both empiricist (observation and unstructured interviews) and rationalist (intuition and introspection) methods to collect and interpret data. The following section presents the findings of this research.

4. Analysis of Data

The terms and expressions that the Shona speaking people devised in the crisis can be categorized as: 1) expressions referring to challenges that people were facing as a result of the crisis, 2) terms referring to local and foreign currency, 3) terms referring to corruption and its perpetrators, 4) words referring to cheap items and illicit deals and 5) expressions referring to the coping mechanisms that Zimbabweans devised in order to survive the crisis. We present the literal meaning, and the newly acquired metaphorical meanings. The origins and changes that the words underwent are discussed in each category.

4. 1. Challenges Faced during the Crisis

BDD-A24835 © 2010 Atlantic Provinces Linguistic Association
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.239 (2026-11-04 13:48:46 UTC)

There are a number of metaphorical terms and expressions that refer to hopelessness and confusion that characterized the Zimbabwe crisis. The term *zvakadhakwa* 'things are drunk' and its variant *zvidhekwe* describe the confusion that people found themselves in as a result of their failure to make ends meet financially, terms also used to describe a failure to succeed in a particular deal or transaction. For example, in response to the question, '*wabudirira here?* 'have you succeeded?' one who would have failed would simply respond, *zvakadhakwa/zvidhekwe* 'drunkenness' for 'I have failed'.

One can detect despondency in the metaphor of the drunken person with whom one cannot hold any meaningful conversation or expect to contribute meaningfully to any intellectually challenging discussion, let alone do any productive manual work. The same can be said of the term *pakona* 'being in a corner' and the expression *kukanga waya* 'frying or roasting a piece of wire', for purposes of eating it, i.e., an exercise in futility. Similarly, *kuwona moto* 'seeing fire' and *kuwona hutsi* 'seeing smoke, i.e. having smoke in the eyes' and by extension, 'being caught in a burning building', all have the connotations of one being in an unsustainably difficult, hopeless and confusing situation.

The expression *kurova/kukwatura pasi petsoka* 'beating someone on the underside of their feet' and by extension 'to sell something at an exorbitant price, to profiteer' had origins in the torture mechanisms which are alleged to have been used by the police and particularly by the CIO on the political opponents of the then-ruling party during the crisis. The word *ngoda* 'diamond' became a metaphor for anything valuable, such as scarce fuel and food commodities, after the discovery of diamonds in the Chiadzwa area of Marange in the Manicaland province of Zimbabwe. Chiadzwa became an area of contestation during the crisis because some senior government officials wanted to monopolize the diamonds while thousands of ordinary Zimbabweans wanted to benefit from the same diamond fields. It is believed that hundreds of ordinary man and women died as the diamond fields fell into lawlessness and violence. The word *ngoda*, therefore, replaced *goridhe* 'gold' which was commonly used in the past to refer to anything that the Shona people considered priceless. This demonstrated the dynamic nature of language, in this case, in direct response to an economic variable.

Zimbabweans nicknamed their country *Ijipita* 'Egypt' as a way of expressing their frustration with the oppressive and repressive conditions that they were surviving in

BDD-A24835 © 2010 Atlantic Provinces Linguistic Association
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.239 (2026-11-04 13:48:46 UTC)

during the crisis. The terrible situation in Zimbabwe was likened to what was obtaining in Egypt during the time when Israelites were being ill-treated by Herod's oppressive government. Interestingly, people referred to Mr Morgan Richard Tsvangirai as 'Moses' suggesting that they considered him as the only political leader who had the capacity to lead them out of the Zimbabwean crisis, just as the Biblical Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt.

The slang term that was used to refer to the situation is *mahwani,* 'one' a remark meaning 'it is difficult.' In response to the hyper-inflationary environment in the country '*mahwani thousand* 'one thousand' emerged. Perhaps the feeling was that *mahwani* would not adequately capture how difficult things were in the country. According to some of our participants, *mahwani thousand* was a veiled mockery of the government for failing to deal with the problems afflicting the country particularly hyperinflation.

4. 2. Local and Foreign Currency

During the crisis local cash was in short supply as evidenced by the incessant long queues at the banks. As a result, one needed to be very innovative and well-connected to lay one's hands on meaningful amounts of the local currency. Also, exchanging foreign currency on the parallel market became a highly lucrative business though very risky. Terms and expressions, therefore, emerged to refer to issues related to handling of currency.

