

Language, Law, and Culture: Exploring Conceptual Metaphors in Ghanaian Supreme Court Judgements

Daniel Dwamena Ofosu ¹  & Esther Serwaah Afreh ² 

¹ Abetifi Presbyterian College of Education, Ghana.

² Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Ghana.



ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore how conceptual metaphors used in Ghanaian Supreme Court judgments reflect the nation's cultural and social values. Guided by Lakoff and Johnson's conceptual metaphor theory, which posits that metaphors are not just linguistic expressions but fundamental conceptual structures that shape our understanding of the world, the study examines 6 selected cases and analyses them through a descriptive qualitative research design. The study adopts the Pragglejazz Group's metaphor identification procedure (MIP) as the analytical framework. Findings revealed dominant metaphors associated with "Journey", "Building", spatial orientation of "Up" and "Down", and "personification", which mirrors Ghanaian worldviews of progress, endurance, moral order, and spirituality. These metaphors demonstrate how judges draw unconsciously on cultural schemas to frame legal reasoning and communicate justice in relatable ways. It recommends incorporating linguistic-cultural analysis in legal education to enhance interpretive competence among judges and lawyers. The study contributes to scholarship by extending metaphor theory into African legal linguistics, illuminating the intersection of law, language, and culture in Ghana's judicial system. It also offers a culturally sensitive model for understanding how legal metaphors shape meaning, reasoning, and perception in postcolonial legal contexts.

Correspondence

Daniel Dwamena Ofosu
Email:

dodwamena@abeticoe.edu.gh

Publication History

Received: 6th September, 2025

Accepted: 11th November, 2025

Published online:
30th December, 2025

To Cite this Article:

Ofosu, Daniel Dwamena, and Esther Serwaah Afreh. "Language, Law, and Culture: Exploring Conceptual Metaphors in Ghanaian Supreme Court Judgements," *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences* 6, no. 15 (2025): 4380 - 4397, <https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.202561513>.

Keywords: conceptual metaphor, court, culture, Ghana, judgment, legal

INTRODUCTION

The language of law has been perceived as a technical and autonomous domain, distinct from everyday speech and insulated from figurative expressions.¹ Classical legal language studies scholars such as Marmor have defended this view, arguing that legal discourse is marked by precision, formality, and an internal logic that excludes the ambiguity often associated with figurative language.² For instance, legal discourse has been argued to be "a language of its own," built upon a specialised grammar and structure that is autonomous from ordinary everyday language.³ However, contemporary scholarship increasingly challenges this assumption and reveals that legal language is, in fact, permeated by figurative devices, particularly metaphor.⁴

¹ Asiimwe Kyomugisha T., "Analyzing Legal Metaphors: Implications for Justice," *Research Invention Journal Of Current Issues In Arts And Management* 4, no. 2 (February 5, 2025): 1–4, <https://doi.org/10.59298/RIJCIAM/2025/421400>.

² Andrei Marmor, *Interpretation and Legal Theory* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2005).

³ Risto Hiltunen, "The Grammar And Structure Of Legal Texts," in *The Oxford Handbook of Language and Law* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 39–51, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199572120.013.0004>.

⁴ Haoyuan Cui, "Corpus-Based Conceptual Metaphor Recognition in Legal Discourse: A Case Study of Cambridge Legal Corpus," *Modern Management Science & Engineering* 6, no. 3 (November 27, 2024): p54, <https://doi.org/10.22158/mmse.v6n3p54>.

Scholars have provided compelling evidence that metaphor is not only present in legal texts but plays a central role in shaping legal reasoning and the construction of meaning.⁵ For instance, Twardzisz explores the metaphoricality of the noun ‘law,’ arguing that despite the perceived unambiguous nature of legal language, metaphor is deeply entrenched. The author suggests that legal language employs metaphor to aid the comprehension of intangible concepts. This aligns with Lakoff and Johnson’s conceptual metaphor theory (CMT), where abstract concepts are understood through more concrete experiential domains.⁶ This study argues that if metaphor permeates language and thought, it inevitably pervades legal language and thinking about legal matters.

Conceptual metaphor, as defined by Lakoff and Johnson, is not a mere ornamental feature of language but a fundamental cognitive mechanism through which abstract concepts are understood in terms of more concrete experiences.⁷ This insight holds profound implications for legal discourse, particularly in the context of judicial reasoning. Court judgments, especially those issued by apex courts, are not simply mechanical applications of statutes but complex interpretive acts that rely on shared conceptual frameworks. Legal language, just like everyday language, functions as a cognitive tool that organises⁸ and expresses human understanding, justifies rulings, and communicates abstract legal principles to a broader audience.⁹

Empirical studies have confirmed the ubiquity and communicative function of metaphor in legal texts.¹⁰ For instance, metaphors related to journey, battle, and building dominate Italian legal texts and carry both cognitive and ideological weight.¹¹ From the foregoing background, there is no gainsaying that the judgments from Ghana’s Supreme Court, often regarded as an authoritative interpretation of civil and criminal law, may also exhibit a rich metaphorical texture. One scholar argues that one way to better understand the language used in these judgments is through a linguistic analysis, which involves examining how language is used to convey meaning and construct arguments.¹²

CMT has been widely applied in diverse fields, including language teaching, literary analysis, emotional expressions, media, business, and political discourse.¹³ In Ghana, scholars have particularly shown keen interest in metaphorical analysis, as evidenced in various research.¹⁴ However, these studies have paid no attention to conceptual metaphors in Ghanaian legal texts, per our review. This makes legal discourse in Ghana an uncharted territory when it comes to the use of conceptual metaphors. Therefore, this study aims to investigate how judges of the Supreme Court of Ghana use metaphors to make meaning of their ruling and how these metaphors reflect cultural, social, and historical values and beliefs in Ghana. Based on these objectives, the study answers the following questions.

⁵ Cui, “Corpus-Based Conceptual Metaphor Recognition in Legal Discourse: A Case Study of Cambridge Legal Corpus.”

⁶ G. Lakoff and M. Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

⁷ Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*.

⁸ Gary R Habermas and James Porter Moreland, *Beyond Death: Exploring the Evidence for Immortality* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2004).

⁹ Michael Tomasello, *Becoming Human : A Theory of Ontogeny* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press Of Harvard University Press, 2019), 134–60.

¹⁰ Cui, Corpus-Based Conceptual Metaphor Recognition in Legal Discourse, p. 54., Lucia Morra and Barbara Pasa, “Ordre Public: A Research into the Origin and Evolution of a Legal Metaphor,” in *Metaphor in Legal Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2022), 186–223., Twardzisz, “The Metaphoricity of the Noun Law,” pp. 1–20.

¹¹ Morra and Pasa, “Ordre Publi,” pp. 186–223.

¹² Asiimwe, Analyzing Legal Metaphors, pp. 1–4.

