



"From Frames to Models": Interpreting EkeGusii Semantics through Fillmore, Frame semantics and Lakoff's Cognitive Theories"

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Abstract

This study offers a critical application of Charles J. Fillmore's Frame Semantics and George Lakoff's Idealized Cognitive Models (ICMs) to EkeGusii, a Bantu language spoken in southwestern Kenya, with the aim of expanding the analytical reach of cognitive linguistics into African linguistic ecologies. Frame Semantics posits that word meanings are comprehensible only in relation to background conceptual structures, or frames, that represent culturally familiar experiences such as commerce, kinship, illness, and ritual. Lakoff's ICM theory complements this by arguing that such frames are rooted in idealized, schematic representations of how speakers culturally and experientially model the world.

While these theories have been extensively applied in the analysis of Indo-European languages particularly English their application to African languages remains underexplored. This study addresses that gap by investigating how EkeGusii lexical items, idiomatic expressions, and culturally salient constructions evoke distinct cognitive frames and ICMs that organize meaning through lived experience. Examples include kinship terminology (*makomoke*, paternal aunt), agrarian verbs (*koburuga*, to weed), and euphemistic health expressions (*oborwaire obotari bw'abanto*, 'a disease not for people'), all of which reflect deeply entrenched moral, social, and cosmological models of the world.

Using qualitative linguistic data, the analysis reveals that EkeGusii meaning-making is not merely referential but experiential and relational, embedding concepts like social hierarchy, moral judgment, and environmental interaction within culturally resonant frames. The ICMs activated in these contexts (for example, moral causality, spiritual agency, social contamination, and restorative balance) demonstrate how cognition is shaped by local cosmologies and normative expectations.

The findings extend Fillmore's and Lakoff's insights beyond Western-centric linguistic paradigms and affirm the utility of frame-based semantics for African language analysis. In doing so, the paper contributes to the decolonization of linguistic theory by advocating for the inclusion of African epistemologies and indigenous knowledge systems in semantic modeling. The study concludes with a reflection on the methodological implications of integrating Frame Semantics and ICMs in African linguistics, particularly for the purposes of lexicography, language documentation, and culturally grounded language teaching.

Key words: Frame Semantics, Cognitive Semantics, Idealized Cognitive Models (ICMs) Conceptual Frames, Embodied Cognition, Prototype Theory, Experiential Realism, Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), Schema Theory

1. Introduction

The meaning of language extends beyond dictionary definitions; it draws upon culturally shared experiences and cognitive structures. Frame Semantics, developed by Charles Fillmore in the late 1970s, provides a framework for understanding how words evoke conceptual frames schematic representations of stereotyped situations. While much of the research in Frame Semantics has focused on English (Fillmore, 1982; 1985; Petruck, 1996), this study investigates how the theory can illuminate meaning construction in the EkeGusii language, analysed in frame semantics and Idealized Cognitive Model (ICM) as in (1)below,

(1)*Ekendabu nekiya*

(“*Being early is fine*” or “*Earliness is good*”) English equivalent (the early bird catches the worm)

1.1 Frame Semantics Analysis:

This expression activates a Temporal-Action Evaluation Frame, which culturally evaluates the relationship between the timing of actions and their consequences. It expresses a culturally sanctioned attitude toward timeliness, preparedness, and initiative.

Frame Elements:

- i) Agent (implied): The person acting early
- ii) Temporal element: *Ekendabu* ("being early")
- iii) Value judgment: *Nekiya* ("is good") an evaluative predicate implying approval
- iv) Implied action: Any socially or economically important task (for example, attending ceremonies, preparing farms, making decisions)

1.2 Idealized Cognitive Model (ICM) Analysis:

This expression reflects a deeply agrarian ICM, in which timing is crucial to success whether in farming (e.g., planting with the rains), trade, or social activities. In the Gusii worldview, being early correlates with:

- i) Productivity and abundance (for example, early planting yields better harvests)
- ii) Social respectability (for example, arriving early for events is a sign of discipline and honor)
- iii) Moral order: Promptness is moralized as a cultural virtue.

1.3 Cognitive Domains Activated:

- i) Agriculture: Early tilling or planting is linked to food security.
- ii) Social norms: Elders emphasize timeliness as a marker of responsibility and adulthood.
- iii) Education and modernity: In contemporary Gusii society, *ekendabu* is often used to encourage academic diligence and prompt action in professional settings.

- (1) Above operates not merely as advice but as a culturally grounded cognitive schema. The frame-based meaning emerges from the interaction of temporal precision (*ekendabu*) and positive evaluation (*nekiya*), which, when analyzed with Fillmore’s frame semantics, reveals that such expressions encapsulate cultural values, not just lexical meaning.

The meaning behind *ekendabu nekiya* portrays life as a race against time, a model that maps across domains: from crop cycles to rites of passage to schooling. Its frequent usage reflects an embodied understanding of urgency, making it a prime example of how language enacts cultural cognition.

1.4 Framing in Semantics, and Idealized Cognitive Models (ICMs: Definitions)

According to Charles J. Fillmore, who introduced the concept of Frame Semantics in the late 1970s, a semantic frame is:

"A system of concepts structured in terms of a particular perspective or experience, which provides the background knowledge necessary to understand the meaning of a word or expression."

More specifically, Fillmore (1976, 1982) defined a semantic frame as:

"Any coherent structure of related concepts that underlies the meaning of a word and allows speakers to understand and interpret it within a specific context."

As an agglutinative and morphologically rich Bantu language, EkeGusii offers fertile ground for exploring how frames manifest in verb morphology, noun class systems, and idiomatic constructions. Given the cultural specificity of many EkeGusii expressions, applying Frame Semantics enables a more nuanced semantic analysis than traditional structural or truth-conditional approaches.

According to Charles J. Fillmore, framing in semantics refers to the idea that the meaning of a word or expression is understood in relation to a larger structured background of knowledge or experience called a frame. A frame is a cognitive structure that organizes related concepts, roles, and scenarios needed to interpret the meaning of linguistic expressions.

In Fillmore's words (late 1970s), a semantic frame is:

"a schematic representation of a stereotyped situation, involving various participants, props, and other conceptual roles that must be understood to grasp the meaning of words associated with that frame."

Thus, framing involves activating or evoking this background knowledge when a word is used, allowing the listener or reader to access the implicit information necessary to interpret meaning fully. For example, the meaning of the word "sell" cannot be understood without the frame of a commercial transaction, which includes a seller, buyer, goods, and money.

Framing in semantics is the process by which words evoke structured cognitive scenarios (frames), and meaning arises from this activation of relevant background knowledge, rather than from isolated word definitions alone.

1.5 Idealized Cognitive Models (ICMs)

According to George Lakoff, Idealized Cognitive Models (ICMs) are mental structures that represent our organized knowledge and experiences of the world in a simplified, schematic way. ICMs are culturally shaped, idealized understandings that people use to make sense of concepts, events, and categories.

In Lakoff's own words (1987):

"ICMs are schematic, idealized representations of our experience that provide the conceptual structure underlying our understanding of various domains."

ICMs therefore,

- i) are idealized because they simplify and generalize real-world complexity.
- ii) help humans interpret meaning and categorize experience.
- ii) are culture-specific and influence how language and thought are shaped.
- iii) work as mental templates or frameworks people use to organize knowledge and interpret new information.

For example, the concept of “mother” is structured by an ICM involving a female parent who nurtures, cares, and raises a child this cognitive model guides how language about motherhood is understood. In sum, ICMs are foundational cognitive schemas that frame how people understand and communicate about their experiences and the world around them.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Frame Semantics: Foundational Works

Frame Semantics arose from Charles J. Fillmore’s critical engagement with transformational-generative grammar, particularly its inadequacy in accounting for the relationship between linguistic form and conceptual meaning. Dissatisfied with models that treated semantics as peripheral to syntax, Fillmore (1976, 1982) introduced Frame Semantics as a cognitively grounded theory of meaning that foregrounds the experiential and encyclopedic knowledge evoked by lexical items. Central to this theory is the notion that the interpretation of a word or expression presupposes access to a semantic frame a structured mental representation of a prototypical situation, event, or action.

