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LOGICAL SIMILARITIES FOUND IN POLYSEMY AND HOMONYMY: A STUDY OF ENGLISH AND IGBO LANGUAGES

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the sense relations between "Polysemy" and "Homonymy" and how they operate in the English and Igbo languages. It is hard to work out a clear cut border between these two specular phenomena; in any case, either possible solution, maximize polysemy or maximize homonymy, will leave some cases where the minimized phenomenon occurs. The paper aims at giving examples of polysemy and homonymy in Igbo, making a distinction between polysemy and homonymy and distinction among polysemy, homonymy and vagueness, and identifying its functions in the Igbo language. Meaning as a matter of fact has a controversial phenomenon in the theory of languages. Despite the dictionary meanings for both polysemy and homonymy, we found other related meanings in English. Furthermore, the paper was able to point out the variables and reasons for polysemous words in the Igbo language.

Keywords: Homonymy, Polysemy and Vagueness

Introduction

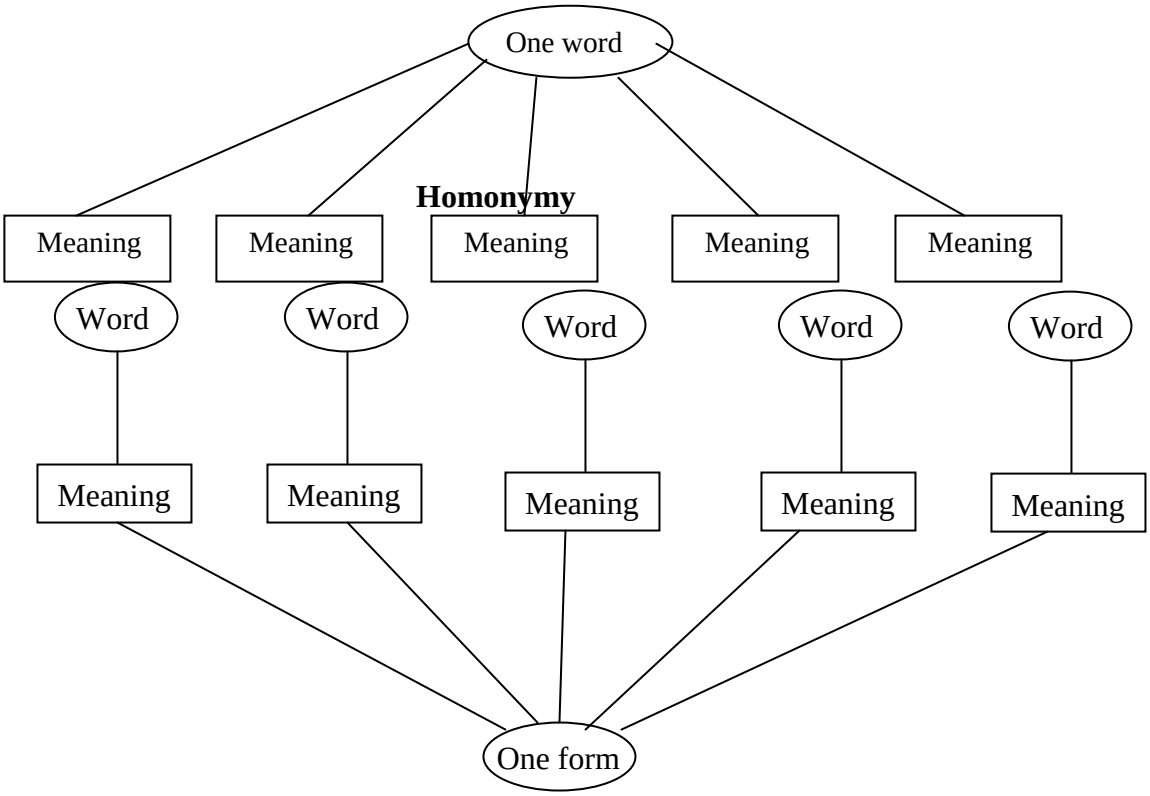
Polysemy is a meaning relation in which a single lexical item has several (apparently) related meanings. This is the several polysemous meanings of a word must belong to a common semantic field. Crystal (1997a:185) defines homonymy as "a term used in semantic analysis to refer to lexical items which have the same form but differ in meaning". Words which have the same form but differ meanings are referred to as homonyms of each other. It has been argued that the distinction between polysemy and homonymy is not always an easy one. The problem according to Palmer (1981: 101), lies in the fact that

> "…if one form has several meanings, it is not always clear whether we shall say that is an example of polysemy (that there is one word with several

meanings) or Homonymy (that there are several words with the same Shape".