¹³ Esther Serwaah Afreh and Daniel Dwamena Ofosu, “The Language of Grief: The Role of Conceptual Metaphors in Family Tributes of Ghanaian Funeral Ceremonies,” *Cognitive Semantics* 10, no. 2 (September 30, 2024): 253–82, <https://doi.org/10.1163/23526416-bja10064>., Gladys Nyarko Ansa, “Metaphor and Bilingual Cognition: The Case of Akan and English in Ghana - Lancaster EPrints,” *Lancs.ac.uk* (Doctoral Dissertation, 2011), <https://eprints.lancs.ac.uk/id/eprint/61709/1/ansah.pdf>., Daniel Dwamena Ofosu and Sanka Washew, “The Metaphoricity of Corruption: Exploring Ghana’s Electoral Manifestos under the Fourth Republic,” *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences* 5, no. 16 (December 4, 2024): 2722–33, <https://doi.org/10.38159/ejass.20245164>., Tolulope Oluremi, “Metaphors in Newspaper Reports on Nigeria 2005 Banks Recapitalisation,” *Linguistik Online* 112, no. 7 (December 15, 2021): 87–102, <https://doi.org/10.13092/lo.112.8262>., Dolores M. Porto, “From Conceptual to Literary Metaphors: A Neuroaesthetics Perspective,” *Cognitive Linguistic Studies* 11, no. 1 (June 6, 2024): 34–50, <https://doi.org/10.1075/cogls.00111.por>.

¹⁴ Esther Serwaah Afreh, “Metaphors Otumfoɔ Lives By: A Cognitive Linguistic Study of Metaphors in Some Addresses by Otumfoɔ Osei Tutu II, Asantehene,” *Cognitive Semantics* 4, no. 1 (March 10, 2018): 76–103, <https://doi.org/10.1163/23526416-00401004>., Esther Afreh and Ofosu, “The Language of Grief”, 253–82., Ofosu and Washew, “The Metaphoricity of Corruption”, pp. 2722–33., Daniel Dwamena Ofosu et al., “The Role of Conceptual Metaphors in Public Perception of Ghanaian Court Judgments,” *International Journal for the Semiotics of Law - Revue Internationale de Sémiotique Juridique*, November 21, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11196-025-10384-8>.

1. What are the types of conceptual metaphors employed by the court in the judgments?
2. In what ways do the metaphors reflect cultural and social values and beliefs in Ghana?

Structure and Language of the Ghanaian Legal System

The Ghanaian court system is structured into multiple levels, which include lower courts, superior courts, and the highest court.¹⁵ In Ghana, the lower courts comprise District Courts and Circuit Courts, with the former having jurisdiction over minor criminal and civil cases, and the latter handling more serious criminal and civil cases. The superior courts in Ghana consist of the High Courts, which possess both original and appellate jurisdiction for civil and criminal cases, and the Court of Appeal, which exercises only appellate jurisdiction over cases heard by the lower and high courts. The Supreme Court holds the ultimate authority to interpret the Constitution and review appeals from the Courts of Appeal.¹⁶ Comprised of the Chief Justice and a minimum of nine other justices, the Supreme Court judges are appointed by the President of Ghana, following the guidance of the Judiciary Committee. With its dual jurisdiction, the Supreme Court exercises both original and appellate powers. In its original jurisdiction, it handles cases involving the interpretation and application of the Constitution. Furthermore, it serves as an appellate court, reviewing appeals that originate from the Court of Appeal and other subordinate courts.

English is the official language of Ghana, and it is used as the primary language for all legal documents and legal proceedings. In instances where parties are not proficient in English, the law guarantees the provision of interpreters to ensure fair participation.¹⁷ The legal language is highly technical and formal, which necessitates analysis through conceptual metaphor to enhance comprehension, fairness, and transparency in legal proceedings.¹⁸

Supreme Court Judgments

Supreme Court judgments are complex documents due to their technicality. Judgments are the formal decisions or rulings made by the courts in both civil and criminal matters.¹⁹ Judgment is defined as an intelligently formulated declaration by a judge about a contested legal issue that has been presented and debated before their esteemed presence.²⁰ Scholars have observed that judgments provide certainty to the parties in a court action that the judgment is fair and that the judge performed his/her duties competently, impartially, and independently.²¹ The authors add that a good hearing and appropriate argumentation are prerequisites for good judgment, and the reasoning of a judge reflects his/her knowledge of the law and approach to the question of fact and the law involved in the case.

The courts in Ghana, like other courts, have the power to issue orders and directions necessary to enforce their judgments, decrees, or orders.²² Judgments of the Supreme Court of Ghana are formal legal documents that provide a detailed analysis of the legal issues involved in a particular case, including the relevant statutes and case law.²³ It has been explained that legal document writers resort to the use of legal terminologies and citations that are specific to the Ghanaian legal system in writing judgments.²⁴ The author observes that judgments of the Supreme Court of Ghana are typically structured similarly, with an introduction that provides background information about the case, a statement of the legal issues involved,

¹⁵ Joseph Ofori Acheampong and Damon M. Cann, "Assessing Public Trust in Ghana's Courts," *Journal of Law and Courts*, January 13, 2025, 1–11, <https://doi.org/10.1017/jlc.2024.24>, Charlotte Omane Kwakye-Nuako et al., "An Exploration of Litigants' Interactions with Court Actors in Ghanaian Courts," *Forensic Science International: Mind and Law* 4 (August 25, 2023): 100119, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.fsimpl.2023.100119>.

¹⁶ Ghana Legal Information Institute, "About the Ghana Legal System," *Ghalii.org*, 2025, <https://ghalii.org/about/>.

¹⁷ Colin Reilly et al., "Language and Employment in Ghana: Capturing the Multilingual Reality," *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 44, no. 9 (June 25, 2023): 807–26, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2023.2195853>.

¹⁸ Acheampong and Cann, "Assessing Public Trust in Ghana's Courts," pp. 1–11.

¹⁹ Akame Winslow Melle, "The Art of Writing a Judgment: An Appraisal of the Form and Content of a Judgment of a Trial Court under the Cameroon Criminal Procedure Code," *International Journal of African Reflections* 2024, no. 1 (2024): 114–36, <https://doi.org/10.47348/ijar/2024/a6>.

²⁰ Rom Mukhiit and Rentsenkhlorloo Anar, eds., *Implementation of Constitutional Review: Challenges and Development Trends* (Mongolia: Ulaanbaatar, 2022).

²¹ Mukhiit and Anar, eds., *Implementation of Constitutional Review*.

²² Kwakye-Nuako et al., "An Exploration of Litigants' Interactions."

²³ Supreme Court of Ghana, "Supreme Court Rules, 1996 (C.I 16)," 1996.

²⁴ Isaac Bisilki, "The Use of Legal English (Legalese) in Ghanaian Law Courts," *ResearchGate* (Thesis, 2018).

a discussion of the relevant legal principles, and a conclusion that summarises the court's decision and reasoning.

