The semantic extension of *pe* (TO CUT) in Nzema communication

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Verbs of separation and material disintegration are a category of verbs commonly referred to as ‘CUT and BREAK’ (C&B) verbs (Guerssel et al., 1985). This class of verbs has sparked a lot of arguments and discussions in the literature (cf. Guerssel et al., 1985; Levin, 1993; Essegbey, 2007; Lüpke, 2007; Majid et al., 2007; 2008; Hsiao, 2015; Agyepong, 2017). In Nzema, *pe* ‘to cut’ is the prototypical CUT- verb which describes actions that result in object separation/disintegration; usually carried out by using bladed instruments. This paper discusses the semantic extensions of *pe* ‘to cut’ in Nzema discourse. The paper employs the Cognitive Approach of Semantic Change (Sweetser, 1990) in exploring the semantic properties of *pe*, based on the cognitive-conceptual, environmental, and socio-cultural experiences of the people of Nzema. Data were obtained from primary and secondary sources. The paper demonstrates that the various extended usages have a close relationship with the original meaning of the verb. The paper also finds that the primary sense of *pe* ‘to cut’ evokes several contextual interpretations, such as *pe awole* ‘cut childbearing’ (to stop procreation), *pe a zule* ‘cut river’ (to travel overseas), *pe s ni* ‘cut his/her mother’ (to insult one’s mother) among others. We note that the various meaning extensions of the verb are dependent on the context of use and/or communication.

Keywords: Nzema, cognitive semantics, separation events, socio-cultural experiences.

1. Introduction

This paper seeks to discuss the semantic extensions of the verb *pe* ‘to cut’ in Nzema communication. The paper looks at the basic denotations of the verb and its associative meanings; situating the discussions in the lens of cognitive semantics. The ‘conceptual meaning’ of a lexical item, as Yule (2010: 113) proffers, “covers those basic, essential components of meaning that are conveyed by the literal use of a word”. The author further notes that, ‘associative meanings’ are other connotations that different people might attach to words. In semantic analysis, many scholars including Baruah (1991), Thakur (1999), Cruse (2011) and others have used the term ‘polysemy’ to refer to linguistic phenomenon where a word has two or more related meanings. In most natural languages, some words have basic or primary meanings and also connote other extended meanings. The ‘primary meaning’ that is derived from words which have metaphorical extensions is also described as the ‘default meaning’ (Cruse, 2011). Sharifian (2014: 118) also opines that “the meaning of many lexical items of human languages lend themselves best to cognitive schemas that are abstracted from cultural experiences”. He notes that many of such lexical items serve as labels for categories which are culturally constructed and established.

The people who live in a particular society have their own notions about the world (Baruah, 1991). In essence, words in human languages of different cultures may be assigned different connotative meanings, which Baruah (1991: 134) refers to as ‘CULTURAL MEANING’. These meanings are said to be best conceived by such specific speech community, owing to some unique cultural and linguistic patterns of the people as a group. Thus, one cannot easily understand and
appreciate the values, beliefs, customs and the general worldview of a people without having a fair knowledge about the culture and linguistic system of the people (Goddard, 2006). The purpose of this study, therefore, is to discuss the basic meaning and extended-contextual usages of *pe* ‘to cut’, a prototypical CUT-verb in Nzema.

### 1.1 Nzema language and people

Nzema refers to both the language and its speakers. Geographically, Nzema people occupy the South-West part of the Western Region of Ghana, West Africa. The Nzemaland extends from Ahanta to the Ghana-Ivory Coast border (Annan, 1980; 1994). Nzema belongs to the Kwa branch of the Niger-Congo language family; which is spoken mainly in the South-West part of the Western Region of Ghana and some part of La Côte d’Ivoire. The Ghana Population and Housing Census carried out in 2021, revealed that the total number of Nzema was 342,090.

Nzema and Akan (Twi) share some verbal similarities as evidenced from the following words in Nzema and Akan respectively: *su* and *su* ‘to cry’, *bu* and *bu* ‘to break’, *sa* and *sa* ‘to fetch’, *biza* and *bisa* ‘to ask’, *kɔ* and *kɔ* ‘to go’ etc. (see also Yakub, 2018: 45). The Nzema basic syllable structure is V, CV, and N; where N represents a syllabic nasal (Annan, 1980: 85). The basic clause structure of Nzema (Kwaw, 2008) exhibits the (SVO) pattern as indicated in example 1:

\[
(1) \quad \text{Me ze e-dɔ kalɛ.}
\]

1SG.POSS father EMPH.PERF-buy car.SG

‘My father has bought a car’

In example (1), *me ze* ‘my father’ is the Subject-agent NP that undertakes the activity of buying, whereas *kalɛ* ‘car’ represents the Object-patient in the construction.

### 2 Previous studies on verbs

Cross-linguistically, studies on verbs have received quite a maximum attention. There are enormous studies specifically on the extensions of ‘eat and drink’ (ingestion verbs) in the literature. Notable among such extensive studies on ingestion verbs are the works of Prins (1993) in Ewe, Newman (1997) in English, Atintono and Adjei (2008) in Ewe and Gurenc, Aikhenvald (2009) in Manambu, Newman and Aberra (2009) in Amharic, Yamaguchi (2009) in Japanese, Adjei (2013) in Gbe, Otoo (2017) in Ga, Agyepong et al. (2017) in Akan among many others. Several works have also had their focus on the basic and figurative uses of human body parts and verbs of perception. Some of these works have been done extensively in Akan by Agyekum (2002; 2013; 2015a, 2015b, 2015c; 2016a; 2016b), in Ga by Otoo (2018), in Kasem by Umar and Dogbey (2019). Atintono (2013) investigates the extensions of posture verbs in Gurenc. The aforementioned studies are significant to the current paper because they present insights to understanding the literal and extended usages of consumption verbs, perception verbs and posture verbs; which further provide immense assistance to our analysis and discussion on the semantic extensions of *pe*, CUT-verb in Nzema.