For instance, the comprehension of the verb buy inherently activates a commercial transaction frame, which includes core frame elements such as the buyer, seller, goods, price, and means of exchange. Such frames are not only linguistic abstractions but also cognitive schemas derived from recurring human experiences, thereby bridging the gap between language and world knowledge.

Fillmore’s collaboration with B.T.S. Atkins (1992) further advanced the practical utility of Frame Semantics, particularly within lexicographic and computational contexts. Their work underscored the inadequacy of dictionary definitions that isolate words from their usage scenarios, advocating instead for meaning representations anchored in culturally and socially situated frames. This theoretical and applied synergy culminated in the development of the FrameNet project, a large-scale lexical database that systematically catalogs English vocabulary in terms of frame-evoking words and their associated semantic roles.

Frame Semantics thus offers a paradigm shift from componential or truth-conditional semantics toward a model that recognizes meaning as dynamic, context-sensitive, and grounded in shared human experiences. It provides a powerful analytical lens through which both linguistic structures and cultural conceptualizations can be interpreted and understood.

2.2 Contemporary Developments

The foundational insights of Frame Semantics have undergone significant expansion in recent decades, with increasing attention to cross-linguistic applications and the adaptation of frame-based models to diverse linguistic ecologies. Scholars such as Petruck (1996) and Boas (2005, 2009) have extended the theory beyond its original application to English, emphasizing the necessity of accounting for variation in how different languages conceptualize experience. Boas (2005) introduced the concept of frame variation, arguing that while many frames are structurally similar across languages, the lexical realization of these frames often varies due to cultural, grammatical, and semantic differences. In his later work, Boas (2009) proposed the development of language-specific frames, especially for non-Indo-European languages, cautioning against the assumption that frame structures derived from English are universally applicable. This intervention was particularly significant for the emerging field of computational lexicography and for projects such as multilingual FrameNet initiatives (e.g., German FrameNet, Spanish FrameNet), which aim to map native lexical items to culturally resonant frames rather than imposing English-centric schemas (Subirats & Petruck, 2003). Although cognitive linguistics has made inroads into the study of African languages (Evans & Green, 2006; Heine & Kuteva, 2002), the application of Frame Semantics to Bantu and other African linguistic systems remains notably limited. A few recent contributions have attempted to bridge this gap. For instance, Andrason and Visser (2015) explore cognitive grammar in isiXhosa, while Mberia (2014) touches on conceptual metaphors in Kikuyu. However, systematic frame-based analysis of African semantic structures, particularly in less-resourced languages such as EkeGusii, is still underdeveloped. This gap underscores the importance of pursuing locally grounded cognitive-semantic studies that consider cultural models, embodiment, and linguistic diversity. As Evans (2011) and Koller (2004) note, meaning is deeply context-dependent, and cross-cultural semantic models must reflect this contextual sensitivity. African languages, with their rich systems of

kinship, spirituality, social hierarchy, and agrarian life, present an especially fertile ground for frame-theoretic research that captures culturally specific semantic frames and Idealized Cognitive Models (ICMs), as introduced by Lakoff (1987). While Frame Semantics has achieved substantial theoretical and applied development in Euro-American contexts, its adaptation to African linguistic environments remains an urgent and promising frontier for both linguistics and cognitive science.

2.3 EkeGusii Linguistics and Semantic Studies

EkeGusii, a Bantu language spoken predominantly in southwestern Kenya, has attracted considerable linguistic attention in phonology, morphosyntax, and sociolinguistics. Early phonological analyses by Bosire (1993) identified tonal and segmental patterns that mark lexical and grammatical distinctions. Cammenga (2002) provided a comprehensive morphosyntactic grammar of EkeGusii, focusing on noun class morphology and verb structure, while Ogechi (2005) examined code-switching and language contact phenomena in urban Gusii communities, highlighting how language is shaped by socioeconomic mobility and bilingualism.

However, semantic analysis of EkeGusii particularly through a cognitive or experiential lens—remains notably underdeveloped. The few studies that do exist tend to approach meaning from metaphorical or ethnolinguistic perspectives. For instance, Nyakoe (2014) analyzes the metaphorical structure of EkeGusii proverbs and idioms, demonstrating how speakers draw from agrarian life, kinship systems, and traditional values to encode moral and ethical knowledge. Similarly, Ongarora and Okoth (2010) explore idiomatic expressions and conclude that their meanings are highly dependent on sociocultural context, often inaccessible through literal or structural interpretation alone.

In a broader view of African linguistics, Heine, Claudi, and Hünemeyer (1991) propose that many African languages, including Bantu varieties, employ grammaticalization paths that reflect experiential conceptualizations. Githiora (2002) and Simango (2006) argue that Bantu semantic systems are deeply intertwined with embodied experience and socio-cultural schemas though these insights have yet to be systematically tied to frame-based semantics. Bierwisch (2001) and Dirven (2005) call for more research into the cognitive dimensions of meaning in African languages, noting that theories like Frame Semantics and Idealized Cognitive Models (ICMs) have transformative potential in uncovering how African speakers structure knowledge and interaction.

While the aforementioned studies underscore the cultural and experiential aspects of meaning-making, they fall short of articulating a unifying cognitive model capable of linking lexical semantics to broader knowledge systems. Frame Semantics, as developed by Fillmore (1982, 1985) and extended by Petruck (1996) and Boas (2005, 2009), offers precisely such a model by positing that words evoke structured mental representations or frames based on recurrent cultural scenarios.

This study fills a crucial gap by applying Frame Semantics to EkeGusii, thereby illuminating how lexical items related to illness, kinship, ritual practices, labor, and social status evoke culturally grounded conceptual structures. These frames not only help speakers interpret language within context but also encode value systems, moral judgments, and ontological worldviews. In doing so, the study affirms Evans' (2011) argument that semantic theory must attend to the local cognitive ecologies of individual languages, especially underrepresented ones.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Frame semantics Fillmore (1976) (1982)

The analysis is grounded in Fillmore's Frame Semantics, which views word meanings as profiles within a broader conceptual frame. Frames are mental representations that structure our understanding of experiences, including participants (semantic roles), processes, and contextual elements.

Key Elements in Fillmore's Definition:

1. **Experience-Based:** Frames are based on everyday experiences and shared cultural knowledge (for example., buying, traveling, teaching).

2. Relational: Words evoke frames that include a network of roles or participants (for example, a “commercial transaction” frame involves a buyer, seller, goods, and money).
3. Contextual: A word’s meaning can only be fully understood when seen in the context of its frame.
4. Cognitive Structures: Semantic frames are mental models used to organize knowledge about typical situations or events.

Also relevant is Lakoff’s (1987) theory of Idealized Cognitive Models (ICMs), which aligns with frame-based thinking. The study employs these models to analyze how EkeGusii speakers conceptualize routine activities (e.g., farming, kinship, illness) through language.

3.2 Application of Idealized Cognitive Models (ICMs)

George Lakoff’s (1987) theory of Idealized Cognitive Models (ICMs) provides an essential complement to Fillmore’s Frame Semantics. While frames are typically linguistic and situational knowledge structures, ICMs reflect structured mental representations that individuals use to interpret the world. These models are “idealized” in the sense that they represent culturally conventional understandings, even if they do not reflect empirical or scientific reality. In this study, ICMs are applied to analyze how EkeGusii speakers conceptualize everyday domains like farming, kinship, and illness, shedding light on culturally specific ways of encoding meaning in language.

Discussions:

4.1 Contextualizing Meaning through Frame Semantics and Idealized Cognitive Models (ICMs)

This section interprets the findings through the lens of Frame Semantics and Idealized Cognitive Models (ICMs), emphasizing the interplay between language, culture, and cognition in the EkeGusii linguistic system. Drawing on Fillmore’s (1982) foundational premise that meaning arises within structured experiential frames, the analysis illustrates how EkeGusii lexical and idiomatic expressions are deeply embedded in culturally situated knowledge. The discussion foregrounds how frame-based approaches offer a more nuanced understanding of meaning construction, particularly in underrepresented languages such as EkeGusii, where semantic interpretation is inseparable from social values, rituals, and worldviews. By situating language use within culturally resonant frames, this section underscores the theoretical and practical relevance of frame semantics for African linguistics and cross-cultural semantics more broadly.