Conceptual Metaphor and Legal Language

In Lakoff and Johnson's exploration of conceptual metaphor, they posit that metaphor is not merely a linguistic ornament but a fundamental mechanism through which individuals conceptualise abstract domains by mapping them onto concrete, experiential ones.²⁵ This means that conceptual metaphors are shaped by linguistic conventions and cultural schemes,²⁶ embodied experiences,²⁷ and contextual factors. Lakoff and Johnson contend that conceptual metaphors are deeply ingrained in our language and thought because they reflect shared cultural understanding.²⁸ These metaphors become linguistic conventions over time.

For Kövecses, metaphor is a systematic set of correspondences between two domains of experience.²⁹ The author suggests that any organisation of human experience can be part of a conceptual domain, and the regularity with which similar metaphors appear in different languages suggests some correspondence with neural mappings in the brain.³⁰ Lakoff and Johnson illustrate this with the conceptual metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR, evident in expressions like "He attacked every weak point in my argument" and "I demolished his argument."³¹ Such metaphors reveal how abstract concepts (e.g., argument) are comprehended through the lens of more concrete experiences (e.g., war).

Further developments in conceptual metaphor theory distinguish between primary and complex metaphors.³² According to Lakoff and Johnson, primary metaphors are rooted in universal embodied experiences, such as MORE IS UP, derived from the correlation between quantity and verticality in physical experience.³³ These scholars explain that complex metaphors also arise from the combination of primary metaphors with culturally specific knowledge, which leads to variations across different cultures and languages.³⁴ Ongoing research continues to explore and expand upon the theorisation of conceptual metaphor.

Lakoff and Johnson distinguish three types of conceptual metaphors: structural (based on structural systematic mapping), orientational (based on spatially related concepts), and ontological (based on having objects, substances, and containers as domains). The authors argue that structural metaphors involve structuring one concept in terms of another.³⁵ Lakoff and Johnson add that structural metaphors are pervasive in language and thought because they shape our understanding of various domains such as relationships, emotions, and abstract ideas. Lakoff and Johnson contend that the second type of metaphor, orientational, organises a system of concepts spatially, often based on spatial orientation terms such as up-down, front-back, in-out, etc. These metaphors structure concepts by associating them with physical directions or special relationships. The scholars also opine that the ontological metaphor conceptualises abstract domains in terms of entities or substances.³⁶ They attribute ontological status to abstract concepts and treat them as if they were tangible objects or substances.

In the context of legal discourse, conceptual metaphor has been used to interpret abstract legal principles into more tangible and rational concepts for framing arguments and shaping legal interpretation.³⁷ Additionally, another scholar argues that metaphors, aside from facilitating understanding

²⁵ Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*.

²⁶ Zoltán Kövecses, *Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory* (Cambridge; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

²⁷ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

²⁸ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, "Conceptual Metaphor in Everyday Language," *The Journal of Philosophy* 77, no. 8 (1980): 453–86.

²⁹ Kövecses, *Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory*.

³⁰ Kövecses, *Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory*.

³¹ Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, p. 4

³² Zoltán Kövecses, *Metaphor in Culture: Universality and Variation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511614408>., Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh*., Kövecses, *Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory*.

³³ Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh*.

³⁴ Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh*., Kövecses, *Metaphor in Culture*.

³⁵ Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*.

³⁶ Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*.

³⁷ Morra and Pasa, "Ordre Public," 186–223., Kenneth J Peak and Tamara Madensen, *Introduction to Criminal Justice: Practice and Process*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc, 2019).

and persuasion by appealing to logos, pathos, and ethos, also play a jurisgenerative role of actively creating and legitimising legal norms while simultaneously biasing interpretation by highlighting some aspects and concealing others.³⁸ Within the context of the Ghanaian Supreme Court judgments, conceptual metaphor may offer a compelling lens for analysing how metaphor shapes legal reasoning and communication.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The descriptive qualitative research design is employed in this study to identify and analyse how the Supreme Court of Ghana employs conceptual metaphors in its judgments.³⁹ This design allows researchers to have an in-depth exploration of the “what, who, where, and how” of this linguistic phenomenon.⁴⁰ Since the focus of the study is on specific factors, such as the types of metaphors used by the court in its judgments and how these metaphors are utilised, this approach is relevant.

Research Paradigm

The study is based on the interpretivist research paradigm, which emphasises the understanding of social phenomena through the subjective meanings individuals assign to their actions and interactions.⁴¹ The paradigm allows for the gathering of information through interpretive methods of analysis to arrive at conclusions. Creswell and Poth contend that the paradigm rejects the idea of a single objective reality.⁴² They argue that reality is socially constructed and context-dependent. Against this background, the paradigm is used for the analysis and interpretation of the cultural and social values and beliefs in Ghana, with relevance to the use of conceptual metaphor in judgments of the Supreme Court of Ghana. This is because the paradigm allows the exploration of the inner experiences of participants to understand how meanings are shaped within the cultural contexts and discover new insights, rather than test predetermined variables.

Population and Sampling

The population of the study is the judgments of the Supreme Court of Ghana based on civil, criminal, and constitutional cases. The Supreme Court gives a verdict on civil and constitutional cases, which are both appellate and original. The court also gives a verdict on criminal cases, which are mostly appellant cases. The simple sampling technique was used to select six (6) judgments on criminal, civil, and constitutional cases from the Supreme Court in the millennial year. The criteria for selecting the data were based on the currency of the data; thus, judgments before the millennial year were not considered. In addition, choosing judgments based on criminal, civil, and constitutional cases is a suitable approach for determining the general legal language of the Supreme Court. By analysing judgments from these types of cases, it is possible to identify the legal principles, concepts, and terminology that are commonly used by the court.

Data Source

The judgments were obtained from the Ghana Legal Information Institute’s (GhLII) official website (<https://ghlii.org/judgments>). The website serves as a centralised platform for accessing legal materials from Ghana, as well as hosting legal materials from other countries. No ethical procedures were followed for the data collection since the judgments are public, verifiable materials, and can be assessed by the public. The sampled judgments were sourced from the three main types of cases that are adjudicated by the Supreme Court of Ghana: Civil cases, Criminal cases, and Constitutional cases.

³⁸ Étienne Cloutier, “A Tale of Two Metaphors: A Narrative Take on the Canadian Constitution,” *McGill Law Journal* 64, no. 3 (2019): 447, <https://doi.org/10.7202/1071747ar>.

³⁹ John Creswell and Cheryl Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*, 4th ed. (SAGE Publications Ltd, 2018).

⁴⁰ Robert Elliot and Ladislav Timulak, *Essentials of Descriptive-Interpretive Qualitative Research : A Generic Approach* (Washington: American Psychological Association, 2021).

⁴¹ Husam Helmi Alharahsheh and Abraham Pius, “A Review of Key Paradigms: Positivism vs Interpretivism,” *Global Academic Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 2, no. 3 (December 2020): 39–43.

⁴² John Creswell and Cheryl Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*. (SAGE Publications Ltd, 2018).