For example, *chidhinha* 'a brick', *chibhegi* 'a stout bag', and *chihomwe* 'a huge pocket/bag' assumed the meaning of 'lots of money'. Hyper-inflation caused people to carry large quantities of money (though of little value), sometimes in bags. These expressions are associated with the Shona class 7 noun prefix {chi-} which is generally used to designate "a number of physical types which are short and stout or large and stout" (Fortune 1980:57), which helps in capturing the shapes (resembling a brick) of the amounts of money that the people were getting from the banks for everyday transactions such as buying tomatoes and vegetables or for transport fares.

Some of the expressions were used to refer to someone who was rich. People were often nicknamed *VaChibhegi/VaChihomwe* 'Mr. /Mrs. Chibhegi (bag) /Mr. /Mrs.

BDD-A24835 © 2010 Atlantic Provinces Linguistic Association
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.239 (2026-11-04 13:48:46 UTC)

Chihomwe (pocket)'. Nicknames thus became a barometer of one's status. The Shona {va-} prefix that is associated with these words is an honorific plural which is normally used with class 1a nouns and is also indicative of someone who is in possession of something (Fortune 1980), here a bag or a pocket.

At the peak of the crisis, in a single cash withdrawal from the bank, one could get such a thick bundle of notes as would literally cast a shadow if put on a table. This is how expressions such as *mari ine mumvuri* 'money that has a shadow', *mari yakareba* 'money that is long' and *mari refu* 'tall money' were coined. Money was said to be long, tall and to have a shadow because it was in very large quantities. The term *Zimkwacha* was used as a pejorative reference to the worthless Zimbabwean dollar and a reference to the Zambian crisis in the mid to late 80's when the Zambian currency, the Kwacha, also suffered severe inflationary pressures. Since the Zimbabwean crisis by far surpassed the Zambian one, the term *Zimkwacha,* shows that sometimes linguistic terms can result from parallelism which does not need to have one-for-one equivalents.

The expression *kupisa/kubhena mari* 'burning money' emerged at the height of the abuse of the electronic money transfers facility through the Real Time Gross Settlement (RTGS) system in 2008 as a result of which even some unemployed people ended up with previously unheard-of amounts of money such as quadrillions and sextillions of Zimbabwean dollars in their bank accounts. Such amounts of money would be transferred into their bank accounts allegedly by dealers inside and outside of banking institutions who were prepared to part with such large amounts of the Zimbabwean dollars in exchange for small amounts of US dollars, which they would use to hedge themselves against inflation. The term *kubhena*, which is borrowed from the English 'burn', originated from the fact that since the transfers were done electronically, they were very fast when compared to cheque transfers which would take days and, in some cases, even weeks to clear. The speed of RTGS transfers, therefore, created mental pictures of a process that takes place very fast because it is being facilitated by the heat or power of electrical energy. Another variation of the expression was *kugocha mari* 'roasting money' and the money would be referred to as *mari yegochigochi* 'barbecued money', a reflection of the speed at which the money was transferred into accounts. The crisis, therefore, gave birth to a culture whereby people wanted very quick and

BDD-A24835 © 2010 Atlantic Provinces Linguistic Association
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.239 (2026-11-04 13:48:46 UTC)

astronomical gains to whatever investments they might have made and this was also captured in the language.

There are some slang terms that were created by the Shona speaking people during the height of the crisis in order to refer to specific amounts of money, such as *thaza* 'a thousand dollars', *mita* 'a million dollars', *bhidza* 'a billion dollars' and *tridza* 'a trillion dollars'. All these terms were borrowed from English to refer to Zimbabwean dollars respectively. These examples are either fully or partially rephonologized in order to make them conform to constraints imposed by the Shona permissible syllable structure which is typically of the consonant-vowel (CV) shape. Truncated terms such as *thaza* 'thousand' and *tridza* 'trillion' show tolerance of dental fricatives and consonantal clusters (complex onsets) respectively in Shona loanword phonology.