4.2 Kinship as an ICM of Social Hierarchy and Obligation

Kinship expressions in EkeGusii are deeply embedded in a culturally structured cognitive system, reflecting not only biological ties but also complex social hierarchies, obligations, and communal ethics. Frame Semantics, as proposed by Fillmore (1982, 1985), provides a lens through which these terms are understood not in isolation but as evoking entire scenes or schemas of interaction. At the same time, Lakoff’s (1987) theory of Idealized Cognitive Models (ICMs) allows for the interpretation of these expressions as part of culturally shared mental constructs that inform social behavior, moral expectations, and identity.

Cultural-Specific ICMs (for example, in EkeGusii)

In the EkeGusii kinship system:

- i) Lineage (ebisaku) and clan (enyomba) define social standing.
- ii) Polygynous households create complex kinship webs.
- iii) Kin terms like “*bagisangio*” (age-mates, often used for cousins) encode both kin and age-grade obligations.
- iv) Kinship is extended to non-blood relations who perform familial functions (e.g., fictive kin).

Moral Obligation ICM

- i) Kinship is not only defined by biology but by moral and ritual obligation.
- ii) The model includes expectations such as:
- iii) Care for elderly kin
- iv) Bride wealth exchanges
- v) Naming children after ancestors
- vi) Mourning or burial responsibilities

In this ICM, kinship is moralized it binds people through ethical imperatives.

Take, for instance, the kinship terms:

Magokoro (grandmother) and *sokoro* (grandfather) do not merely denote elderly relatives; instead, they activate a "Senior Kinship Frame" that includes elements such as:

- i) Role: Elder authority figure
- ii) Attributes: Wisdom, nurturing, spiritual authority
- iii) Cultural expectations: Providers of blessings, moral guidance, and custodians of lineage

These lexical items trigger an ICM of ancestral reverence, in which the elderly are seen as liminal figures who mediate between the living and the ancestral realm, particularly in ritual and decision-making contexts. This reflects the AbaGusii cosmology, where age confers not only seniority but metaphysical authority.

Similarly, the communal phrase:

(2) *Omwana noyo bwa banto bonisi* ("A child belongs to all people") invokes a "Collective Child- Rearing Frame", with elements such as:

- i) Agent: Community/extended kin
- ii) Patient: The child
- iii) Obligation: Shared responsibility for welfare and discipline
- iv) Goal: Social harmony and moral development

This expression encodes an ICM of Ubuntu ethics a pan-African philosophical model emphasizing human interdependence ("I am because we are"). In this model, raising a child is not the responsibility of biological parents alone but of the broader kinship and community structure.

Under Frame Semantics, these utterances do not merely communicate facts but index a rich schema of relational roles, culturally valued behaviors, and affective alignments. The speaker, by invoking such frames, situates themselves within a socially encoded moral order, one that privileges hierarchy, reciprocity, and collective well-being.

Moreover, the ICM of kinship in EkeGusii encodes asymmetric relations terms like *tata moke* (uncle) or *makomoke* (aunt) are not equal counterparts but come with distinct taboos, rights, and ritual functions. These are culturally mapped onto social scripts about who may discipline, bless, inherit from, or represent whom in different social or legal scenarios.

Thus, Frame Semantics helps us unpack the structured scenarios behind kinship terms, while ICMs explain the deep, culturally embedded knowledge systems that govern their interpretation. In EkeGusii, kinship is not merely nomenclature; it is a cognitive model of belonging, authority, and moral responsibility that frames social life, continuity, and collective identity.

4.3 Illness as a Frame and ICM of Moral and Spiritual State

In EkeGusii, illness is frequently framed in both biomedical and spiritual-moral terms. The word *rwara* (to be sick) can be applied in both literal and metaphorical frames. For example:

Akonire he/she is cursed. The EkeGusii word *akonire* (he/she is cursed) evokes a deeply culturally embedded conceptual frame tied to spirituality, morality, and communal order as analysed below using Frame Semantics and Idealized Cognitive Models (ICMs):

4.4 Frame Semantic Analysis of *akonire* ("he/ she is cursed")

Evoked Frame: Spiritual Judgment / Misfortune Attribution Frame

In EkeGusii, *akonire* invokes a frame where undesirable events or states are interpreted as resulting from supernatural or moral transgression. This frame involves several key roles:

Frame Element Description

Affected Person:	The cursed individual (usually isolated or feared)
Source of Curse:	Supernatural agent (God, ancestors, or witchcraft)
Trigger/Cause:	Moral or ritual offense (e.g., disrespecting elders, breaking taboos)
Effect/State:	Misfortune, illness, social alienation
Social Response:	Stigma, avoidance, or ritual purification

Interpretation:

In this frame, a curse is not just a private affliction, but a public condition that links spiritual violation to social consequences. The word *akonire* doesn't merely denote a misfortune it implies judgment and a moral breach, often understood communally rather than individually. In Frame Semantics (Fillmore, 1982) and Idealized Cognitive Models (ICMs) (Lakoff, 1987), a word like *akonire* (EkeGusii for "he/she was cursed") activates a rich conceptual network, where the power to curse is not just a linguistic label but part of a culturally grounded conceptual frame. Here's how both theories help us understand the source and structure of the power to curse:

Frame Semantics Perspective

In Frame Semantics, meaning is understood in relation to a background knowledge structure—or frame which includes participants, actions, and culturally-specific expectations.

Frame for Cursing

The word *akonire* evokes a Cursing Frame, which might include the following elements:

- i) Curer (Agent of the curse, often an elder, ancestor, spiritual figure)
- ii) Victim (Person cursed)
- iii) Power source (Spiritual or social authority)
- iv) Transgression (An act that justifies or triggers the curse)
- v) Effects (Misfortune, illness, exclusion)

The power to curse within this frame is not inherent in the word, but inferred from the culturally available scripts. In many African societies like the AbaGusii, this power often comes from:

- i) Elders and ancestors, whose words are believed to carry spiritual force.
- ii) Violation of taboos or kinship obligations, which activates the curse as a form of social or moral sanction.
- iii) Moral order, where language carries not just communicative, but performative power to say it is to make it happen.

Idealized Cognitive Models (ICM) Perspective

Lakoff's ICMs are mental structures shaped by culture, experience, and metaphoric reasoning.

ICM of Cursing as Moral Causality

In the case of *akonire*, we might see:

- i) Moral Order ICM: The world is maintained by moral balance. Violations lead to consequences imposed by those with spiritual capital.
- ii) Speech as Action ICM: Language (especially from a legitimate source) has causal power words *do* things.
- iii) Authority Hierarchy ICM: Some people (e.g., parents, elders, diviners) have inherent power because of their position in a social hierarchy.

In this model, the power to curse is not random. It stems from:

- i) Cultural authorization (for example, "a mother's curse cannot be reversed")
- ii) Spiritual legitimacy (for example, ties to ancestors, gods, or supernatural beings)
- iii) Perceived justice (for example, balancing wrongdoing)

Combined Analysis

In both models, the power to curse is institutionalized tied to social role, cultural belief, and symbolic authority. The use of *akonire* does not merely describe an event but invokes a broader narrative of justice, transgression, and spiritual force.

Example (EkeGusii context):

(3) *Omogaka akonete omwana as eokworokia amachaya.*

(The elder cursed the child because of shame or disrespect.)

- i) Frame: Elder has moral/spiritual authority.
- ii) ICM: Disrespect breaks the moral code → curse invoked → social and spiritual consequences follow.

ICM (Idealized Cognitive Model) Analysis

Relevant ICMs:

- i) Moral-Cosmic Balance ICM
 - i) The world is governed by invisible moral forces (ancestors, God).
 - ii) Wrongdoing (even unknowingly) upsets this balance, resulting in a curse.
 - iii) The ICM assumes a causal chain between action and metaphysical consequence.
- ii) Contamination/Stigma ICM
 - i) The cursed person is seen as spiritually “polluted”.
 - ii) Associating with them may be seen as risky—evoking a quarantine-like conceptualization (akin to disease).
- iii) Restoration ICM
 - i) Restoring the balance may involve rituals (e.g., sacrifices, cleansing).
 - ii) Healing or reversal of the curse is possible through reconciliation with the spiritual world.