Some studies have specifically discussed ‘CUT and BREAK’ (separation) verbs. For example, Ameka and Essegbey (2007) discussed the C&B verbs in Ewe and asserted that BREAK verbs participate in the causative/inchoative alternation in which the transitive sentence expresses an agent acting on a patient/theme while its intransitive counterpart expresses the theme entering into a state (e.g., *John broke the cup vs. the cup broke*) whereas CUT-verbs do not participate in the causative/inchoative alternation. Instead, their intransitive counterparts, if a language allows it, are only supposed to be middle constructions (*the bread cuts easily*) (Ameka and Essegbey, 2007: 241). Ameka and Essegbey showed that C&B verbs in Ewe are grouped into four classes, which they
referred to as highly agentive, agentive, non-agentive, and highly non-agentive. The authors indicated that highly agentive and highly non-agentive-verbs behave like CUT-verbs and BREAK-verbs respectively. Agentive and non-agentive verbs sometimes behave like CUT-verbs, and other times like BREAK-verbs. As a result, they appear to pose a problem for Guerssel et al.’s (1985) hypothesis. They argued that the grammar of Ewe, which requires that events involving causal agents always occur in the transitive, takes care of this phenomenon. Therefore, there is no need to postulate ‘polysemous’ pairs for these verbs.

Based on data from Tafi, a Ghana-Togo Mountain language, Bobuafor (2018) explored the morpho-syntactic properties and extended semantic readings of Tafi CUT and BREAK verbs in relation to the suggested generalisations by Guerssel et al. The author posited that CUT-verbs in Tafi include té ‘cut/slash’, bhui ‘cut’ and yá ‘cut’. She then noted that, like Ameka and Essegbey (2007) found for Ewe, it is only a highly agentive verb té ‘cut/slash’ which cannot occur intransitively. The other CUT-verbs bhui and yá have intransitive counterparts. Thus, the study demonstrated that the hypothesis concerning the CUT-verbs needs to be re-examined. Drawing on the proposed scale of agentivity for CUT and BREAK verbs by Ameka and Essegbey (2007), the study suggested that the agentive CUT-verbs bhui and yá occur in intransitive constructions when the separation event being described does not require an instrument. Further exploring the extended semantic interpretations of the agentive CUT-verb bhui in Tafi, compared to the uses of equivalent agentive CUT-verbs in Ewe, Ga and Akan, it was revealed that some of the readings are shared only with Ewe, the dominant lingua franca of the Tafi, e.g., ‘cut a case’ implies ‘judge a case’. Others occurred in the four languages, e.g., ‘cut breast’ implies ‘wean a child’ in terms of their usage outside the physical domain.

In another study, Atintono (2019) discussed the semantics of separation verbs in Gurenɛ and also tested the generalisation by Guerssel et al. (1985) that BREAK-verbs but not CUT-verbs participate in the causative/inchoative alternation. He observed that the separation verbs can be classified into three subclasses CUT, BREAK and opening verbs based on their semantic properties. The CUT-verbs as noted require the use of a sharp instrument in their semantics but the BREAK verbs do not necessarily require an instrument. Instead, the manner of the separation is crucial for the semantics of the latter. The opening verbs describe separation events that result in the detachment of one part of an object with minimal or no destruction of the other part and can often be reversible. An important finding in the paper, as the author noted, is that most CUT-verbs in Gurenɛ participate in the causative/inchoative alternation while all the BREAK-verbs and Opening verbs also participate in the alternation (cf. Atintono, 2019: 29).

Agyepong and Osam (2020) examined the semantic properties and argument realisation potentials of four verbs of separation twá ‘to cut’, bú ‘to break’, bɔ́ ‘to crack’ and pàɛ́ ‘to split’ in Akan. They indicated that, twá ‘to cut’, which is the prototypical CUT-verb in Akan, describes separation events that are carried out with a bladed instrument. The three BREAK-verbs bú ‘to break’, bɔ́ ‘to break, to crack’ and pàɛ́ ‘to split’, describe breaking events that primarily occur without an instrument. Instances where twá ‘to cut’ occurs in the one-place/intransitive construction were further discussed. The authors provided evidence to show that the one-place construction in which the Akan verb twá ‘to cut’ occurs is not passive but rather inchoative Contrary to Guerssel et al’s (1985) proposal that when CUT-verbs occur intransitively in languages, they are passives—position that is contrary to Guerssel et al’s (1985) proposal that when CUT-verbs occur intransitively in languages, they are passives. Agyepong and Osam also explored the contexts where the BREAK-verbs bú ‘to break’, bɔ́ ‘to break, or to crack’ and pàɛ́ ‘to split’ do not lend themselves to be used in the one-place construction and demonstrated that when these three BREAK-verbs describe events that necessarily require the use of a (bladed) instrument, then their use in the one-place construction cannot derive an ‘enter-into-state’ interpretation.
Among these works, Bobuafor’s (2018) work seems to have a close resemblance with the current study, as we seek to also examine the extended contextual interpretations of \( pe \), the CUT-verb in Nzema beyond its basic meaning. These previous studies are insightful contributions to scholarly works on verbs in terms of cognitive semantics. The Nzema data further presents interesting insights and deepens our understanding on the phenomenon; shedding more light on how speakers of Nzema extend the basic semantic attributes of \( pe \) ‘to cut’ to describe many abstract phenomena in their day-to-day communication. Essentially, the current paper tries to expand the frontiers of the existing works in the semantic domain of separation events.