At the height of the crisis there were attempts, though half-hearted, by the police to stop the practice of foreign currency exchange on the parallel market. To avoid being detected and arrested by the police, some of whom operated in plain clothes, the money changers therefore had to come up with their own street lingo to refer to the various foreign currencies. The rand was, therefore, referred to as *marara,* a borrowing from the Afrikaans term for South African currency ('rand'), and the US dollars were variously referred to as *magirinhi* 'greens'*, huni nyoro* 'firewood that is not dry' and *mashizha* 'leaves, which are usually green'. The term *marara* 'litter' for the 'rand' can be said to be a form of what Dirven (1985:88) refers to as "sound metaphor": in this case, the [r] sound in the word *marara* is utilized to onomatopoeically refer to the South African currency. The term *magirinhi* has its origins in the green colour of the US dollar. Some of our respondents from the University of Zimbabwe said it was a result of borrowing from the word 'greenback', another term for the US dollar in Economics circles. Other variant expressions that were used to denote the US dollars are *huni nyoro* and *shizha.* These terms were also used to refer to the US dollar notes because the money is green in colour and resembles the green barks of 'freshly cut firewood' and the green colour of leaves.

Terms such as *pini* 'pin' and *waya* 'wire' were used to denote 100 Zimbabwe dollar, 100 rand and 100 pula notes, and the terms had been in use long before the crisis and continued to be used during the crisis. Although Mawadza (2000) classifies these words as slang, we wish to categorize them as metaphors that are conceptually related to

BDD-A24835 © 2010 Atlantic Provinces Linguistic Association
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.239 (2026-11-04 13:48:46 UTC)

the thinness of a piece of wire or a pin. This structural property is metaphorically transferred to the shape of a Zimbabwean 100 dollar or South African 100 rand note.

4.3 Corruption and its Perpetrators

In order to survive during the crisis, quite a large number of people across the social spectrum engaged in corrupt activities. The expressions *musika mutema* 'black market' was used for the 'parallel market' and *huwori* 'decay' for 'corruption'. The expression *musika mutema,* in addition to being metaphorical is also a direct translation from the English expression 'black market', with its negative connotations. Some of the terms in this category which were a result of borrowing were *dhiri* 'deal' and *bhigi dhara* 'big man'. In the context of the crisis, the term *dhiri* was mainly used pejoratively to refer to an illicit transaction. The word *mudhira* 'dealer' was thus used to refer to someone who engaged in shady deals. In this case, the Shona class 1 prefix {mu-} is used in order to capture the fact that the word is referring to a human being. Purely slang terms used to describe corrupt activities included *kutonyora*, *kudhiza* and *kudusa* all of which literally mean 'giving a bribe', for example to a police officer in exchange for being let off the hook after being accused of a traffic offense or exchanging foreign currency on the parallel market, or to an officer of the Vehicle Inspection Department (VID) in order to corruptly acquire a driver's license.

Words such as *murungu* or *muvheti* 'white person' were both used to refer to someone rich despite the fact that they might be black. The extension of the meanings of these terms was a result of the historical fact that during the colonial era it was the whites who were rich and powerful in Zimbabwe. Furthermore, white people were, for the most part, the employers in the colonial period, hence without *varungu* (employers) there would be no business. The term *mhene* 'duiker' was a metaphorical expression used to also refer to someone with a lot of money; the connection between a duiker and someone with a lot of money came from the poise, elegance and flamboyance of the duiker which could also be seen in most of the people who acquired sudden wealth as a result of being able to take advantage of the crisis. Furthermore, the expression *kuzvuva dumbu* 'dragging one's stomach' emerged to refer to the body structure of most rich people who

BDD-A24835 © 2010 Atlantic Provinces Linguistic Association
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.239 (2026-11-04 13:48:46 UTC)

had potbellies as a result of good living. The expression could often be used to refer to anyone who was perceived to be rich even if they did not have a potbelly. This explains why Geertz (1972) cited in Mawadza (2000:95) concludes that a number of words may be made to carry, in addition to their normal linguistic meaning, what might be referred to as status meaning.

4.4 Cheap Items and Success in Illicit Deals

Terms and expressions that emerged during the Zimbabwean crisis show that not all circumstances were characterized by gloom and doom. There would be occasions when people would get cheap items and also succeed in business deals. The words *kuhwinha* 'winning' and *kunhonga* 'picking up from the ground [usually something for free, e.g., ripe fruits that will have fallen from a tree or money lost by someone]' both have the extended meaning of getting something at a very cheap price or winning in a business deal. Words such as *kudyira* 'eating as a result of selling something' or *kunwira* 'drinking as a result of selling something' have connotations of one having benefited unfairly from the sale of an item since he or she can afford to spare some of the money for a drink or to buy themselves something from the sale instead of keeping all the money for essentials such as rent or school fees. The word-initial {ku} in these words is the Shona class 15 infinitive prefix which is found in constructions that have radical segments and they are nouns which also function as verbal constructions because they denote action.