4.4 ICM and Frame Semantics Analysis of Kinship Frames in EkeGusii

Kinship Conceptualization in EkeGusii

Kinship in EkeGusii is deeply structured, both linguistically and culturally. The term *makomoke* (paternal aunt) represents not only a biological relation but a socially embedded role with specific duties, expectations, and taboos.

Frame Semantics Overview (Fillmore, 1976, 1982)

In Frame Semantics, lexical items evoke entire conceptual scenarios or frames within which the meaning of those words can be properly understood. The term *makomoke* (aunt) activates a Kinship Frame, which includes:

Frame Elements (Participants):

Frame Role	Ekegusii Term	Function within Frame
Omokwani/omraii	<i>Omokwani</i>	Central reference point often the child who identifies relatives.
Father	<i>Tata</i>	Anchors the paternal line.
Paternal Aunt	<i>Makomoke</i>	Father's sister has specific authority in rituals and family matters.
Paternal Uncle	<i>Tata moke</i>	Father's brother shares lineage duties.

Taboos/Obligations Cultural knowledge Respect rules, inheritance, and ritual roles tied to these figures.

These terms do not exist in isolation; they presuppose knowledge of hierarchical relations, gender roles, and lineage structure, activating a frame network of familial relations.

Idealized Cognitive Models

The ICM of Kinship is a structured mental schema where speakers understand relations based on:

- i) Lineage (paternal vs. maternal)
- ii) Gender roles
- iii) Age hierarchy
- iv) Ritual and inheritance duties

- v) Respect speech norms (for example., not directly naming elders or specific kin)

In this ICM:

- i) *Tata* is more than a label it indexes a role embedded in a moral and social order.
- ii) This ICM explains why and how certain kinship terms evoke emotional, ethical, or ritual responses, rather than neutral identification.

3. Cultural-Cognitive Frame Activation

For instance, referring to someone as *makomoke* implies:

- i) Deference in speech and behavior.
- ii) Expectation of advice, protection, or ritual presence.
- iii) Recognition of her role in naming ceremonies, conflict resolution, or clan negotiations.

This kind of kinship term activates not just a semantic field, but a cognitive universe: the listener is prompted to understand what this role entails in practice.

4. Example in Contextual Usage

Sentence:

"*makomoke nere okoa abana bonsi abamura amrieta.*"

Translation: "My paternal aunt is the one who names male children."

Frame-ICM Interaction:

- i) Frame: Kinship event (naming ceremony).
- ii) ICM: Role of *makomoke* as ritual actor and lineage representative.
- iii) Cultural Inference: Speaker respects her role in perpetuating lineage and culture.

5. Implications for Semantic Analysis

This kind of analysis shows that:

- i) EkeGusii kinship terms carry more semantic weight than their English equivalents.
- ii) Translation without the frame or ICM can strip the term of its functional depth.
- iii) Frame Semantics and ICMs allow scholars to capture culturally situated meanings, revealing how cognition and culture co-structure language.

Comparative Perspective

Language Term (Paternal Aunt) ICM Function

EkeGusii	<i>Makomoke</i>	Naming, ritual, discipline
Kiswahili	<i>Shangazi</i>	More generic term, fewer ritual roles
English	<i>Aunt</i>	Biological label, limited social function

This comparison underscores how EkeGusii maintains complex socio-cognitive mappings between linguistic form and cultural practice a rich ground for Frame Semantic analysis.

The EkeGusii kinship lexicon, particularly the term *makomoke*, demonstrates how language encodes structured cultural knowledge. Using Frame Semantics and Idealized Cognitive Models, we see that terms like

makomoke are windows into a socially embedded world view, where kinship is not merely biological but semanticized through ritual, hierarchy, and moral obligation.

4.2 Farming and Labor Frames

Agricultural practices in EkeGusii are more than economic activities they are embedded in culturally salient knowledge systems and lexicons. Verbs such as *koburuga* (to weed) and *gosimeka* (to plant) activate detailed Farming and Labor Frames, which reflect the community's agrarian worldview. Drawing on Frame Semantics, these verbs evoke structured experiential scenes with clearly defined participant roles and tools, while also indexing an Idealized Cognitive Model (ICM) in which farming is seen as both a livelihood and a moral obligation tied to land, seasonality, and communal sustenance. These verbs do not simply denote physical actions; they evoke culturally structured frames embedded in cognitive models of work, community, and seasonal rhythms.

Unlike English where such actions may be described generically (*tend crops*), EkeGusii encodes specific stages in cultivation, reflecting the cultural salience of subsistence farming

Frame Semantics analysis

The verb *koburuga* activates an agricultural labor frame, which includes:

Frame Elements EkeGusii Cultural Mapping

Agent:	<i>Omoremi</i> (farmer, often gendered as female)
Instrument/Tool:	<i>obokombe</i> (hoe)
Target:	<i>Omoburugero</i> (weeds)
Goal:	<i>Korenda ebimeri</i> (crop care / nurturing crops)
Time:	Done early morning or after rains

ICM Insights (Lakoff, 1987)

Koburuga is part of a schematic model of labor that defines productivity, responsibility, and gender roles.

Cultural scripts link weeding with diligence and moral character: failure to weed implies laziness or neglect.

The mental model associates certain seasons, rituals, and community expectations with this activity.

Sociocultural Embedding: Children and youth may be assigned *koburuga* as a rite of passage into responsibility, making the verb semantically rich beyond its surface action.

Verb: *Gosimeka* (to plant)

Frame Elements in Frame Semantics

Frame Role	Ekegusii Term/Practice
Agent:	<i>Omoremi</i> (farmer)
Tool:	<i>Obokombe</i> (hoe)
Seed:	<i>chinyeke</i> (seeds)
Seedlings:	<i>ebimeri</i> (seedlings)
Land/Farm:	<i>Eburi</i> (cleared and tilled land)
Time/Condition:	<i>Engaki ye mbura</i> (season of enough rains)
Goal:	<i>Korema</i> (to cultivate/raise crops)

ICM Interpretation

The act of *gosimeka* is conceptualized not just as planting, but as entering a seasonal covenant with nature:

- i) The farmer is modeled as a co-creator with natural forces the rain, land, and ancestral blessings.
- ii) The Idealized Cognitive Model of Farming in EkeGusii involves:
 - i) Planning: Choice of right season (rain, moon cycles).
 - ii) Preparation: Land clearing and hoe sharpening.
 - iii) Rituals: Some communities bless seeds or fields.

This reveals a ritual and ecological frame, absent in generic English equivalents like “to plant,” which fail to evoke the seasonal, communal, and moral implications encoded in *gosimeka*.

Implications for Frame Semantics and ICM

- i) EkeGusii lexically encodes knowledge structures about environment, economy, and social responsibility.
- ii) Fillmore's frames help map participants and actions, but ICMs (Lakoff) reveal deeper cognitive-cultural structures.
- iii) These verbs are not mere carriers of grammatical tense/aspect but reveal a world of lived cultural logic.

The verbs *koburuga* and *gosimeka* are not only examples of linguistic encoding of labor they are conceptual portals into AbaGusii worldviews. Frame Semantics allows us to track the roles and structures, while Idealized Cognitive Models explain why these roles matter cognitively and culturally. This demonstrates the power of integrating cognitive semantics in the study of African languages like EkeGusii, which preserve deep ontological insights into human-nature relationships.

4.3 Illness and Health Frames

Terms such as *okogireka* (convulsions) and *ogokonwa* (curse-related illness) evoke health frames deeply tied to spiritual and communal interpretations. A Frame Semantics approach reveals how language links physical symptoms to spiritual causes, structuring illness narratives within traditional belief systems.

Oborwaire igo bwasoete mobere
 (“The disease entered the body.”)

Frame Elements:

- i) Agent (*oborwaire* (disease): Conceptualized as an external force.
- ii) Affected entity (omobere the body): The passive receiver of the disease.
- iii) Path/Source (bwasoete –came into): Implies disease travels from outside.

Analysis:

This frame evokes an ICM where illness is seen as an invader that attacks the body. Similar to metaphors in many languages (e.g., “flu caught me”), EkeGusii treats diseases as animate intruders, aligning with a culturally embedded belief in external causation, including spiritual or environmental forces.