The contrast between polysemy and homonymy can be demonstrated thus:

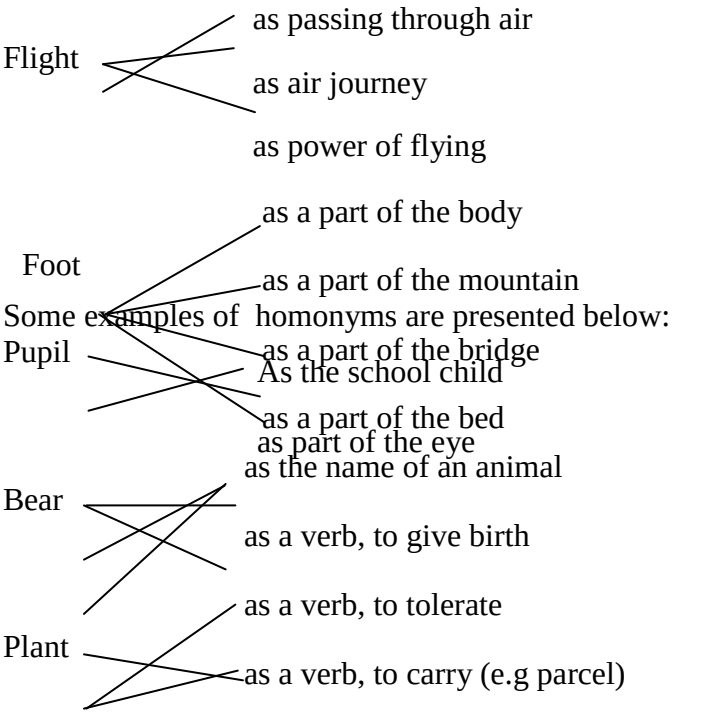
Polysemy



Lyons (1977: 550-69).

Examples of Polysemous words in English include:

Mouth — as part of the body
Mouth — as where rivers follow into the sea
Ear — as entrance of a caye
Ear — as a part of the body
as a part of the plant (such as maize)



The use theory of meaning was put forward by a German Scholar, Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889 – 1957) in his book *Philosophical investigations*. Akmajian, Demers, Farmer and Harnish (2003:223) state that the use theory was formulated with the slogan "the meaning of an expression is determined by its use in the language community, and to specify that use is to specify its meaning."

Wittgenstein (1952:56) portends that the use theory is of opinion that the meaning of a word or sentence is to be sought in its use, not in its correspondence to some entity. He says that the actual meaning of a word may be explained in terms of the rules of its use.

Horwich (2004:2) notes that the use theory. "begins with the observation that the meaning of a word is a common factor in the explanations of its various occurrences and proceeds to argue, on that basis that each word means what it does in virtue of the acceptance conditions of certain specified sentences containing it."

In explaining this claim he puts forward some sort of meaning – constituting issues from the use theory of meaning.

> " bachelor's meaning is engendered by our underived acceptance of the sentence. "the bachelors are the unmarried men."
> "red's meaning stems from our undrived propensity to accept "that is red" in response to the sort of visual experience normally provoked by observing a clear red surface

These illustrations point out the importance of use or context as a basis for determining meaning of words in a language.

Ndimele (1999:12) avers that the meaning of an expression is the effect(s) that are created in a particular context the expression is used. He however, identifies the use theory of Wittgenstein (1952:24) as a 'contextual and operational theory' which disabuses the use of entities in suggesting meanings.

According to Evans (2007:32) polysemy comes from the neo-Latin polysemia which originates from Greek word polusemous. The word is divided into two 'poly' meaning 'many' and 'sema' meaning 'sign'. This invariably gives the linguistic term 'having' many meanings or multiple meanings. He defines polysemy and polysemous as "the existence of several meanings for a single word or phrase" polysemy in his view is noted as an item or word in a language with two or more sense (which relatively close in meaning).

Polysemy in Palmer (1996:13) is a sense where same word may have a set of different meanings. He gave an instance of the word *flight* as being defined as "passing through the air," "power of flying", "air journey", "unit of the air force", "volley", "digression", "series of steps" in the dictionary. He acknowledges that these varying definitions have posed problems in semantic theoretical application.