According to Kubasek, Brennan, and Browne, civil cases in a broader sense involve disputes between private parties over non-criminal matters like contracts, property, or personal injuries.⁴³ In lucid terms, the goal is to resolve the dispute and provide remedies, often in the form of monetary compensation. Civil cases also seek to provide specific performances, such as overturning the results of an election when a party feels the electioneering processes did not lead to a free and fair election. Criminal cases, on the other hand, are legal proceedings initiated by the government against individuals or entities accused of violating criminal laws.⁴⁴ The primary objective is to determine guilt and impose penalties such as imprisonment or fines to maintain public order and safety. In this study, we also categorised another type of case as “constitutional case”. Although grouped under civil cases because the goal is not to impose criminal sanctions, constitutional cases specifically involve the interpretation or application of a constitution.⁴⁵ Table 1 details the judgments that were sampled for the study.

Table 1: Details of the selected judgments of the Supreme Court of Ghana

Ref.	Title	Case Type	Status	Date
CVC J1	Mahama vs E.C. and Another [2021] GHASC 12	Civil	Original	4 th March, 2021
CVC J2	Jaji vs Paul Boateng [2022] GHASC 22	Civil	Appellant	6 th April, 2022
CRM J1	Samadzi vs Republic [2017] GHASC 37	Criminal	Appellant	6 th April, 2017
CRM J2	Robertson vs Republic [2014] GHASC 169	Criminal	Appellant	28 th May, 2014
CON J1	Justice Abdulai vs Attorney-General [2022] GHASC 1	Constitutional	Original	9 th March, 2022
CON J2	Daniel Axim vs Attorney-General [2022] GHASC 15	Constitutional	Original	6 th April, 2022

Judgments from the Supreme Court of Ghana (sourced from <https://ghlii.org/judgments>).

For easy identification and references, the sampled judgments were given reference codes, i.e., Civil Case (CVC), Criminal Case (CRM), and Constitutional Case (CON). In addition to these codes, the specific judgment and sentences from which the various metaphors were inferred were coded together with a number. Based on these, CVC J1 – S21 represents the 21st sentence of the first judgment under the civil case. This is illustrated in the extract below.

- 1) The facts surrounding the suit have been played out in near epic dimensions before the public (CVC J1 – S21).

Data Analysis Procedure

The analysis of the data was made by the application of the Pragglejaz Group Metaphor Identification Principle (MIP) for analysing the metaphoricity of discourses.⁴⁶ This procedure is a well-established methodology for systematically identifying metaphors in text. Pragglejaz Group suggests that metaphor in discourse can be identified through four (4) stages. The procedure provides that one first reads the entire text to get the general understanding, followed by the identification of the various lexical units in the text. The procedure is further grounded on the comparison of contextual with basic meaning for the set of selected lexical units.⁴⁷ For this study, the basic meaning was determined by definitions in the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (LDCE) and the Online Etymological Dictionary (OED). The contextual meaning was also determined by the frame configured by those concepts expressed through the co-texts of the selected lexical unit. The comparison of the basic meaning frame elements with

⁴³ Nancy K. Kubasek, Bartley A. Brennan, and Neil M. Browne, *The Legal Environment of Business: A Critical Thinking Approach*, 8th ed. (Pearson, 2021), 611.

⁴⁴ Peak and Madensen, *Introduction to Criminal Justice*.

⁴⁵ Kubasek, Brennan, and Browne, *The Legal Environment of Business*, 611.

⁴⁶ Pragglejaz Group, “MIP: A Method for Identifying Metaphorically Used Words in Discourse,” *Metaphor and Symbol* 22, no. 1 (January 2007): 1–39, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10926480709336752>.

⁴⁷ Pragglejaz Group, “MIP: A Method for Identifying Metaphorically Used Words in Discourse,” p. 4.

the contextual meaning frame elements determines whether the frames are the same or different. Metaphors were identified in those cases where basic and contextual frames differed.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Lexical Characteristics of the Judgments

This section discusses the lexical pattern of the sampled judgments for the study. The number of sentences and words in each judgment was manually counted with the assistance of MS Word. The lexical density of the judgments was calculated to determine how dense the information in the judgments. Table 2 presents these details.

Table 2: Lexical pattern of the data

Judgments	Justice Abdulai vs Attorney General	Daniel Axim vs Attorney General	Jaji vs Boateng	Mahama vs EC and Another	Robert vs Republic	Samadzi vs Republic	Total
Text Length							
Sentences	163	102	327	486	241	265	1584
Words	4673	3544	10462	16236	7843	8764	51522
Lexical Density							
Lexemes %	54.20	56.42	57.39	61.52	58.52	60.25	58.05

Source: Researchers' analysis

Collectively, these judgments encompass 1,584 sentences and a total of 51,522 words. Among them, civil cases stand out with the highest word counts and lexical densities. For instance, the case between *Mahama vs. Electoral Commission and Another* comprises 16,236 word counts and a lexical density of 61.52%. Similarly, the judgment in *Jaji vs. Boateng* exhibits a substantial text length of 10,462 words and a lexical density of 57.39%. One possible justification for the length of civil cases is that civil cases often involve diverse human interactions, conflicts, and negotiations, providing a rich context for extended debates and expressions.⁴⁸

Criminal cases, such as *Samadzi vs. The Republic* and *Robert vs. The Republic*, also demonstrate considerable text lengths and high lexical densities. Criminal cases often involve compelling narratives, moral dilemmas, and emotionally charged situations.⁴⁹ The nature of criminal proceedings, with their focus on crimes, victims, and perpetrators, lends itself to the use of language extensively to generate a compelling narrative either to corroborate an alibi or persuade judges of an accused's innocence or conviction. It is also realized that constitutional cases, such as *Justice Abdulai vs. Attorney General* and *Daniel Axim vs. Attorney General*, recorded the least number of sentences, with 163 and 102 sentences, respectively. Constitutional cases are primarily focused on legal principles, frameworks, and constitutional interpretations, which may have a relatively reduced need for longer linguistic exploration.⁵⁰ In lucid terms, the complexity of Constitutional Cases may contribute to a lower frequency of words used to interpret the constitution; thus, the foundational legal principles and the interpretation of constitutional texts necessitate a more direct and formal language style.

RQ1: Types of Conceptual Metaphors

The analysis reveals the presence of 8 conceptual metaphors, with some of these metaphors overlapping in different judgments. Conceptual metaphors were utilised more in civil cases, with a total of six (6) metaphors. Metaphors appeared in criminal cases five (5) times, while constitutional cases exhibited three (3) metaphors. Notably, the judgments in the cases between *Mahama vs. EC and Another* (CVC J1) and

⁴⁸ Kubasek, Brennan, and Browne, *The Legal Environment of Business*, 611.

⁴⁹ Peak and Madensen, *Introduction to Criminal Justice*

⁵⁰ Kubasek, Brennan, Browne, *The Legal Environment of Business*, 611

Samadzi vs. Republic (CRC J1) contained the highest number of conceptual metaphors, with four (4) metaphors identified in each judgment.