Health and illness in EkeGusii are not solely biomedical phenomena but are understood within a cognitive and cultural framework that links language, spirituality, community, and bodily experience. The language reflects an ontology of illness that encodes agency, causation, morality, and social responsibility. Through the lens of Frame Semantics (Fillmore, 1976; 1982) and Idealized Cognitive Models (ICMs) (Lakoff, 1987), we can analyze how EkeGusii speakers conceptualize and talk about illness.

Example Frame:

Utterance: *Oborwaire igo bwasoete mobere*

Gloss: "The disease entered the body."

Frame Semantics Elements:**Frame Role Ekegusii Term/Concept Explanation**

Agent: *Oborwaire* ("disease") Treated as an animate or forceful entity—external in origin

Path/Source: *Bwasoete* ("came into") Motion verb indicating intrusion or invasion

Affected Entity *Omobere* ("body") Passive recipient of illness, likened to territory or space

ICM Analysis:

This structure aligns with a "Disease-as-Enemy" model, a common ICM cross-linguistically, but with unique cultural extensions in EkeGusii:

ICM 1: Disease as External Invader

- i) The disease is not "developed" internally but comes from outside, echoing spiritual, environmental, or social transgression models.
- ii) This reflects traditional beliefs where illness is caused by witchcraft (*oborogi*) ancestral anger, or moral violation.

ICM 2: Body as a Bounded Space

- iii) The body is treated as a container, into which unwanted forces can enter.
- iv) This conceptualization reflects both spiritual and physical boundaries.

ICM 3: Moral Causation Model

- v) Illness may be interpreted not just biologically but morally—illness reflects spiritual imbalance or communal disharmony.
- vi) This aligns with ideas of "curse-related illness" (e.g., *ogokonwa*), where language constructs causality through spiritual attributions.

Key Health Terms and Their Frames**A. Okogireka (to convulse)****Frame Elements:**

- i) Patient: The one affected (often a child).
- ii) Cause: Often spiritual, such as ancestral displeasure.
- iii) Event: Sudden, violent body movement seen as beyond human control.

ICM: Convulsions are not just medical they represent a breach in spiritual protection, a sign of unresolved ritual obligations.

B. Ogokonwa (curse-related illness)**Frame Elements:**

- i) Agent: A person with power to curse or ancestral forces.
- ii) Instrument: Spoken curse, spiritual medium.
- iii) Outcome: Unexplained chronic symptoms, often untreatable biomedically.

ICM:

- iv) Illness is part of a social-moral justice system a form of restorative imbalance.
- v) Diagnosis here involves elders, rituals, and symbolic communication, not just clinical observation.

3. Conceptual Metaphors and their alignment with ICMs

The metaphor "disease entered the body" is structurally similar to English expressions such as:

- i) "The flu caught me."
- ii) "He was struck by illness."

Yet, in EkeGusii, these metaphors are more than figurative they are embedded in ritual, diagnostic, and therapeutic practices, showing an ontological grounding.

Comparison Table:

Language	Expression	Conceptual Metaphor/ICM	Implication
English	"Caught a cold"	Disease as attacker or pursuer	Mild, metaphorical
EkeGusii	" <i>Oborwaire mobere</i> "	<i>bwasoete</i> Disease as an invader	Spiritually significant, socially serious
Ekegusii	" <i>Ogokonwa</i> " illness)	(curse illness as punishment or imbalance)	Embedded in moral and ancestral frameworks

4. Socio-Linguistic Implications

- i) These frames show how the AbaGusii understand causation, agency, and responsibility in illness.
- ii) The diagnosis is often communal, requiring not just medical treatment but spiritual resolution (e.g., cleansing rituals, confession).
- iii) Naming a disease (or refusing to name it directly) has performative power, shaping how people respond to and treat illness.

Health-related discourse in EkeGusii operates within culturally specific semantic frames and ICMs that interweave bodily, spiritual, and social dimensions. Terms like *okogireka*, *ogokonwa*, and *oborwaire igo bwasoete mobere* encode causal models and therapeutic logics rooted in tradition. By applying Frame Semantics and ICM theory, we can uncover how language reflects and sustains these worldviews, offering critical insights for medical anthropologists, cognitive linguists, and public health practitioners working in multilingual, multicultural contexts.

Frame: Healing as Restoration of Balance

EkeGusii phrase:

Ekerō esosera yarwete mobere , omorwaire abete buya naende

("When the fever left the body, the patient was well again.")

Frame Elements:

- i) Undesirable state (*rikuba* fever): Seen as a disruptive presence.

- ii) Change-of-state (*riarwete* left): Indicates a return to equilibrium.
- iii) Final state (akaba buya/akagwena became well): Health is restored.

Analysis:

The frame of restoration here emphasizes the ICM of health as balance. Illness disturbs equilibrium, and healing is framed as a rebalancing act. This view supports a holistic, non-mechanistic model of health, common in many African cultures.

EkeGusii Phrase:

Eker o esosera yarwete mobere, omorwaire abete buya naende

Gloss: "When the fever left the body, the patient was well again."

Frame Semantics Elements

This phrase activates a Change-of-State Frame, which includes the following components:

Frame Element	EkeGusii Realization	Explanation
Undesirable State	<i>rikuba</i> ("fever")	Represents illness as an intrusive entity causing discomfort and imbalance.
Affected Entity	<i>omobere</i> ("body")	Treated as a bounded container or field site of disruption.
Change-of-State Trigger	<i>yarwete</i> ("left")	The illness is personified and depicted as departing, marking healing.
Resulting State	<i>abete buya</i> ("became well")	Return to a state of normalcy and harmony.
Time Frame	<i>ekero esosera</i> ("when it left")	Locates the change in time, aligning with causal sequence in the healing.

Idealized Cognitive Model (ICM) Analysis

This phrase reflects an ICM of Health as Balance, which is pervasive in many African indigenous medical epistemologies. In this worldview:

- i) Health is understood not as the absence of disease but as a state of bodily, spiritual, and social harmony.
- ii) Illness is seen as a disturbance or intrusion a dis-equilibrating force.
- iii) Healing restores homeostasis a rebalancing rather than merely "curing" a pathogen.

Key ICMs Activated:

ICM of the Body-as-Container:

- i) The *body* (*omobere*) is a bounded space into which illness can enter and from which it can depart.
- ii) This model parallels expressions in both EkeGusii and global metaphors such as "the illness left me" or "I expelled the sickness."

ICM of Illness as Disruption:

- i) *Rikuba* (fever) is externalized and treated as an intruder.
- ii) This reflects cultural models where fever is not merely biomedical but spiritually or environmentally induced.
- iii) The departure of illness indicates a restoration of moral and environmental balance.

ICM of Healing as Return to Harmony:

The phrase *abete buya naende* ("he/she became well again") encodes cyclical time and recovery suggesting health is a natural, desirable default that can be recovered after temporary disruption.

The word *buya* is tied to notions of rightness, wholeness, and functionality, not just physical wellness.

Cultural Implications

- i) In the AbaGusii worldview, health is not individualized but interconnected with communal, spiritual, and environmental forces.
- ii) Healing involves ritual, communal acknowledgment, and often ancestral appeasement.
- iii) The linguistic frame of healing as rebalancing aligns with traditional medicine systems, where healers act not just on the body but the entire social-spiritual context of the patient.

This EkeGusii phrase encapsulates a culturally rich conceptualization of illness and recovery. Through Frame Semantics, we observe a Change-of-State frame tied to movement metaphors, while ICM theory reveals deeper cognitive schemas linking health to spiritual and ecological balance. Such analysis demonstrates the semantic sophistication of indigenous knowledge systems and the necessity of grounding healthcare discourse within culturally resonant frames.

Frame: Illness Naming and Social Identity

In EkeGusii, the naming of illness often transcends biomedical categorization, embedding social judgments and moral connotations. Phrases like *oborwaire bwa batari no bochenu* (“the illness of those who lack cleanliness”) illustrate how health-related discourse reflects and reinforces cultural hierarchies and social exclusion. Through the lens of Frame Semantics and Idealized Cognitive Models (ICMs), such expressions activate frames that associate disease with behavioral or moral failings, demonstrating how language encodes both diagnosis and stigma within a culturally specific semantic ecology.