The paper is theoretically based on Sweetser’s (1990) Cognitive Semantic Approach. Sweetser (1990) observes that linguistic expressions are grounded and rooted in human cognitive experience. Sweetser believes that the human cognitive structure is significant and seems to be inevitable since semantic and lexical polysemy cannot be understood independently. According to Sweetser’s model, the human mind is metaphorically structured, and that our knowledge and experiences about things and events that are well known help us to conveniently transfer concepts to other events which are not so familiar. The model will help account for the extended semantic readings of \( pe \) ‘to cut’ in Nzema, based on cognitive and cultural experiences.

3. **Data and methods**

The paper adopts the qualitative research approach in unveiling the basic and extended usages of \( pe \) ‘to cut’ in discourse interaction among the Nzema. It employs a multi-method approach of data elicitation. We hand-recorded many of the metaphorical expressions of \( pe \), ‘to cut’ in a data collection note book, during natural communicative events and social interactions. For instance, at the market places and on buses within the Nzema locality, we wrote down some of the data from spontaneous speeches. We also tape-recorded some of these expressions during traditional gatherings/ceremonies among the Nzema, such as funerals and arbitrations. In these endeavours, we sought the speakers’ consents and explained to them the purpose of recording their conversations. While listening to Nzema discussions on radio (e.g. Ankobra FM and West End Radio) both situated within the Nzema zone, we paid particular attention and wrote down some of the data for this study. Apart from these instances, additional data were also taken from Nzema literary books such as Ezenrane (1992), Kwesi (1996), Blay (1997) and Kwaw (2012). These secondary materials (prose and drama books) were found necessary because they contained fascinating story lines with some proverbs, idioms and other expressions in which the extended usages of \( pe \) could be traced.

Having assembled these data from both primary and secondary sources, we engaged four (4) native respondents, 2 males and 2 females aged between 65 and 75 years for semi-structured interviews. They were purposively selected, because we trusted that their ages, knowledge and experiences could place them in a better position to provide reliable information on the culturally conceptualised extensions of \( pe \) ‘to cut’ in Nzema discourse. We contacted these interviewees individually in their homes at their convenient hours and crosschecked the data at hand by eliciting useful clarifications on the extended usages of the verb under investigation. At every meeting, the interview proceedings were audio-recorded, using a portable android phone. The recorded information was later transcribed and translated for the analysis; categorising the data according to relevant thematic areas that were seen to be connected. Our intuitive knowledge as indigenous speakers also enriched the choice of data and the analysis/discussions.
4. Some collocations of *pe ‘to cut’: The case of human body parts and crop reaping

Some human body parts and the activities of crop harvesting are associated with the verb *pe ‘to cut’. These combinations aptly showcase the transitivity nature of the CUT-verb in Nzema. Consider the sentences in (2a) and (2b):

(2) a. Dɔkɛta ne ɛ-pe Kɔfi asa.  
   Doctor DEF PERF-cut PSN hand  
   ‘The doctor has cut Kofi’s hand’ (Kofi is amputated).

   b. Eyazɔnlenli ne pe-le bana dɔnwo.  
   Farmer DEF cut-PST plantain many  
   ‘The farmer harvested a lot of plantain.’

In example (2a), doctor is the Subject-agent that undertakes the cutting event. The verb *pe, selects the Object-patient Kɔfi asa ‘Kofi’s hand’ to affirm its transitive use. Similarly, in (2b), eyazɔnlenli ‘farmer’ occupies the Subject-agent position, and the Object-patient bana ‘plantain’ occurs after the verb *pe. In this example, the quantifier dɔnwo ‘many’, exists to perform an adjectival function, that is, to describe and inform us about the amount (number) of plantain that were harvested.

Further instances where *pe can combine with other nominal entities (in terms of body parts and crop reaping) are shown in tables 1 and 2 respectively. For instance, as can be seen in table 1, *pe ekɔmele ‘cut neck’, *pe esale ‘cut hand’ *pe toale ‘cut penis’, pe enrinli ‘cut hair’ and pe e sa ati ‘cut finger nails’ occur in transitive constructions. Each construction has an implied (covert) Subject-agent wɔnɔ ‘you’ that precedes the CUT-verb with ekɔmele ‘neck’, esale ‘hand’, toale ‘penis’, enrinli ‘hair’ and e sa ati ‘finger nails’ as the respective Object-patient NPs occurring directly after the verb. These are further illustrated in table 1 below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Body part</th>
<th>English gloss</th>
<th>Free translation</th>
<th>Plausible instrument</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>*pe ekɔmele</td>
<td>cut neck</td>
<td>to slaughter</td>
<td>cutlass, knife, axe, etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*pe esale</td>
<td>cut hand</td>
<td>to amputate</td>
<td>cutlass, knife, axe, etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*pe toale</td>
<td>cut penis</td>
<td>to circumcise (a male)</td>
<td>blade, pair of scissors, etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pe pe enrinli</td>
<td>cut hair</td>
<td>to trim one’s hair</td>
<td>blade, pair of scissors, etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pe pe e sa ati</td>
<td>cut finger nails</td>
<td>to cut one’s finger nails</td>
<td>blade, pair of scissors, etc</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: ‘Cutting’ in relation to human body parts