The increased number of metaphors in the judgments of the civil and criminal cases may be attributed to their length, which included numerous legal registers that required conceptual understanding, especially for ordinary citizens who are unfamiliar with legal terminology. This aligns with studies that contend that criminal and civil cases frequently feature conceptual metaphors due to their cognitive and linguistic value in conveying complex narratives.⁵¹ Criminal proceedings, in particular, rely on metaphors to articulate the seriousness of crimes and to enhance the persuasive impact of legal arguments.⁵² Similarly, civil cases often involve conflicts and social issues that align with everyday experience, making them fertile ground for metaphorical expressions.⁵³ In contrast, one author contends that constitutional cases tend to focus on abstract legal principles and frameworks, which results in a relatively reduced use of metaphorical language due to their technical nature.⁵⁴

Structural Metaphors

COURT PROCEEDING IS A JOURNEY

Lakoff and Johnson (1999) highlight the Journey metaphor as linking movement to life's progress, expressed in phrases like "moving ahead" or "making strides." In CVC J1, the Supreme Court of Ghana employed this metaphor to conceptualise court proceedings as a journey where presenting evidence represents forward movement. The expression "*in advancing reasons to support his petition*" highlights progress towards a goal, portraying the petitioner's argument as a motion toward success.

- 2) *The Petitioner, in **advancing** reasons to support his petition, contended that though the 1st Respondent effected corrections to its original data as announced on 9th December 2020 (CVC J1 – S67).*

In (CVC J2), it was discovered that the court understood court proceedings in terms of a journey with the use of the verb phrase "*set out*" in example (3) and "*depart from*" (4). In this example, the court envisaged facts as a vehicle to propel the advancement of the journey. Consequently, the viability and success of the case are contingent upon the acquisition and presentation of admissible evidence or facts, serving as the vehicle upon which the entire legal argument is riding.

- 3) *It is also considered worthwhile to **set out** with clarity the facts of a related suit which 82 commenced in the District Court, Kaneshie, Accra... (CVC J2 – S2).*
- 4) *From the above, for this honourable court to **depart from** the concurrent findings of the two lower courts, ... barring such a conclusion, the appeal must fail. (CVC J2 – S91).*

The arrival of the travellers at their destination is inferred from the expression in example (5).

- 5) *What appears to be lost on the Defendant is that he has **arrived** at the fact that the sale is illegal because he is advancing his case and not that the ownership of the property has been determined to belong to him (CVC J2 – S140).*

The expression describes the gradual advancement of an argument and shows the petitioner's steady progress towards asserting the illegality of the sale.

The journey metaphor extends beyond movement, as Bounegru and Forceville posit; it entails the presence of an unresolved problem, a mission to be accomplished, and an act of redemption to be

⁵¹ Peak and Madensen, *Introduction to Criminal Justice*.

⁵² Elçin Esmer, "Conceptual Metaphors in the Criminal Court Transcripts," in *Social and Humanities Science Research, Theory*, ed. Şükrü Ünar and Senem Karagöz (Livre de Lyon, 2021), 1–18.

⁵³ William Burnham, *Introduction to the Law and Legal System of the United States* (St. Paul, Mn: West Academic Publishing, 2016)., George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, "Conceptual Metaphor in Everyday Language," *The Journal of Philosophy* 77, no. 8 (1980): 453–86.

⁵⁴ Esmer, "Conceptual Metaphors in the Criminal Court Transcripts, 1-18.

undertaken.⁵⁵ In CRC J1, the judges conceptualised the court proceedings as a journey requiring the court to start from one point to another destination, navigating through the paths and roads to discover which one is best to be tread on. This is why the court has to go “*a winding journey through the records to determine the validity of the evidence provided*”.

6) *Nonetheless, to discharge our duty to do substantial justice in all cases, the court had to undertake a **winding journey** through the record to discover the facts in the case (CRC J1 – S27).*

Lakoff and Johnson⁵⁶ argue that every journey has a starting point and a destination. That the Supreme Court gives the final verdict of the case is understood as the destination of the proceedings in examples (7) and (8) is true.

7) *It is to be noted that a careful reading of the Court of Appeal decision as a ... will reveal that the Court did not err in **arriving** at this conclusion, as the analysis of the relevant facts of the case was in respect of an irregular sale (CVC J2 – S99).*

8) *It appears to us that if the courts below had carefully considered the facts of the case ... the defence of the appellant, they would have concluded differently from the one they **arrived** at (CRC J1).*

A COURT PROCEEDING IS A SPORT

The act of deliberating a court case in Ghana’s Supreme Court has been conceptualised as the sport of football in which two opposing teams are competing for a trophy because the framers of the judgment used specific verb phrases, such as “play” and “played out” in examples (9 and 10), “attack,” in (11) and “defend,” in (12) which is typical in football language. In judgment (CRC J1), the idea of two teams playing the game is inferred from the linguistic expression in (9).

9) *In the same vein, a policeman or soldier or prison officer who is closely involved with the **investigation team** is likely to **play** biased in favour of his duty calling by simply not being truthful on the matter at issue (CRC J1 – S223).*

10) *The facts surrounding the suit have been **played out** in near epic dimensions before the public (CVC J1 – S21).*

11) *Though the Petitioner is not, in substance, **attacking** the validity of the 7th December, 2020 Presidential elections ... (CVC J1 – S18).*

12) *The Petitioner **attacked** the oral declaration made by the Chairperson of the 1st Respondent in reliefs (a), (b), and (c), and consequently, sought an annulment of C.1 135 in relief (d) (CVC J1 – S433).*

In the examples, the plaintiff and counsel for one team, while the defendant and the counsel form the opposing side. Each side competes to win the “trophy” of a favourable verdict. In CRC J1, this courtroom contest is likened to a football match where expressions such as “attack” portray the petitioner’s challenge to the election’s validity. The court, like a referee, ensures fairness by interpreting constitutional rules and guiding the proceedings. Thus, the legal contest becomes a structured game governed by rules, strategy, and skillful adjudication aimed at achieving justice.

⁵⁵ Liliana Bounegru and Charles Forceville, “Metaphors in Editorial Cartoons Representing the Global Financial Crisis,” *Visual Communication* 10, no. 2 (May 2011): 209–29, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470357211398446>

⁵⁶ Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*.

- 13) “... court usually apply the **election code** to protect, not to defeat the right to vote” (CVC J1 – S482)

Lastly, the use of the verb phrase “*strike down*” construes the proceeding as a game where players strike the ball into the opponent’s nets. In judgment (CRC J1), the example in (14) made the reader aware that the judiciary had no power to strike down an Act of Parliament,” just like striking a football.

- 14) *The courts declined the invitation and said that parliament was supreme, and that the judiciary had no power to **strike down** an Act of parliament (CRC J1 – S243).*

CASES ARE BUILDINGS

The metaphor conceptualises a legal case as a building, where the foundation represents the evidence supporting it. Just as a solid foundation sustains a structure, strong evidence upholds a case. In CVC J1, involving the Electoral Commission and the NPP candidate, the court portrays the plaintiff as the builder constructing this legal “building.” The metaphor illustrates how the strength of argument and facts determines the stability and success of a case in court. In example (15), for instance, the petitioner is understood as the builder who constructs the building.