Another term for very cheap goods and services was *bhakosi*. This was a borrowing from the acronym for BACOSSI (Basic Commodities Supply Side Intervention), an intervention strategy which was introduced by the RBZ in 2008 to make basic commodities available to vulnerable groups at very cheap prices. The term became very popular within a very short space of time and anything selling cheaply in the streets was said to be selling at *bhakosi* price. This also coincided with the RTGS period when people would sell commodities such as milk, ice cream, biscuits and tooth paste in the streets of Harare at ridiculously low prices in order to raise large sums of local currency (Zimbabwean dollars) which they would use to buy US dollars from the parallel market

BDD-A24835 © 2010 Atlantic Provinces Linguistic Association
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.239 (2026-11-04 13:48:46 UTC)

which they would then go and 'burn' (transfer electronically) to get quadrillions and sextillions of Zimbabwe dollars in return.

4.5 Coping Mechanisms

During the crisis, people devised quite a number of coping strategies for which they coined new terms, such as *kukiyakiya* 'locking repeatedly', *kujoinisa* 'joining separate items together', *kubatanidza* 'joining separate items together' and *kujingirisa* 'joining separate items together' all of which have the same extended meaning of 'employing unorthodox means to raise money for survival.' A word such as *kumhanyamhanya* 'running around/running up and down', has a connotation of there being no time to rest if one wanted to survive during the crisis, as relying on only one means of survival was risky. The term *kukiyakiya* is particularly interesting in that even politicians used it. Soon after the formation of the Zimbabwean Government of National Unity (GNU) when Honorable Tendai Biti, the incumbent Minister of Finance was asked how his party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) had raised the foreign currency for civil servants' salaries, his response was *takakiyakiya* 'we used unorthodox means to raise the money' (www.newzimbabwe.com), an indication that raising money through unorthodox means had become acceptable in Zimbabwe even among lawmakers. It is also noteworthy that words such as *kumhanyamhanya* 'running around' and *kukiyakiya* 'locking repeatedly' are reduplicated forms of the verbs *mhanya* 'run' and *kiya* 'lock'. Reduplication is an interesting word formation process in the context of this investigation because it indicates that "a heightened quality or intensity is conveyed" (Fortune 1980:90).

Kukorokoza 'gold panning', a lucrative venture despite the risks associated with it, came to mean 'anything, e.g., selling vegetables in the streets, that one would do to raise money for survival'. Another metaphorical term is *kuvhara* 'closing, e.g., a door' whose metaphorical meaning is 'cheating someone in a business deal'. This was so common a practice during the crisis that one always had to be alert in whatever they were doing otherwise one would lose out in a very big way. Another metaphor was *kudya negumbo* 'eating by means of a leg' whose extended meaning is 'getting money from

BDD-A24835 © 2010 Atlantic Provinces Linguistic Association
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.239 (2026-11-04 13:48:46 UTC)

prostitution'. Similarly, *kudya nekuverenga mbariro* 'eating from counting the rafters that make up the roof of a house' also meant 'getting money from prostitution'. These expressions are an indication of the not so virtuous means that some people in the Zimbabwean society came up with in order to survive the crisis. All these words are verbal and belong to the Shona noun class 15, which is indicated by the word-initial prefix {ku-} and which denotes action.

5. Discussion

Using Cognitive Grammar, we can say that concrete phenomena such as bricks, bags, colours, burning and roasting were the Source Domains [SDs] from which the Target Domains [TDs], 'money', was conceptualized. In *chidhina* 'brick' or 'large bundle of bank notes', the conceptual metaphor is MONEY–IS–A–BRICK. Similarly, in the expression *kugocha mari* 'roasting money' the SD is a vivid physical process used to convey the TD of the process of electronically transferring money from one account to another, which happens at a much faster pace than other methods. Shona speakers used concrete knowledge of bricks and fire to figuratively describe life during the crisis.

However, there were also some slang terms that were created by the Shona speaking people during the height of the crisis. According to Louw and Du Plooy-Celliers (2003:79), "slang is a form of language used by a particular, limited group of people, and may not be generally understood." Mawadza (2000) notes that slang is vivid, forceful and (more) expressive than standard usage. It often avoids the sentimentality and formality which older words often assume.