Table 1 shows some activities of *pe ‘cut’, that are related to human body parts. Other instances of *pe ‘to cut’ in connection with crop harvesting are represented in table 2:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kinds of crop/plant</th>
<th>English gloss</th>
<th>Free translation</th>
<th>Plausible instrument</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>*pe akenla</td>
<td>cut sugarcane</td>
<td>to harvest sugarcane</td>
<td>cutlass, knife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*pe bana/konwo</td>
<td>cut plantain/banana</td>
<td>to harvest plantain</td>
<td>cutlass, knife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*pe kuku siak</td>
<td>cut a bunch of coconut fruits</td>
<td>to harvest coconut</td>
<td>cutlass, knife</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: ‘Cutting’ in relation to the harvesting of crops

The events described in table 2 also demonstrate some combinatorial instances of *pe ‘to cut’, which are mainly concerned with the act of reaping the specific crops/plants mentioned in the table. A
detailed discussion on the possible collocants of *pɛ* to derive other contextual semantic readings is presented in section 5.

4.1 **The basic (literal) meaning of *pɛ* ‘to cut’**. Basically, *pɛ* ‘to cut’ in Nzema semantically denotes the act of using a sharp instrument such as a blade, a pair of scissors, a knife, a cutlass, an axe, or a broken bottle etc., to either make a mere mark, or completely separate an object apart. The verb is used transitively in Nzema. This is to say that, in a syntactic argumentation (Aarts, 2001), the verb actually requires an Object-patient to arrive at a meaningful interpretation as further exemplified in (3), (4) and (5):

(3) Koasi *pɛ*-le baka ne.  
PSN cut-PST tree DEF  
‘Koasi cut the stick/tree’.

(4) Dadeɛ ne ɛ-*pɛ* Adwo.  
Knife DEF EMPH.PERF-cut PSN  
‘The knife has cut Adwo’.

(5) Raalɛ ne *pɛ*-le abɔnkye ne nrɛnlande.  
Woman DEF cut-PST goat DEF cutlass  
‘The woman cut the goat with a cutlass’

The utterances in (3), (4) and (5) exemplify the basic usage of *pɛ* ‘to cut’; where *Kofi* ‘personal name’, *dadeɛ* ‘knife’ and *raalɛ* ‘woman’ respectively are the Subject-agent NPs with *baka* ne ‘the tree’, *Adwo* ‘personal name’ and *abɔnkye* ‘goat’ as the Object-patient NPs. It is important, however, to note that the basic notion of *pɛ* is ‘inherently’ associated with some properties that can be best conceived through critical reflection and cognition. These inherent semantic properties help us to arrive at the various extended contextual interpretations beyond the literal sense of *pɛ*, as schematised below:

4.1.1 **Some properties that enhance the contextual interpretation of *pɛ***

+ **pain**: (e.g., basically, when an NP that receives a cut is animate; either a human or an animal, the effect of ‘cutting’ is conceived to be an infliction of some amount of pain and discomfort on that animate entity which occupies the Object-patient slot as can be observed above in examples (4) and (5)).
+ **opening** (e.g., basically, when an object, say a sod is cut, we observe that a gap is created, and a way is opened. Again, when the carpenter’s saw, for instance, is used to cut wood, the wood is made to split; thereby creating a gap/a way in-between).
+ **absolute separation** (e.g., basically, when a tree is ‘cut down’ (felled), we notice that the stump which is firmly grounded in the soil becomes completely separated from the trunk that holds the branches and leaves. Here, we can observe that the two parts of the tree are widely separated apart).
+ **cessation** (sometimes, when ‘cutting’ takes place, discontinuity occurs).

– **contact/attachment**: (e.g., when a sharp object is used to cut one’s skin, we observe at least, a disconnection/detachment of the skin at the position that is cut; even if an absolute separation of a body part does not take place).

1 In examples (4) and (5), the act of cutting actually inflicts some sort of pain, suffering and discomfort on the animate entities *Adwo* ‘personal name’ and *abɔnkye* ‘goat’ respectively.
Therefore, in the following section, we will show that these inherent semantic properties of the verb *pe* (as indicated above) are ‘intelligently’ and ‘purposively’ transferred by Nzema-speakers to talk about many abstract notions in their daily conversations. In so doing, our discussions shall hinge on the extensions of these semantic associations of the verb in order to showcase the link between the basic meaning of the verb and its extended usage in a more or less abstract sense.

5. **Data analysis: Extended contextual interpretations of *pe* ‘to cut’ in Nzema**

This section focuses on the various extended usages of *pe* ‘to cut’ in Nzema. In the data presentation, we provide the sentence in the local language, followed by interlinear glossing, and a literal translation in English which is put in single quotation marks; whereas the contextual meaning (interpretation) is kept in parenthesis. Here, the inherent semantic properties of *pe* ‘to cut’ that shall be extended to explain the various contextual interpretations are: (i) ‘inflicting some pain on animate entities’, (ii) ‘opening/ creating a gap’, (iii) ‘separating widely/ completely’ and (iv) ‘causing a disconnection and detachment’ and (v) ‘causing cessation/ discontinuity’. Our discussion begins in section 5.1 as follows:

5.1 **Describing the act of insulting a person.** Cross-linguistically, it is noted that **CUT** and **BREAK** verbs tend to have physical uses where they describe prototypically separation caused in the material integrity of objects. However, they also tend to occur in collocations where the affected objects do not have material integrity as such (c.f. Bobuafor, 2018). In such contexts, the expressions tend to have interpretations different from physical cutting and breaking (Spalek, 2015). Among the Nzema, for instance, the verb *pe*, ‘to cut’ is used to imply the act of someone insulting another person, as can be seen in example 6a:

(6) a. Kakula raale ne pe-le ɔ nli anom.  
Child woman DEF cut-PST 3SG.POSS mother yesterday  
‘The girl cut her mother yesterday’ (The girl insulted her mother yesterday).

b.* Kakula raale ne va-le dade ne pe-le ɔ nli.  
Child woman DEF take-PST knife cut-PST 3SG.POSS mother  
‘The girl took a knife and cut her mother’.

In (6a), it could be observed that ɔ *nli* ‘her mother’ is the NP constituent that occupies the Object-patient position. Obviously, as human, the mother who receives the insults from her child would feel embarrassed and disturbed. In other words, the insult causes some displeasure, discomfort and pain in the mother. This has a close semantic relation to the default (basic) meaning of the verb *pe* ‘to cut’, which actually tends to inflict pain in case the Object-patient entity is animate as indicated above in examples (4) and (5). It is worth explaining that example (6a) in Nzema does not suggest that the mother was cut with a sharp instrument as may be understood in English, for instance. In Nzema discourse, however, the utterance in (6a) actually means that the girl rained insults on her mother. To clearly make a distinction, and to indicate that an Object-patient entity has been cut with a sharp instrument, the exact instrument must be mentioned in the utterance as shown in (6b).

5.2 **Describing the phenomenon of exceeding a limit.** The verb *pe*, ‘to cut’ is also employed in Nzema discourse to describe an excessive amount of substance contained in another substance. Here, the idea of cessation and/or discontinuity associated with the event of ‘cutting’ is extended to arrive at such interpretation. Let us see examples in 7:
(7)  

a. Ngyenle ε-pe subue ne.  
Salt EMPH.PERF-cut soup DEF  
‘Salt has cut the soup’.

b. Dazia ε-pe subue ne.  
Pepper EMPH.PERF-cut soup DEF  
‘Pepper has cut the soup’.

In (7a) and (7b), pe is used to imply that the required amount of salt and pepper respectively in the soup have exceeded the normal limit. Here, the discontinuity interpretation or feature that is associated with pe ‘to cut’ plays a role in arriving at these interpretations. When pepper and salt ‘cut’ the soup (become excessive in the soup), the soup does not continue to be delicious; in other words, it ceases to be enjoyable. We suggest that one striking semantic feature of soup is that it is an NP that must be + deliciousness. Thus, when an agent, such as salt becomes extremely excess in the soup, it causes the soup not to continue to be delicious.

5.3 Describing the phenomenon of bringing an activity to an end. In Nzema communication, pe is further employed to indicate that a certain event no longer takes place. The interpretation in this category implies that a person or a group of people have actually stopped performing certain activities, and that they are no more in touch with such activities. The critical thing about the types of NPs that combine with the verbs to derive this interpretation is that they denote events and processes that are durational i.e. last for a period, has temporal sequences etc. The use of the CUT-verb in combination with these NPs indicates an interruption/ cessation of these events. Consider the examples in 8a-f:

(8)  

a. Mieza nee Abizi ε-pe manzonle ne azo.  
PSN CONJ PSN EMPH.PERF-cut litigation DEF POST  
‘Mieza and Abizi have cut the litigation’ (They have ceased the litigation)

b. Be-pe butule ne azo  
2PL-cut quarrel DEF POST  
‘You people must cut the quarrel’ (You people must cease the quarrel)

c. Raalɛ ne ε-pe fualɛ.  
Woman DEF EMPH.PERF-cut menstruation  
The woman has cut menstruation’ (She has had her menopause).

d. Raalɛ ne ε-pe awolɛ.  
Woman DEF EMPH.PERF-cut birth  
‘The woman has cut child birth’ (The woman has ceased procreation).

e. Raalɛ ne ε-pe ɔ ra ne nyɛfonlɛ.  
Woman DEF EMPH.PERF-cut 3SG.POSS baby DEF breastfeeding  
‘The woman has cut her baby breastfeeding’ (Baby has ceased breastfeeding).

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2 We are grateful to an anonymous reviewer for pointing out this to us to straighten our line of argument.
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In (8a) – (8f), *pe* is deployed to mean that the various events such as litigating, quarrelling, menstruating, childbearing, breastfeeding and bed-wetting are not taking place again. In these extensions, there is the concept of separation and disconnection which are transferred from the basic (literal) denotation of the verb as explained in section 4.1 above. In (8a), for instance, the meaning of *pe* ‘to cut’ has been extended to achieve the interpretation that *Mieza* and *Abizi* have no connection with litigation anymore. In other words, it is conceived that both litigants have separated/isolated themselves from litigation; just as sometimes, in a more concrete or physical act, when an object is cut with a sharp instrument to cause isolation/disconnection. In Nzema society also, when two or more people engage in verbal conflict or quarrel, other people around try to calm their tempers by simply saying *bepe butule ne aza* ‘you people should cut the quarrel’, which means (they should stop quarrelling) as exemplified in (8b). In (8c) and (8d), *pe* ‘to cut’ is used to imply that the woman has ceased menstruation and procreation respectively. In essence, we conceptualise that the woman no longer engages in those activities. In (8e) and (8f), there is also the concept of cessation, where the child stops breastfeeding and bed-wetting. Here, again, the critical thing about the types of NPs that combine with the verb to derive this interpretation is that they denote events and processes that are durational i.e. last for a period, have temporal sequences etc. The use of the cut verb *pe* in combination with these NPs indicates an interruption/cessation of these events.