- 15) ... *it seems the petitioner **built** his case around this figure of 13,434,574 erroneously announced by the Chairperson of the 1st Respondent as the total valid votes cast (CVC J1 – S283).*

Additionally, the case is metaphorically constructed like a building, where accurate election figures form the solid foundation supporting the structure (case). An author argues that an accused individual can only emerge victorious in a legal case when the case is well constructed from its very foundation to its roof, with the necessary facts that present a probable course of action.⁵⁷ In CRC J1, the court equates reliable evidence to a firm base, essential for sustaining the integrity of a case, just as foundations uphold a building. Studies in legal discourse show similar metaphorical parallels, where weak or hearsay evidence cannot support a case.⁵⁸ Thus, factual accuracy and coherence function as the foundational elements upon which legal arguments are successfully built.

- 16) *How then can **hearsay evidence provide a foundation** for corroboration by PW6, because you cannot put something on nothing? (CRC J1 – S244).*

In example (17), the appellant claimed the evidence presented by the state did not support the case, thereby conceptualising the evidence as a weak foundation of a building.

- 17) *The appellant is aggrieved by the decision of the Court of Appeal and has appealed to us as the final court, mainly on the ground that the **evidence led does not support his conviction** (CRC J1 – S9).*

From the expression above, it is understood that this foundation is not strong enough to hold up the building – the case. It comes as no surprise for the court to explain that a case can collapse when it is not based on cogent evidence, just as a building will collapse when built on a weak foundation. Through the expression in examples (18) and (19), the court supports the claim that a weak or poor foundation of a building can cause the collapse of the building, just as the “*supply charge*” refused to stand because the “*possession charge in count one collapsed*”.

⁵⁷ Timur Zinurovich Zinatullin, “THE BASIC ISSUE of a CRIMINAL CASE: CONTENT, RESOLUTION,” *Bulletin of Udmurt University Series Economics and Law* 29, no. 4 (July 25, 2019): 495–500, <https://doi.org/10.35634/2412-9593-2019-29-4-495-500>.

⁵⁸ Ljubica Kordić, “Metaphors Lawyers Live By,” *International Journal for the Semiotics of Law - Revue Internationale de Sémiotique Juridique* 36, no. 4 (January 19, 2023): 1639–54, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11196-023-09975-0>.

18) *Having failed to meet the initial test, no further consideration can be given to the rest of the evidence put forward by the prosecution since you cannot put something on nothing – it will collapse* (CRC J1 – S245).

19) *With the collapse of the possession charge in count one, the second count of supplying cannot stand* (CRC J1 – S246).

Finally, the use of a ceiling to conceptualise the case as a building is rooted in the idea that most buildings have ceilings. In example (20), the court conceptualised a case as building and the need to put a ceiling over that building. In simple terms, this type of building, as construed as a case, needs to be tightly sealed so that courts will strictly adhere to the period given to adjudicate on a specific case.

20) *In my view, the time has come for us to confront these delays by placing presumptive ceilings on types of cases to be followed by the prosecution and serve as a basis for trial judges to adopt more effective case management techniques ...* (CRC J1 – S222).

Ontological metaphor

AN ARTICLE IS A PRISON WARDEN

An ontological metaphor – personification⁵⁹ is employed within the context of the judgment of the case between *Axim vs Attorney-General* (CNC J2). In this judgment, the court interpreted the noun phrase “*Article*”, an abstract concept, in human terms, attributing it to characteristics typically associated with human beings. In doing so, the court drew upon human qualities such as the capacity to restrict and confine individuals. In example (21), the court conceptualised the *Article* as a prison warden, capable of restraining the Attorney-General from exercising its powers.

21) *He cannot, therefore, be restrained by any Article in the Constitution in any way in the lawful exercise of those functions by an enforcement order from this court* (CNC J2 – S99).

In addition, the use of the noun phrase “*fetter*” in example (22) conceptualises an *Article* as a prison warden. According to the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, a *fetter* is “a chain that is put around a prisoner’s hands or feet” to restrict his or her freedom.

22) *It is to be remembered that these documents do not belong to the Auditor-General (so the Article invoked cannot put a fetter on who else has access to them)* (CNC J2 – S52).

By attributing this ability of a prison warden to put a *fetter* on a prisoner to an *Article*, the court makes readers understand that anyone can get access to the said document under dispute because the document does not belong to the Attorney General, as expressed in examples (22). In other instances, though the *Article* has the power to restrain the defendant, it does not restrict him by putting a *fetter* on him in the exercise of the defendant’s mandate. Through this metaphorical lens, the court emphasised that the provisions within the *Article* possess a binding authority that curtails the rights and freedoms of individuals.

A RIGHT IS A FRAGILE OBJECT

A Right is conceptualised as a fragile object that is susceptible to breaking when it is not handled well. Through this conceptualisation, the judges called for the protection of the rights, especially those of the citizens in the country. In judgment (CRC J1), for instance, the judges recognise how fragile rights can be, thereby making them susceptible to being trampled upon; therefore, a need to protect them.

⁵⁹ Kordić, “Metaphors Lawyers Live By,” 1639–54.

23) *They are to ensure that the **rights** of the declarant, i.e., the accused, who is under restriction, **are not trampled upon** by the Police or the investigative agencies (CRC J1 – S186).*

The court also called for the protection of the rights of the accused person in example (38).

24) *These constitute the **rights** of all accused persons as have been **protected** by the 1992 Constitution” (CRC J1 – S187).*

The court recognised that the rights embedded within the constitution are akin to fragile objects, susceptible to fracture if mishandled or neglected, thereby necessitating their protection and preservation. For instance, the judges called for the protection of the right in examples (25) and (26). This metaphor was inferred from linguistic units such as “protection”.

25) *It must be emphasised, however, that ... **protection of this Constitutional right** in a member presiding in the absence of a Speaker and his or her duty to represent his or her constituents in the vote ... (CNC J1 – S223).*

26) *“Courts usually apply **the election code to protect**, not to defeat the right to vote (CVC J1 – S482).*

Oriental metaphor

AN ARTICLE IS AN ENTITY THAT IS UP

Studies acknowledge the prevalence of spatial metaphor in legal language.⁶⁰ Findings from Šeškauskienė indicate the presence of the vertical dimension of space, which is mostly manifested in linguistic expressions with ‘under’, ‘over’, ‘high’, and ‘low’. Similarly, the analysis of the judgment (CNC J1) reveals the judges’ inclination to depict *Articles* as superior, with their power to “override” other provisions in the Constitution. Here, the *Article* is understood as occupying a position of power or control (UP). In the context of the data examined, the spatial orientation ‘UP’ was employed as a means to understand that an entity rests atop another. For instance, in examples (27) and (28) respectively, the judges conceptualise an *Article* as occupying an authoritative position with the power to “override” and “overrule” a right of a presiding member.