EkeGusii term:

oborwaire bwabatari no bochenu

(“The illness of those who lack cleanliness” often referencing stigmatized conditions like skin diseases (obosisa) *rikabeso* (cholera))

Frame Elements:

- i) group: Socially marginalized individuals.
- ii) Cause: Moral or behavioral failings (implied).
- iii) Diagnosis: Encodes social judgment.

Frame Element Description

Patient Group: Those who lack cleanliness , socially marginalized group.

Cause: Implied moral or behavioral failing (lack of hygiene).

Diagnosis: Illness name encodes social judgment and stigma.

Social Context: Reinforces boundaries between “clean” vs. “unclean” groups.

Consequence: Shapes social identity and treatment of the afflicted.

Analysis:

Here, the frame links diagnosis with moral judgment, consistent with how labels can stigmatize in medical discourse. The ICM embeds social and ethical dimensions into health terminology, shaping how illness is perceived and how sufferers are treated.

Oborwaire bwabatari no bochenu

(Literal: “The illness of those who lack cleanliness”)

often referencing stigmatized conditions such as skin diseases (obosisa) (....) cholera.

Frame Semantics Analysis

- i) The phrase activates a Social Judgment Frame intertwined with a Health Frame, where the illness is not only a biomedical condition but a marker of moral failure or social deviance.
- ii) The patient group is explicitly defined by their lack of cleanliness, a culturally salient criterion that links physical health with moral and social identity.
- iii) The frame encodes causal attribution, where the illness is conceptualized as a direct consequence of personal neglect or impurity, rather than solely environmental or biological factors.
- iv) Such naming functions as a discursive boundary, delineating who is considered “healthy” and socially acceptable versus “unclean” and marginalized.
- v) This diagnostic frame often results in stigmatization and social exclusion, impacting access to care, social support, and community integration.

ICM (Idealized Cognitive Model) Analysis

- i) The phrase reflects an ICM that associates health with moral cleanliness, embedding an ethical dimension within disease concepts.
- ii) Cleanliness operates not only as a physical hygiene practice but also as a social virtue and identity marker.
- iii) The “unclean” individual becomes cognitively mapped onto a social outcast or deviant, which influences both perception and treatment of illness.
- iv) The cause effect model embedded here is:
- v) “Failure to maintain personal or communal hygiene \Rightarrow illness \Rightarrow social stigma.”
- vi) This ICM reflects broader cultural schemas where illness carries symbolic meanings beyond physical symptoms, affecting social relations and power dynamics.

Broader Socio-Cultural and Medical Implications

- i) The stigmatizing label in EkeGusii mirrors global patterns in medical discourse, where diseases are often moralized (for example, “dirty diseases,” “lifestyle illnesses”).
- ii) Such linguistic framing shapes patient identities, influencing whether individuals seek treatment or face discrimination.
- iii) The social power of naming illnesses in this way reflects colonial and postcolonial histories where health behaviors were often racialized or moralized, impacting marginalized groups disproportionately.
- iv) Understanding these frames is crucial for humanitarian and public health interventions, which must navigate local meanings and stigma to be effective.

The EkeGusii phrase *oborwaire bw abatari no bochenu* exemplifies how illness naming is deeply embedded in social identity construction and moral judgment. Frame Semantics reveals the interlocking frames of health, morality, and social exclusion, while the ICM highlights cultural schemas that link cleanliness with virtue and illness with deviance. This complex framing underscores the need for culturally sensitive health communication that acknowledges and challenges stigma.

Frame: Traditional vs Biomedical Healing

In EkeGusii discourse, the domain of healing activates a conceptual contrast frame between traditional and biomedical models of care. This frame distinguishes not only methods of treatment but also underlying worldviews, authority structures, and explanatory models. Traditional healing invokes ancestral, spiritual, and herbal knowledge mediated through elders and diviners, while biomedical healing is associated with hospitals, pharmaceuticals, and Western-trained doctors. These contrasting frames reflect an ideological tension within the community, shaping how illness is diagnosed, who is authorized to treat it, and how legitimacy is culturally assigned. Analyzing this through Frame Semantics and Idealized Cognitive Models (ICMs) reveals how EkeGusii speakers cognitively navigate and linguistically encode competing health paradigm

EkeGusii contrastive expressions:

- i) *kogwenigwa n'omoragori* (“to be treated by a herbalist”)
- ii) *kogwenigwa n'omonyagitari* (“to be treated by a doctor”)

Frame Elements:

- i) Healer type: Traditional vs modern.
- ii) Treatment method: Herbal/spiritual vs clinical.
- iii) Illness type: Often distinguished between “African” illnesses and “European” illnesses.

Analysis:

EkeGusii health discourse encodes an ICM where healing paths are bifurcated, and the illness type determines the appropriate healer. This shows the coexistence of medical systems, each with its own frames of legitimacy.

Traditional vs Biomedical Healing in EkeGusii**Contrastive Expressions:**

- i) Kogwenigwan'omoragori
Literal: “to be treated by a herbalist” (traditional healer)
- ii) kogwenigwan'omokiariane
Literal: “to be treated by a doctor” (biomedical practitioner)

Frame Semantics Elements

Frame Element	Description
Healer Type:	Traditional healer (<i>omoragori</i>) vs Biomedical doctor (<i>omonyagitari</i>)
Treatment: Method:	Herbal, spiritual, ritualistic vs Clinical, pharmaceutical, diagnostic
Illness Type:	“African” illnesses (spiritual, culturally defined) vs “European” illnesses (biomedical, infectious, chronic)
Patient Role:	Seeker of healing within a culturally appropriate system
Legitimacy Frame:	Competing models of authority and efficacy in healing

Frame Semantics Analysis

- i) The expressions evoke two distinct healing frames:
 - i) Traditional Healing Frame: Emphasizes herbal remedies, spiritual intervention, ritual knowledge, and social embeddedness of illness causation (for example, curses, ancestral displeasure).
 - ii) Biomedical Healing Frame: Focuses on diagnosis through scientific methods, pharmaceutical treatments, clinical procedures, and pathophysiological explanations.
- ii) The illness frame activated by the patient or community perception determines the appropriate healing path, reflecting a culturally bifurcated health epistemology.
- iii) These frames are mutually recognized yet ideologically distinct, each carrying its own cognitive models, social authority, and explanatory narratives about illness and recovery.
- iv) Linguistically, the use of different verbs and agent nouns (herbalist vs doctor) signals frame-shifting that indexes broader cultural understandings of health, illness, and legitimacy.

ICM (Idealized Cognitive Model) Analysis

- i) The ICM embedded in EkeGusii health discourse assumes a binary medical cosmology:
 - i) Traditional illnesses require intervention by the *omoragori*, who is knowledgeable in spiritual and herbal realms.
 - ii) Biomedical illnesses require intervention by the *omonyagirari*, who uses science-based knowledge.
- ii) This reflects a cognitive schema of complementarity and compartmentalization, where illness causation and treatment modalities are mapped onto culturally specific domains.
- iii) The ICM includes beliefs about the nature of disease causation spiritual vs biological—and the corresponding appropriate social roles in healing.
- iv) The coexistence of these frames highlights a pluralistic health model that is typical in many African societies, where biomedical and traditional healing systems operate in parallel, sometimes overlapping but often maintaining boundaries.

Broader Cultural and Medical Implications

- i) This frame dichotomy impacts health-seeking behavior, where patients navigate between systems based on illness perception, availability, and cultural legitimacy.
- ii) The recognition of these frames is critical for public health interventions, as ignoring traditional healing perspectives may reduce uptake of biomedical care or create resistance.
- iii) The tension and interaction between these healing frames also illustrate postcolonial legacies, where biomedical systems introduced through colonialism coexist with indigenous knowledge systems.
- iv) Understanding the linguistic encoding of these healing frames reveals how language functions not just descriptively but normatively—defining what is considered valid healing and who holds power in healthcare.

The EkeGusii expressions *kogwenigwa n'omoragori* and *kogwenigwa n'omonyagitari* activate richly structured frames of traditional and biomedical healing, reflecting culturally entrenched ICMs about illness causation and treatment legitimacy. These frames articulate a pluralistic health worldview where healing paths are clearly demarcated yet coexist, underscoring the importance of culturally sensitive healthcare policies that engage with both systems' epistemologies.