It is well known that borrowing occurs because languages and dialects normally do not exist in a vacuum. A major characteristic of borrowing is the adoption and adaptation of terms through integrating them more firmly into the linguistic structure of the receiving language (Chimhundu 1983). The most noticeable nativization process involves phonology. The immediate coining of such terms as *bhidza* 'billion' and *tridza* 'trillion' in response to new Zimbabwe dollar denominations that would have been introduced by the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ) conforms with the observation by Mawadza (2000:94) that slang is an ever changing set of colloquial words and phrases

BDD-A24835 © 2010 Atlantic Provinces Linguistic Association
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.239 (2026-11-04 13:48:46 UTC)

that speakers use to establish group identity and solidarity. As the reality related to currency denominations changed, so also did the slang used by the Shona speakers to refer to this reality. For example, each time the RBZ knocked off zeroes from the currency and reduced the highest denomination to a hundred dollars, the terms *bhidza* and *tridza* would disappear from the slang referring to the Zimbabwean dollar only to reappear with the rise in inflation when the central bank printed and introduced higher denominations in response to inflation.

In the case of naming corruption, the SDs are concrete phenomena such as *kuwora* 'decaying' and *kuzvuva dumbu* 'dragging one's stomach' while the TD is corruption. Therefore, in the expression *kuzvuva dumbu* 'dragging one's stomach' the conceptual metaphor is 'DRAGGING ONE'S STOMACH-IS-BEING RICH', another vivid image. A similar logic applies to the naming of a rich person as *murungu* 'white person', where the conceptual metaphor is WHITE PERSON-IS-BEING RICH: the SD is the white person who is usually rich while the TD is the black people who acquired riches during the crisis. Therefore, there is a clear movement from the SD to the TD.

When the RTGS system was suspended by the RBZ, the practice of selling commodities at *bhakosi* (very cheap) prices also died a natural death and with it came a severe reduction in the use of the term *bhakosi* in the streets. This is another indication of language change in response to economic realities. Therefore, the SD for cheap items was the Shona people's existing knowledge of actions such as *kunhonga* 'picking up' and *bhakosi* 'BACOSS', through which people benefit without any significant costs. It is this knowledge of concrete events that helped them conceptualize cheap things as if they are for free. All these observations show us that metaphors are not just words but are part of our conceptual system and affect how we think and what we care about almost every waking moment (Lakoff and Johnson 1999).

According to Kittay (1987:3), "metaphors are conceptual and provide members of a linguistic community with structure for perceiving and understanding the world. The cognitive force of metaphor comes not from providing new information about the world, rather from a (re)conceptualisation of information that is already available to us." Hence, Mawadza (2000:97) says, "metaphor names one thing by something in another domain, calling forth a likeness or analogy between things that are fundamentally different."

BDD-A24835 © 2010 Atlantic Provinces Linguistic Association
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.239 (2026-11-04 13:48:46 UTC)

6. Conclusion

This study set out to explore the nature of metaphorical terms and expressions that were created by Shona speaking people during the Zimbabwean crisis. We analyzed the metaphors using analytical tenets that are provided in the CG theory. This contemporary view shows that these metaphorical expressions are shifts from one domain (SD) to another (TD). The major conclusion that we make in this study is that we use metaphorical expressions that refer to our environment to show the cognitive view of language and we use existing cognitive models in the process of mapping from one cognitive domain to another. This study illustrates the change that the Shona language is undergoing, changing as the situation in Zimbabwe is changing. We conclude that language reflects the everyday experiences and realities of a people.

The nature of words that have been analyzed in this study shows the experiences that the people of Zimbabwe went through as a result of the ongoing multidimensional crisis in their country. This is in conformity with Sweetser's observation that "there is a pervasive metaphorical structuring of our mental world in terms of our physical world" (1990:145). Metaphors aid communication by expanding the lexicon of the language. We, therefore, recommend a similar analysis of metaphorical terms and expressions that also emerged during the crisis in Zimbabwe in other local languages such as Ndebele, Nambya and Kalanga, among others.

REFERENCES

Alo, M. A. 2004. Context and Language Variation: The EL2 Context. In *Language and Discourse in Society*, ed. L. Oyeleye. Ibadan: Hope Publications, p. 73-82.