27) *... From the foregoing dicta, we would conclude that an issue of enforcement or interpretation of a provision of the Constitution **under Article 118(1) (a)** (CNC J1 – S47).*

28) *It is on the basis of these reasons that we hold that the preliminary objection raised by the respondents herein should be **overruled** for the petition to be determined on the merits” (CVC J1 – S272).*

The prepositional phrase “under” shows that something lies beneath the *Article*. For instance, in examples (27), the judges try to show that an issue of enforcement or interpretation of a provision of the Constitution lies beneath the authority of Article 118(1) (a).

A RULE IS AN ENTITY THAT IS UP

In judgment (CVC J2), the court also formulated the notion that *Rule* is another entity that occupies the spatial field of “UP”. This metaphor holds true with the idea that people with authority or power occupy higher positions. This may be construed from the sitting position of traditional leaders in a gathering in Ghanaian culture, for example. In Ghana, traditional leaders normally sit on a pedestal that raises them above the ordinary people in a gathering. The high position occupied by these leaders is understood as they wield authority over their subjects. In the judgments, the judges used the prepositional

⁶⁰ Inesa Šeškauskienė, “Metaphor in Legal Translation: Space as a Source Domain in English and Lithuanian,” in *Metaphor in Legal Discourse*, ed. Inesa Šeškauskienė (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2022), 114–45.

phrase “under” in examples (29) and (30) to conceptualise rule (authority) as occupying a higher position, UP, with other institutions subservient to it.

29) *No application is made under rule 10, the sale shall become absolute/ If an application made under rule 10 is dismissed, the Court shall make an order confirming the sale (CVC J2 – S107).*

30) *After a sale of immovable property becomes absolute or is confirmed under this rule, the Court shall grant a certificate to the person who was declared the purchaser at the sale (CVC J2 – S109).*

PRINCIPLE IS AN ENTITY THAT IS DOWN

The idea that foundations, such as building foundations, are set on the ground below the human spatial field presents the understanding of *Principle* as an entity that is “DOWN”. From the prepositional phrase “upon” and the verb phrase “relied on”, the court conceptualises principle as a foundation on which the action of the court is set due to its special field of “DOWN”. This is exemplified in (31) where the court stood to act on an appeal.

31) *The principles upon which the court would act on an appeal against sentence were that it would not interfere with a sentence on the mere ground that if members of the court had been trying the appellant, they might have passed a somewhat different sentence (CRC J2 – S36).*

RQ2: How metaphors reflect cultural and social values and beliefs in Ghana

Lakoff and Johnson argue that one’s cultural values form a coherent system with the metaphorical concepts we live by.⁶¹ They contend that the most fundamental values in a culture will be coherent with the metaphorical structure of the most fundamental concepts in the culture. For instance, the metaphor “MORE IS UP” reflects how many cultures link upward movement with increases or improvement. This shows how physical experience influences language and behaviour. For Kövecses, the role of culture in the creation and interpretation of metaphors is not always universally fixed but rather influenced by cultural experiences and values.⁶² Consequently, different cultures may use unique metaphors to express the same abstract idea and draw on varied experiences and linguistic preferences. However, cultural values and metaphors do not always align perfectly, sometimes creating conflicts and diverse interpretations across societies.⁶³

From the foregoing argument, cultural values may change if the underlying metaphors change, but it may also depend on other factors, such as social, political, and economic conditions, as well as individual and collective agency. From the current study, the court employed several metaphors that have social and cultural implications. They include the journey, building, the special orientation metaphors, and personification. For instance, studies indicate that Ghanaian culture, like many other cultures worldwide, views a person’s life as comprising three primary phases: birth, life, and death. Birth is commonly seen as the moment an individual enters the world, and life is symbolised as a journey that begins with this arrival, while death represents the conclusion of this expedition. As a result, the author identified three metaphors: “BIRTH IS ARRIVAL,” “LIFE IS A JOURNEY,” and “DEATH IS DEPARTURE”.⁶⁴

Consequently, it is not surprising to find journey-related metaphors in the judgments of the Supreme Court of Ghana because Ghanaian culture perceives most processes and rituals as journeys. This cultural perspective extends to concepts like birth, life, death, and marriage, all of which are considered forms of rituals and seen as journeys. This cultural understanding of journeys finds validation in

⁶¹ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*.

⁶² Kövecses, *Metaphor in Culture: Universality and Variation*

⁶³ Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*. pp. 23-24.

⁶⁴ Esther Serwaah Afreh, “Nana Addo Dankwa Akuuffo-Addo’s Inaugural Address: Conceptual Metaphors, Metonymies and Values to Celebrate a Presidency,” *Journal for Research Scholars and Professionals of English Language Teaching* 6, no. 34 (November 24, 2022), p. 18 <https://doi.org/10.54850/jrspelt.6.34.006>.

expressions like “*ɔbra ye akwantu*” (life is a journey), “*akwantu mu nsen dɔɔso*” (issues in a journey are enormous), “*ɔkwantunii mmɔbrɔ*” (the sorry state of a traveller), and “*aware ne kwan ware*” (marriage is a long journey) in Akan; and “*gbaɲ ni ogbaɲ jee sheemɔ*” (life is a journey) and “*tsui shitoo ka adesu ya shinɔɲ*” (humility takes you far) in Ga, a language mostly spoken in the southern part of Ghana, particularly, the Greater Accra region.

In this study, the court conceptualises court proceedings as a journey because the proceedings are viewed as a process and a ritual that requires the parties involved in the suit to go through various stages to reach a favourable conclusion. The judges in their judgments likened the process of discovering facts in the case to embarking on a “winding journey.” This perception is influenced by the cultural notion of processes as journeys, and the judges view the proceedings as a process. Besides, the journey metaphor suggests that the process of litigation is often long and challenging, comparable to “*akwantu mu nsem*” (Challenges of life), but necessary to achieve the desired outcome.

In addition, the court recognises the competitive aspect of court proceedings and perceives it as a game where two opposing teams contend for victory, winning the case. Furthermore, in the adversarial system, the parties and their attorneys bear the responsibility of presenting evidence, questioning witnesses, and making legal arguments. The judge acts as a neutral arbiter, making decisions based on the evidence and legal arguments presented by the parties. They serve as referees, ensuring a fair trial, adherence to proper legal procedures, and the relevance and admissibility of evidence. Additionally, the judge may rule on points of law and provide instructions to the jury on the applicable legal principles. Given this perspective, judges, in their judgment writing, may naturally conceptualise the court proceedings as a contest due to the realisation of the parallel roles resembling a competition where the parties are seen as two different teams and the judges or the court as the referee.