5.4 To indicate movement/departure. In Nzema communication, *pe* ‘to cut’ can also be extended to describe a person’s movement from one place to another. Here, the physical act of cutting an object to result in an absolute/ a wider separation is being mapped onto these conceptualisations. Let us see some examples below:

5.4.1 Talking about travelling overseas, banishment and stepping out for a while. In (9a), (9b) and (9c), we present extended usages of the verb to indicate the act of travelling overseas, banishment and going out for just a while respectively.

(9)

a. Kofi ba-pe azule evole bieko.
   PSN FUT-cut river year next
   ‘Kofi will cut river next year’ (Kofi will travel abroad next year).

b. Belemgbunli ne e-pe Kofi azule.
   Chief DEF EMPH.PERF-cut PSN river
   ‘The chief has cut Kofi river’ (The chief has banished Kofi).

c. Me-ba-pe me nwo ekyii.
   1SG-FUT-cut 1SG self small
   ‘I will cut myself small’ (I will travel for a while).

In pragmatic sense, these activities such as litigating, quarrelling, menstruating, childbearing, breastfeeding and bed-wetting are presupposed to have been ongoing before they ceased to recur.

It is also possible among the Nzema to try to persuade and calm down the tempers of people who are into serious verbal assaults by simply saying *begyakyi butule ne* ‘you people should stop quarrelling’.

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3 In pragmatic sense, these activities such as litigating, quarrelling, menstruating, childbearing, breastfeeding and bed-wetting are presupposed to have been ongoing before they ceased to recur.

4 It is also possible among the Nzema to try to persuade and calm down the tempers of people who are into serious verbal assaults by simply saying *begyakyi butule ne* ‘you people should stop quarrelling’.
Among the Nzema, when a person travels overseas or moves from Nzemaland (or Ghana) to any other country, the person is said to have ‘cut’ a river. Thus, Kofi bape azule evo le bieko, which is translated literally to mean that ‘Kofi will cut river next year’ as in (9a), implies that Kofi will travel to another country the following year. The link between the basic sense of the verb pe ‘to cut’, which relates to causing a disconnection or separating an object apart and its extended meaning which describes the act of travelling abroad could be observed to be closely related. This is because when one travels overseas, it is conceptualised that the person is separated from his home; creating a wide gap between his home and the new destination where he finds himself. Thus, it is conceived that Kofi would have to cross several nations and for that matter rivers before arriving at the new destination. In (9b), pe is used to express that Kofi is removed from the community (banished). Among the Nzema, when one indulges in social vices and immoralities, such that the folks can no longer tolerate such unpleasant attitude, the person can be sacked from the community. Since the chief is the most rightful person empowered to pronounce the banishment, the utterance in (9b) is often common to express the phenomenon. Figuratively, to ‘cut Kofi river’, is likened to separating and disconnecting him from the society since he is compelled to go and settle at a different locality. In (9c), pe as it occurs in mebape me nwo ekyii ‘I will cut myself small’ implies that I will leave my premises for just a while (very short time), and that I will not travel very far; often not going outside my own country. In such an utterance, ekyii (a while/a short time) is usually present to actually indicate that the movement and for that matter the time to be spent is going to be very limited. Crucially, it is conceived that I will be separated from my premises, therefore underscoring the close semantic relation between the original verb and its extended usage.

5.4.2 Talking about the act of covering/travelling a long distance. In the process of embarking on a journey, one may either travel a very long or somewhat short distance. In Nzema communication, therefore, the verb pe ‘to cut’ is employed to indicate that one has covered or will have to cover a long distance either on foot or by bus. We present an example of this interpretation of pe in 10a:

(10) a. Wɔ-pe adenle tendenle ɛne.  
2SG.PERF-cut road long today  
‘You have cut a long road today’ (You have travelled a long distance today).

b. Me-tia adenle tendenle dahuu.  
1SG-walk.HAB road long always  
‘I walk a long distance everyday’.

In (10a), it is conceptualised that the person who embarked on the journey had actually travelled through several villages, towns, cities and perhaps nations, whether on foot or by bus. Thus, it is obvious that the traveller is widely separated from his/her home or wherever he/she lived before undertaking such a trip. It is worth noting that the extended meaning of pe as used in (10a) caters for both means of travelling, (i.e. on foot and by motor vehicle). In order to clearly distinguish

5 It must be noted that, expressing the sense of banishment requires an obligatory Subject-agent to cause the Object-patient to move from one community to another community as illustrated in (9b), where the chief causes Kofi to leave his former community. This syntactic phenomenon is required to distinguish the notion of banishment from the sense of travelling overseas, in that the structure of the latter is such that Kofi rather acts as Subject-agent who does the travelling himself.

6 As a similar explanation has been provided in section 5.1, mebape me nwo ekyii, which literally means ‘I will cut myself small’ does not mean to cut my body with a sharp instrument, unless the particular instrument used to do the cutting is stated as seen in sentences (5) and (6b).
between both means of travelling, the utterance must involve any of the key words *tia* ‘walk’ or *diale* ‘walked’ or *badia* ‘will walk’ etc. in the case of travelling on foot as in 10b.