Black, M. 1962. Metaphor. In *Models and Methods*, ed. M. Black. Ithaca, New York: Routledge.

Chabata, E. 2007. The Nambya Verb with Special Emphasis on the Causative. *Unpublished PhD thesis.* University of Oslo: Department of Linguistics and Scandinavian Languages.

BDD-A24835 © 2010 Atlantic Provinces Linguistic Association
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.239 (2026-11-04 13:48:46 UTC)

Chakanja, I. 2006. Conceptual Metaphors in English and Shona: A Cross-linguistic and Cross-cultural Study. *Unpublished PhD thesis*. South Africa: University of South Africa.

Chapanga, E. 2004. An Analysis of the War Metaphors Used in Spoken Commentaries of the 2004 Edition of the Premier Soccer League (PSL) Matches in Zimbabwe. *Zambezia*, xxxi (i/ii):62–79.

Chimhundu, H. 1983. Adoption and Adaptation in Shona. *Unpublished D.Phil thesis*. Harare: University of Zimbabwe.

Dirven, R. 1985. Metaphor as a Basic Means of Extending the Lexicon. In *The Ubiquity of Metaphor: Metaphor in Language and Thought*, ed. R. Dirven and W. Paprott. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamin Publishing House.

Eubanks, P. 1999. Written Communication. *Sage Publications* 16(2).

Fortune, G. 1980. *Shona Grammatical Constructions*. Harare: Mercury Press.

Geertz, C. 1972. Linguistic Etiquette. In *Sociolinguistics,* ed. J. Pride and P. Holmes. USA: Penguin Books.

Hachipola, J. 1998. *A Survey of the Minority Languages of Zimbabwe*. Harare: University of Zimbabwe Publications.

Hein, B. 1997. *Cognitive Foundations of Grammar.* New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Khumalo, L. 2007. An Analysis of Ndebele Passive Construction. *Unpublished PhD thesis*. University of Oslo: Department of Linguistics and Scandinavian Languages.

Kittay, E. 1987. *Metaphor: Its Cognitive Force and Linguistic Structure*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Lakoff, G. 1987. *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

----------. 1993. The Contemporary Theory of Metaphor. In *More than a cool reason: A field guide to poetic metaphor,* ed. *G.* Lakoff, G. and M. Turner. Chicago and London: University of Chicago University Press.

Lakoff, G. and M. Johnson. 1980. *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

BDD-A24835 © 2010 Atlantic Provinces Linguistic Association
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.239 (2026-11-04 13:48:46 UTC)

----------. 1999. *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought*. New York: Basic Books.

Lakoff, G. and M. Turner. 1989. *More than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Langacker, R. 1987. *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar: Theoretical Prerequisites*. Vol. 1. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

----------. 2000. *Grammar and Conceptualization*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Louw, M. and F. Du Plooy-Cilliers. 2003. *Let's Talk about Interpersonal Communication: A South African Perspective.* Johannesburg: Heinemann.

Mawadza, A. 2000. Harare Shona Slang: A Linguistic Study. *Zambezia* 27(1):93-101.

Mberi, E. 2003. Metaphors in Shona: A Cognitive Approach. *Zambezia,* xxx (i):72-88.

McEnery, T. and A. Wilson. 1996. *Corpus Linguistics: An Introduction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Sachs, J. 2008. Life in Zimbabwe: Waiting for Useless Money. In *The New York Times: Africa.* Columbia: University of Columbia.

Svorou, S. 1994. *The Grammar of Space*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Sweetser, E. 1990. *From Etymology to Pragmatics: Metaphorical and Cultural Aspects of Semantic Structure*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Taylor, J. 2002. *Cognitive Grammar.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

---------- 2003. *Linguistic Categorization*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ungerer, F. and H. Shmid. 1996. *An Introduction to Cognitive Linguistics*. London: Longman.

Internet Sources

www.newzimbabwe.com/15/01/2009

www.nytimes.com/02/10/2008

www.smh.com.au/news/23/03/2009

www.zimbabwesituation.com/02/02/2008

BDD-A24835 © 2010 Atlantic Provinces Linguistic Association
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.239 (2026-11-04 13:48:46 UTC)

BDD-A24835 © 2010 Atlantic Provinces Linguistic Association
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.239 (2026-11-04 13:48:46 UTC)