Euphemisms

Literal Translation: “That disease which is not meant for people”

Interpretation: Euphemism for serious or socially sensitive illnesses such as *entira* (anthrax), *omosaando* (fowl cholera). The expression is extended to illnesses perceived as degrading, contagious, or tied to death and shame.

Frame Semantics Analysis

Activated Frame: Euphemistic Illness Discourse Frame

The Euphemistic Illness Discourse Frame in EkeGusii emerges in contexts where direct naming of illness is avoided due to cultural taboos, social sensitivity, or the potential for stigma. Euphemisms such as *oborwaire obotari bw'abanto* (“that disease which is not for people”) are employed to maintain politeness, social cohesion, and individual dignity. This frame is typically activated in discussions involving highly stigmatized, terminal, or spiritually charged illnesses *ebirecha* (demons) where explicit naming would be considered disrespectful or socially inappropriate.

Core Frame Elements:

Element	EkeGusii Realization
Target Event:	Diagnosis or reference to a taboo illness
Linguistic Strategy:	Euphemism: indirect naming via symbolic distancing
Cultural Function:	Maintain face and social harmony
Inference Trigger:	Listener draws on shared knowledge to interpret correctly
Diagnostic Power:	Speaker avoids naming; still asserts diagnostic knowledge
Social Boundary:	Expression marks boundary between public discourse and private suffering

This frame illustrates how naming is not just a linguistic act, but a culturally governed communicative event. The use of indirect language is itself a diagnostic move that communicates both knowledge and moral stance.

Idealized Cognitive Model (ICM) Analysis

ICM in Operation: Silence and Social Respect Model

In this ICM:

- Naming certain illnesses is a culturally sanctioned violation, thus speakers draw on a shared conceptual model of communicative avoidance.
- The euphemism assumes shared knowledge of what the “unspeakable” disease is, relying on cultural scripts of inference.
- This reinforces the cognitive separation between the named (ordinary illnesses) and unnamed (morally threatening or contaminating illnesses).

The ICM helps explain how EkeGusii speakers conceptualize illness beyond the biological through moral, social, and spiritual filters that structure how language is used.

Cultural and Linguistic Implications

- In EkeGusii society, direct speech around diseases linked to shame, animal-human boundaries, or death is culturally discouraged.
- Euphemism acts as a linguistic form of damage control, protecting the speaker and hearer from discomfort or dishonor.
- This also reinforces social roles: Only certain individuals (for example, elders, healers, clinicians) may be authorized to speak openly about such conditions.

Diagnostic Silence and Power

This practice aligns with Foucault’s idea that diagnosis is not only clinical but discursive and disciplinary:

- By choosing not to name, the speaker asserts social power over when and how meaning is made.
- Silence, as used here, is not ignorance but a deliberate form of knowledge control a linguistic technology for managing health, morality, and identity.

Comparative Note

Similar euphemistic frames appear across African cultures:

- In Kikuyu: “*gūtirĩ gūtari na thahu*” (“there is no place without a curse”) used for taboo illnesses.
- In Swahili: “*ugonjwa wa aibu*” (“disease of shame”) for STIs.

These parallel idioms reflect a pan-African communicative ethos where euphemism serves as a protective moral code.

Idioms and Proverbs

EkeGusii idioms often function as carriers of communal values and ethical teachings. The idiom *Oborema igoro bore* (“Disability can come at old age”) activates a culturally grounded frame that promotes empathy, humility, and social inclusion. Rather than treating disability as an anomaly, the expression normalizes it as a potential, natural condition of aging, thereby discouraging stigma. Through Frame Semantics and Idealized Cognitive Models (ICMs), this idiom reveals how language reinforces collective responsibility and moral caution in the treatment of vulnerable members of society.

Idiom: *Oborema igoro bore*

“Disability can come at old age.”

Pragmatic Meaning:

Do not stigmatize people with disabilities; it is a human condition that may affect anyone, especially in later life.

Frame Semantics Analysis:

This idiom activates the “Aging and Physical Decline” Frame, which includes the following frame elements:

Frame Element	Description
Agent:	The speaker or moral agent issuing a social warning
Condition:	<i>Oborema</i> (disability) – framed as a possible, natural human state
Temporal Anchor:	<i>Igoro</i> (old age) – signals the life stage where physical changes occur
Modal Possibility:	<i>Bore</i> (can happen) – emphasizes contingency and shared vulnerability
Cultural Norm:	Implied social ethic of non-stigmatization and empathy

The idiom does not merely describe physical impairment but frames disability as a universally human experience embedded in the aging process, urging the listener to adopt a perspective of inclusivity and foresight.

ICM Analysis:

Drawing from Lakoff’s (1987) theory of Idealized Cognitive Models (ICMs), the idiom evokes two interrelated models:

The Aging as Decline ICM:

- i) Aging is conceptualized as a natural stage accompanied by physical limitations.
- ii) Disability is not treated as abnormal but as part of the lifecycle continuum.
- iii) This ICM contrasts with Western biomedical frames that treat disability primarily as pathology.

The Moral Reciprocity ICM:

- i) Ethical principle: “What happens to others today may happen to you tomorrow.”
- ii) Encourages humility and discourages discrimination.
- iii) Promotes a social-moral model of disability over an individual-pathological model.

Cultural Insight:

In EkeGusii culture, respect for elders and empathy toward the vulnerable are deeply ingrained values. This idiom functions both as a warning against arrogance and a lesson in communal ethics. It reflects how language in AbaGusii society is used to encode social responsibility and to mitigate stigma through culturally embedded wisdom.

“Oborema igoro bore” exemplifies how idiomatic expressions in EkeGusii embed both cognitive universals (aging, vulnerability) and cultural particulars (Ubuntu ethics, communal care). Frame Semantics and ICMs together reveal how the meaning of this idiom extends beyond the literal to shape social attitudes and moral behavior.

Idiom: Omonwa nabo okoreterera okogoro

“The mouth (tongue) can bring trouble to the leg”

Literal: Meaning: One’s own words can lead to trouble.

- i) **Frame:** Communication frame
This frame involves the act of speaking, the speaker, the message, and the consequences of speech.
- ii) **ICM: Self-sabotage or Betrayal Model**
The idealized model assumes that individuals have control over their speech, and when harm results from it, the speaker is the agent of their downfall. This reflects a cultural belief in personal responsibility and caution in speech. Idiom:

FRAME SEMANTICS ANALYSIS

Activated Frame: Speech and Consequence Frame

This idiom activates a culturally and cognitively salient frame where speech acts are tightly linked to physical or social consequences. It reflects the understanding that language is a form of **action** with moral and social repercussions.

Frame Element Description

Agent:	The speaker or moral actor whose speech may initiate events
Instrument:	<i>Omonwa</i> (mouth/tongue) – the symbolic source of speech and agency
Action:	Speaking – framed as a potentially dangerous or consequential act
Affected Entity:	<i>Okogoro</i> (the leg) – metaphor for the self’s mobility, freedom, or safety
Result:	Trouble or harm – arising not from external causes but from one’s own words

Cultural Norm Implied ethic of verbal restraint, accountability, and social awareness

Interpretation:

In this frame, the idiom encodes the belief that spoken words are performative they can instigate conflict, incur punishment, or attract danger, especially in communal settings where speech is morally weighted.

ICM ANALYSIS

1. Speech as Action ICM

Derived from conceptual metaphor theory, this model views speaking as a form of doing.

- i) Speech is not neutral; it can initiate real-world consequences.

- ii) The mouth (as a metaphor for speech) holds power over the body (the self).
- iii) Words can "move" the speaker into trouble, into exile, into danger.

2. Self-Caused Harm ICM

This idiom invokes a moral model where individuals are responsible for the outcomes of their own expressions.

- i) Harm or misfortune is not always external it can be self-generated.
- ii) The leg (mobility, movement) suffers due to the mouth (speech), suggesting a chain of causality from language to consequence.

3. Social Harmony and Accountability ICM

- i) In communal societies like that of the AbaGusii, uncontrolled speech can disrupt social equilibrium.
- ii) The idiom prescribes verbal discipline and social mindfulness what you say affects not only your social standing but your very safety and freedom.

Cultural Insight

In EkeGusii culture, where language is intertwined with moral order, social rank, and conflict resolution, speech is not merely expressive it is performative and ethically loaded. The idiom *Omonwa nabo okoreterera okogoro* encodes cautionary wisdom: words spoken carelessly can result in social alienation, physical danger, or retaliation.