5.4.3 *Talking about the act of crossing a road/river.* In Nzema discourse, *pɛ* is further used as a matter of meaning extension to describe the act of crossing a road or river to the other side as in (11a) and (11b) respectively:

(11) a. Nrenyia ɛrelera ne kola pɛ kale adenle ne.
Man old DEF AUX.can cut car road DEF
‘The old man can cut the lorry road’ (The old man can cross the road).

b. Ye-pɛ azule na ye-a-dwu ɛya fofolɛ ne anu.
1PL-cut.HAB river CONJ 1PL-CONS-reach farm new DEF POST
‘We cut a river’ before we reach the new farm’.
(We cross a river/stream before getting to the new farm).

In (11a), we can conceptualise that the verb is extended to describe the act of crossing the road; which relates to separating the road in an abstract sense. In other words, moving from one side of the road (a lorry road for instance) to the other side is conceived as ‘cutting the road’ because the road is perceived to be divided into two in an abstract sense. In a similar vein, (11b) implies separating the river when one moves from one bank to the other bank of the river, either by a canoe or on foot.

5.4.4 *Describing the concept of separating the dead from the living.* In Nzema culture, the soul of the deceased (ghost) is believed to be separated from the living souls when friends and other relatives of the deceased are allowed to put some amount of money in a plate that is often placed beside the dead body while laid in state. This token amount is referred to as *supele ezukoa* ‘money for cutting the river’ (money for crossing the river). This is exemplified in 12:

(12) Saa ɛ-wu a ɛ-n-va ezukoa ɛ-n-go kyese supele
COND 2SGG-die PART 2SG-NEG-take money 2SG-NEG-go unless river.cut
‘If you die, you don’t take money along except money to cut the river’.
(The dead don’t need money except money to cross river to the spiritual world).

The Nzema believe that there is a river between the world of the living and that of the dead. Thus, anybody who dies needs a little amount of money to be paid at the river bank before he/she could cross it. This process of crossing the river from the physical world to the spiritual world, (as per the cultural conceptualisation of the Nzema) is also described as *supele* ‘cutting the river’. This figurative use of the verb *pɛ* ‘to cut’ in (12) is as a result of the fact that crossing the river is associated with cutting and dividing it into two parts, which is conceived in a more abstract sense. The Nzema again use *pɛ* ‘cut’ in this regard because the deceased (ghost) is perceived to be separated from the living, since the literal/original meaning of cut is characterised by separation of an object. In other words, the link between the dead and the living is cut.

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7 It is prudent to note that the *pɛ* ‘cut’ extensions and interpretations are largely ‘context dependent’. For instance, to cut a river as discussed in (9a) is meant to indicate the act of travelling overseas, whereas cut a river as in (11b) indicates the act of moving from one bank of the river/stream to the other bank. The difference in the two contexts (9a & 11b) of using the verb figuratively can be well captured when the actual destination (the new farm) to where one is crossing the river is mentioned overtly as seen in (11b).
5.5 Describing the creation of avenue/opportunity. Another interesting extension of *pe* ‘cut’ in Nzema discourse unfolds when someone’s behaviour paves way for other people to follow suit. For instance, among the Nzema, if an elderly sibling does something for the younger siblings to act the same way, the elder person can be said to have ‘cut the road’ for the rest to follow in the same direction. Here, the kind of opportunity that may be created for others to emulate may be good; such as learning hard to succeed in an examination or could be bad; such as becoming pregnant or being rude, truant, and a thief among others to result in school dropout. These are exemplified in the utterances in (13a) and (13b) respectively:

(13) a. Aku a *pe-le* adenle maa-nle Aya ye-le Kakula kpalɛ a.
    PSN FOC cut-PST road give-PST PSN do-PST child good PART
    ‘It is Aku who cut the road for Aya to be a good child’
    (It is Aku who paved way/created the opportunity for Aya to behave well).

b. Aku a*8 pe-le* adenle maa-nle Aya ye-le awule a.
    PSN FOC cut-PST road give-PST PSN do-PST thief PART
    ‘It is Aku who cut the road for Aya to become a thief’.
    (It is Aku who paved way/created the opportunity for Aya to be a thief*9*).

In (13a) and (13b), it can be observed that *Aku* establishes and exemplifies certain behavioural patterns for *Aya* to emulate. In both instances, *Aku* is seen as the ‘pioneer’ to open the way (provide an avenue) through which *Aya* also behaves later. This figurative interpretation is well derived from the basic act of cutting vegetation (through the forest) to create a path/road as in *pe adenle* ‘to cut/slash a road’. This expression entails a specific manner of creating a road, i.e. by slashing vegetation with an instrument in order to pave way (see also Bobuafor, 2018) for people to be able to make movement afterwards. Hence, *Aku’s* initial behaviour, whether good or bad, is seen to be the ‘opening channel’ for her sibling, *Aya* to undertake same activity.

5.6 Describing the act of slapping/knocking a person (beatings). The basic meaning of *pe* is also extended in communication among the Nzema to indicate the act of using one’s bare hand or an object to beat/hit a person either in the face, in the ears, on the buttocks or any other part of the body. The following examples in (14a-c) further illustrate these scenarios:

(14) a. ɔ-pe-le ɔ ye a-nye zo.
    3SG-cut-PST 3SG.POSS wife EMPH-eye.PL POST
    ‘He cut his wife’s eyes top’ (He slapped his wife in the face).

b. Me-mpe-le kakula mgbanyizonle ne a-nzo nu.
    1SG-cut-PST child rude DEF EMPH-ear.PL POST
    ‘I cut the rude child in the ears’ (I slapped the recalcitrant child in the ears).

c. Kilehile-volɛ ne pe-le sukoa-vø ne abo anwo.
    Teach-NOM DEF cut-PST learn-NOM DEF buttocks POST
    ‘The teacher cut the learner on the buttocks’.