In Ghanaian culture, a building serves as a significant symbol of people living together, often used as a metonym for a family. The term “*Mefie*” (my house) signifies “my family”.⁶⁵ The author emphasises that a building offers not only respect and security but also represents a crucial achievement. It is truly intriguing to witness how Ghanaians hold buildings in such high regard. This sentiment is succinctly captured in the Akan proverb: “*Yebisa wo fie, yemmisa wo sika*” (We ask about your house, not your money), highlighting the significance of buildings in Ghanaian culture. From the preceding arguments, it becomes evident that the judges in the judgments of the Supreme Court recognise the significance of buildings in Ghanaian culture. The court drew upon the characteristics of a building, such as having a ceiling and a solid foundation, to comprehend the various legal cases. The court recognised the significance of constructing a solid case, akin to building a house, by emphasising the paramount importance of securing a favourable verdict. As aptly observed by Van der Geest, buildings not only symbolise security but also hold a parallel notion in the court’s belief system. By building a case with a robust foundation, one inadvertently ensures the advantageous outcome of winning the case. This is probably the reason why in the case between Tetteh Samadzi and the Republic, the appellant won the case. The court, with the notion of a solid foundation, understood that the evidence alluded to the court by the appellant was strong enough to warrant his vindication.

Pitt and others posit that human spatial thinking is heavily shaped by culture and language.⁶⁶ They argue that different languages have distinct ways of conceptualising spatial relations, using either absolute frames of reference (e.g., north, south, east, west) or relative frames of reference (e.g., left, right, front, back). In Ghanaian culture, the “up” and “down” dichotomy is context-dependent. Sometimes, “up” and “down” can be associated with positivity and negativity, respectively. For example, the Akan expression “*w’agu m’anim ase*” (I have been disgraced) or “*ɔde m’anim aye fam*” (I have been disrespected) conceptualises the face “*anim*” as something glorious due to the upward bodily orientation of the face, while “*ase*” and “*fam*” (the ground) signify a downward spiral of diminishing a person’s status. However, in different contexts, the interpretation of up and down spatial orientation varies. In contrast to the above, the legal system in Ghana interprets the downward spiral not as negativity or lower status but as a solid

⁶⁵ Sjaak van der Geest, “Yebisa Wo Fie: Growing Old and Building a House in the Akan Culture of Ghana,” *Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology* 13, no. 4 (1998): 333–59, <https://doi.org/10.1023/a:1006563032706>.

⁶⁶ Benjamin Pitt et al., “Different Reference Frames on Different Axes: Space and Language in Indigenous Amazonians,” *Science Advances* 8, no. 47 (November 25, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.abp9814>.

foundation. This finding highlights the non-universality of the metaphor, demonstrating that while in some contexts “down” is associated with negativity, in others, it symbolises strength and a firm base.

Finally, the personification metaphor is a prevalent and widely recognised linguistic and cognitive phenomenon.⁶⁷ This metaphor carries cultural, social, and ideological significance. It involves attributing human characteristics, qualities, or actions to non-human entities, abstract concepts, or inanimate objects.⁶⁸ Kövecses argues that the personification metaphor exhibits cultural variations in terms of the entities or objects that are personified and the specific qualities assigned to them.⁶⁹

Many Ghanaian ethnic groups hold a deep-rooted belief that all elements of the universe possess a life force and spiritual essence. This belief extends to animals, plants, celestial bodies, and natural forces. The Akan people strongly believe in ancestral spirits and an interconnected spiritual world that coexists with the physical realm.⁷⁰ Therefore, through personification, Ghanaians imbue objects, animals, and natural elements with voices and personalities, fostering a personal connection with these spiritual entities. In the context of the Supreme Court judgments, it is possible that the judges, being integral members of Ghanaian society, have unconsciously embraced these cultural values. As a result, they attributed humanlike qualities to an entity (Article) in their judgments.

CONCLUSION

From the analysis of the data, it has become evident that the Supreme Court employs metaphors to conceptualise legal registers. These metaphors can be said to render their judgment accessible to individuals outside the legal system, who may lack an understanding of its technicalities. This was accomplished by drawing upon the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). It should be noted that all the types of metaphors put forward by Lakoff and Johnson – structural, orientational, and ontological metaphors – were utilised by the court. The court, through the application of structural metaphor, employed mappings that associated certain legal registers, namely “COURT,” “CASE,” and “COURT PROCEEDINGS,” with more concrete elements such as “SPORTS,” “BUILDING,” and “JOURNEY.” Moreover, through linguistic expressions, the progression towards a goal was conceptually represented as a forward or progressive movement. Kövecses observes that this metaphorical framework serves as the underlying basis for narratives of progress across diverse domains, significantly influencing our beliefs and expectations regarding the future.⁷¹

Furthermore, in accordance with the principles of the orientational metaphor,⁷² wherein the body’s spatial orientation and the arrangement of our thoughts are intertwined with another domain, the court employed metaphor to conceptualise various legal registers. Notably, ARTICLES, RULES, and LAW were construed as residing in an “UP” position, with the upward orientation symbolising authority and power, allowing for the ability to “override” and “overrule” previously established positions within the case. Conversely, other legal registers, including ARTICLES, PRINCIPLES, and EVIDENCE, were situated in a “DOWN” position, implying their foundational nature. It is imperative to acknowledge that the analysis yielded an understanding of legal language in terms of objects, aligning with the ontological metaphor type. Within this metaphorical framework, the court employs cognitive mapping techniques to project entities like fragile objects onto abstract concepts, such as *Rights*. Particularly, through the metaphorical lens of a fragile object, the court invoked the need to safeguard the *rights* of individuals.

Understanding these metaphors used in legal discourse has practical implications for improving communication clarity and public trust in the justice system. Recognising how judges employ metaphors such as journey, building, and game can help professionals to frame judgments and arguments in ways that make abstract legal concepts more accessible to a non-specialist audience. Training judges and lawyers to identify and manage metaphoric expressions can also minimise misinterpretation and foster

⁶⁷ Afreh, “Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo-Addo’s Inaugural Address,” Afreh and Ofosu, “The Language of Grief, pp. 253–82., Ofosu and Washew, *The Metaphoricity of Corruption*, pp. 2722–33., Šeškauskienė, “Metaphor in Legal Translation: pp. 114–45., Twardzisz, “The Metaphoricity of the Noun Law, pp. 1–20.

⁶⁸ Afreh, “Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo-Addo’s Inaugural Address,” Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*.

⁶⁹ Kövecses, *Metaphor in Culture: Universality and Variation*.

⁷⁰ Lauren Coyle Rosen, “Copresent Jurisdictions: Spirits, Theopolitics, and the Rise of Akan Spirituality in the United States,” *PoLAR Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 47, no. 1 (May 1, 2024): 76–87, <https://doi.org/10.1111/plar.12568>.

⁷¹ Kövecses, *Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory*.

⁷² Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, p. 461.

transparency. For the public, simplifying metaphorical reasoning enhances comprehension of court decisions, thereby bridging the gap between legal institutions and citizens and promoting confidence in judicial communication.

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ABOUT AUTHORS

Daniel Dwamena Ofosu is an Assistant Lecturer at the Abetifi Presbyterian College of Education. His research interests are generally in cognitive semantics, conceptual metaphor and multimodal metaphor theories, legal and political discourse, and translanguaging and language policy.

Prof. Esther Serwaah Afreh (PhD) is an Associate Professor of English at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology. She holds a PhD in Linguistics. Generally, her research has been in syntax, semantics, and cognitive semantics.