- i) This reflects Ubuntu-inspired ethics: speech should sustain, not rupture, social ties.
- ii) It also resonates with the value placed on silence, discretion, and indirectness in many African communicative traditions.

The idiom *Omonwa nabo okoreterera okogoro* illustrates how, in EkeGusii, language functions within a rich network of cognitive models and cultural frames. Through Frame Semantics, we see how speaking is embedded within a causal and ethical schema of action and consequence. Through ICMs, we understand how the idiom encodes shared moral knowledge: speech has legs it travels, acts, and returns to affect the speaker. In this way, EkeGusii idioms not only reflect thought but regulate behavior, guiding communal life through linguistic wisdom.

Idiom: *Getutu nkere maiso*

Literal Translation: "Even a bush has eyes."

Figurative Meaning: Someone or something is always watching; be mindful of your actions even when you think you're alone. No place is truly private.

1. Frame Semantics Analysis

Invoked Frame:

Surveillance / Awareness Frame

This frame typically involves:

- i) Agent of Perception: The implicit observer (personified as "the bush").
- ii) Observed Entity: The individual whose actions are under scrutiny.
- iii) Setting: A seemingly hidden or private space (e.g., a bush or remote area).
- iv) Assumption Disruption: The speaker assumes solitude or invisibility, which the idiom challenges.
- v) Cultural Norm: Social accountability and moral conduct must be maintained even in secrecy.

Frame Elements:

Frame Element	Realization in Idiom
Observer:	Implied personified nature (the bush)
Action:	Behavior that assumes secrecy
Social Norm:	Expectations of accountability
Interpretive Focus:	Invisible or unexpected watchers

This idiom embeds the idea that every environment, even natural or “empty” ones, is socially charged with moral surveillance a concept deeply rooted in traditional African moral philosophy.

2 Idealized Cognitive Model (ICM)**Omnipresent Moral Oversight Model**

This ICM frames reality as never fully private, where human and non-human entities (e.g., nature, ancestors, spirits) maintain a watchful presence over individuals. It draws from:

- i) Traditional African spirituality, where animism suggests that even landscapes possess life or awareness.
- ii) The communal ethic of accountability, where behavior is governed by the ever-present social gaze.

The idiom expresses an embodied cognitive understanding: one internalizes the presence of moral oversight into everyday actions minding what you say or do, even in solitude.

3. Pragmatic and Cultural Significance

In EkeGusii culture, this idiom functions as:

- i) A moral caution against secrecy or wrongdoing,
- ii) A didactic tool to instill integrity and consciousness of communal norms,
- iii) A cognitive frame for conceptualizing privacy not as isolation, but as socially and spiritually monitored space.

It also aligns with wider African traditions where elders, ancestors, or even nature hold symbolic or actual surveillance roles.

Schematic Representation

Category	Analysis
Idiom	<i>Getutu nkere maiso</i>
Literal Meaning	“Even a bush has eyes.”
Intended Meaning	Be mindful; someone is always watching.

Category	Analysis
Frame	Surveillance / Awareness Frame
Key Frame Elements	Observer (bush), Observed (individual), Secrecy, Accountability
ICM	Omnipresent Moral Oversight
Cultural Significance	Upholds communal ethics and discourages immoral behavior even in isolation.

1. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, descriptive research design informed by cognitive linguistic theory, particularly Frame Semantics (Fillmore, 1982; Fillmore & Atkins, 1992) and Idealized Cognitive Models (Lakoff, 1987). The primary objective is to identify and analyze culturally salient frames in the EkeGusii language as reflected in everyday discourse, idiomatic expressions, and lexical choices.

4.1 Data Collection

The corpus was developed through a combination of ethnographic fieldwork, including:

- i) EkeGusii oral literature (proverbs, folktales, ritual speech)
- ii) Community storytelling sessions conducted in rural and peri-urban areas of Kisii and Nyamira counties
- iii) Semi-structured interviews with native speakers, elders, and cultural practitioners (n=25)
- iv) Participant observation in culturally significant events such as marriage negotiations, initiation rites, and healing ceremonies

These methods facilitated the documentation of naturally occurring language use, ensuring that the data reflects authentic conceptualizations embedded in the community's worldview.

3.2 Analytical Framework

The study applies the FrameNet methodology (Ruppenhofer et al., 2010) for frame identification and annotation, adapted for non-Indo-European languages following the recommendations of Boas (2005, 2009). Lexical units (LUs) in EkeGusii were mapped onto frames based on recurring patterns of use, syntactic behavior, and semantic roles as observed in discourse contexts.

Where appropriate, the analysis also incorporated:

- i) Lakoff's (1987) Idealized Cognitive Models (ICMs) to account for culturally specific mental representations that organize semantic interpretation
- ii) Fillmore's (1985) frame elements and participant roles, tailored to EkeGusii's sociocultural settings
- iii) Cross-linguistic comparison with existing FrameNet corpora to highlight divergences and culturally motivated frame structures

3.3 Validity and Reflexivity

To enhance validity, a triangulated approach was used. Insights from linguistic analysis were cross-checked with:

- i) Community member validation sessions to confirm the appropriateness and interpretation of frames
- ii) Key informant feedback to clarify nuanced semantic and pragmatic meanings

The researcher maintained a reflexive stance, acknowledging the positionality as both analyst and co-participant in meaning construction.

This methodological approach ensures that the findings are both linguistically rigorous and culturally grounded, supporting a nuanced understanding of how EkeGusii speakers use language to reflect, construct, and transmit conceptual knowledge.

7. Conclusion

The findings of this study reinforce Charles Fillmore's seminal insight that linguistic meaning is not an isolated construct but is embedded within culturally and cognitively structured experiences. In applying Frame Semantics to EkeGusii, a Bantu language with minimal prior representation in cognitive linguistic scholarship, this paper has demonstrated that words function not merely as referential labels but as cultural triggers that activate intricate conceptual frames. These frames spanning kinship, labor, illness, and spiritual causation reveal how EkeGusii speakers encode, transmit, and negotiate social knowledge through language.

This analysis further illustrates that lexical semantics in EkeGusii cannot be fully accounted for using Eurocentric or universalist frameworks alone. The data point to the existence of language-specific frames *and* Idealized Cognitive Models (ICMs) that are shaped by local cosmologies, ethics, social structures, and environmental interactions. For instance, the framing of illness in spiritual terms or kinship as moral obligation rather than biology reflects a worldview in which semantic content is grounded in communal epistemologies and relational ethics. This supports Lakoff's (1987) proposition that ICMs are shaped by sociocultural experience, and that meaning arises from embodied, situated cognition.

Moreover, this study underscores the urgent need to recalibrate semantic theory to include indigenous and marginalized languages. The underutilization of Frame Semantics in African language analysis is not merely a gap in application but a theoretical oversight that risks perpetuating linguistic bias. As Boas (2009) has argued, meaning construction is culturally contingent, and without adapting our frameworks to local cognitive ecologies, semantic theories risk oversimplifying or misrepresenting non-Western languages.

In advancing a frame-based analysis of EkeGusii, this paper makes three important contributions:

1. **Theoretical Extension:** It expands Frame Semantics by demonstrating its utility in analyzing the meaning structures of an underrepresented Bantu language.
2. **Methodological Innovation:** It adapts the FrameNet approach to a non-Indo-European linguistic and cultural setting, integrating ethnographic insights with semantic theory.
3. **Linguistic Documentation:** It contributes to the broader project of African language revitalization and preservation by illustrating the depth and richness of EkeGusii semantic knowledge.

Going forward, there is a critical need to develop FrameNets and computational lexicons for African languages grounded in local knowledge systems. Such initiatives would not only enrich global semantic theory but also contribute meaningfully to decolonizing linguistics ensuring that African conceptual worlds are not merely studied but also used to reshape the theories by which language is understood.

Finally, this research affirms that Frame Semantics, when adapted to contextually grounded linguistic ecologies, offers a powerful, culturally sensitive lens for exploring meaning. By foregrounding EkeGusii as a case study, it invites broader reflection on how cognitive linguistics can evolve to be more inclusive, equitable, and representative of the world's diverse languages and worldviews.

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