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8 The focus marker *a*; in the utterances (13a) and (13b) specifically indicates that *Aku* is the only person who led such an exemplary life for *Aya* to emulate.

9 In this utterance, there is the sense of inference and presupposition, in that *Aku* had led a previous life through which *Aya* may be behaving presently.
As we have discussed earlier in section 4.1, *pe* ‘to cut’ in its original (literal) sense is associated with the ability to cause discomfort and pain in any animate entity that experiences the action. The effect of the verb in this regard is what has been extended to also mean the act of beating/slapping a person because beating obviously inflicts pain and discomfort to whoever receives it. In (14a), (14b) and (14c) therefore, *ɔ ye ‘his wife’, kakula mgbanzunli ne ‘the rude child’ and sukoavo ne ‘the student’ are the Object-patient constituents which received the ‘cut’ (beatings) from the Subject-agent *ɔ ‘he’, *me ‘I’ and *kilehilevole ne ‘the teacher’ respectively. It should therefore be emphasised here that the semantic shift/mapping maintains a closer link between the original meaning of the verb and its extended interpretation.

5.7 Describing the act of preventing a person from communicating. In interpersonal discourse among the Nzema, one can make another person pause his/her speech. This usually happens when a second speaker intends to make further clarifications while the first person speaks. In this instance, the second speaker is described as ‘having cut’ the mouth\(^{10}\) of the first speaker as shown in example 15a:

(15) a. Kpɔmavolɛ ne dende-le eyii la belembunli ne
Spokesperson DEF talk-PST small PART chief DEF
pe-le ɔ nloa.
cut-PST 3SG mouth
‘When the spokesperson commented for a while, the chief cut his mouth’.
(When the spokesperson spoke for a while, the chief stopped him from talking).

b. Saa e-le-tendɛ a me-m-pe ε nloa.
COND 2SG-PROG-talk PART 1SG-NEG-cut 2SG.POSS mouth
‘When you are talking, I do not cut your mouth’.
(I do not prevent you from speaking when you are doing so).

In example (15a), the expression *belembunli ne pele ɔ nloa ‘the chief cut his mouth’ implies that the chief caused the spokesperson to pause his speech. In other words, the chief rendered the spokesperson incommunicado for a short while and perhaps allowed him to continue his speech later. In this context, the spokesperson is perceived as ‘having been separated/disconnected’ from the act of speaking. Another common utterance in casual conversations among the Nzema that describes a temporal prevention of one’s speech is exemplified in 15b:

In (15b), *pe* ‘cut’ is used in addition to the negative morpheme {m-} to mean ‘do not cut’ your mouth; which indicates that the second speaker does not intend to absolutely prevent the first speaker from talking; rather, the first speaker is made to pause his speech for some time, thereby ‘cutting’ and disconnecting the flow of communication. This can be metaphorically compared with the physical process of cutting an object where connection ceases to take place.

\(^{10}\) To cut a communicator’s mouth in this context does not mean to ‘chop’ his/her mouth with a sharp instrument, say a blade or a knife, neither does it mean to slap the person in the mouth as may be seen in (14a-c). Rather, it means to make the person pause his/her comments for a while in order for another person to chip in a crucial information before the former speaker proceeds. In order to differentiate between the act of beating a person from the act of stopping one from speaking, the postposition *zo ‘on/top’, nu ‘in’, etc are always incorporated in the utterances that connote slapping/beatings (see data 14 of this paper, as an example).
6. Conclusion

The paper sought to examine the basic meaning and extensions pe ‘to cut’, a verb of separation in Nzema discourse, situating the analysis in the lens of Sweetser’s (1990) ‘cognitive semantics’. The paper has brought to light, the basic meaning of the verb and its figurative senses; which demonstrates that the various interpretations to a greater extent, have a close relationship with the original denotations of the verb. It has been shown that the basic meaning of pe ‘to cut’, as a verb of separation, is accompanied by some semantic componential features (as outlined in section 4.1.1) which serve as basis for conceptualising and describing other activities in ‘abstract sense’. The paper revealed that the original meaning of the Nzema verb pe ‘to cut’ is extended to talk about phenomena such as pe ṣ nli ‘cut his/her mother’ (to insult one’s mother), pe azule ‘cut a river’ (to travel abroad), pe adenle tendenle ‘cut a long road’ (to travel a long distance), pe adenle maa awie eye debie ‘cut road for someone to act in a way’ (to create an opportunity for others to behave in a certain manner), pe awole ‘cut childbearing’ (to stop procreation), pe miene ‘cut urine’ (to stop bedwetting) among others. These interpretations are not randomly and haphazardly derived; rather, the extended usages ‘carry’ semantic attributions derived from the basic sense of pe ‘to cut’. The study has indicated that the various conceptual mappings are culturally constructed, and that the interpretations are ‘context-motivated’.

Abbreviations Used

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1SG</td>
<td>1st person singular</td>
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<td>Nominalising suffix</td>
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References

The semantic extensions of ‘pe’ (to cut) in Nzema communication


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