Ravin and Leacock (2000:56) say that polysemes are etymologically and semantically related. They said that other meanings of a word can originate from metaphoric usage. They illustrate with the word *line* as can be seen in 'a line of people "and a" line drawn across a paper.' Ravin and Leacock (2000:56) aver that definitions in their dictions may be as a result to further drifting apart of meaning relations that can lead to homonymous words.

Empirical Studies

In this section, we will be considering polysemy in some languages and the Igbo language

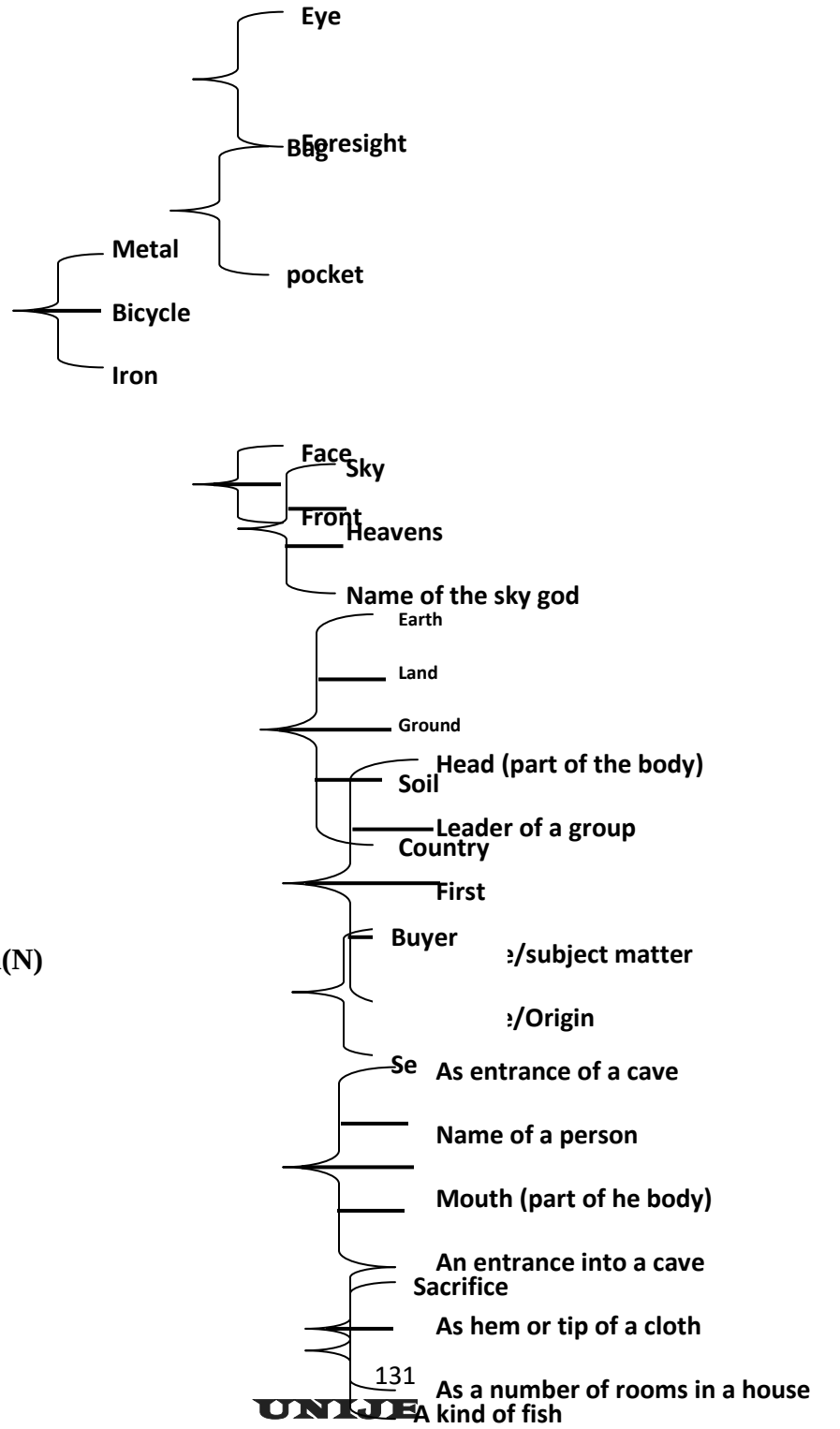
Polysemy in some languages

POLYSEMY IN INYI DIALECT OF IGBO

The following are some other examples of polysemous lexemes in Inyi dialect of Igbo. They are:

1. **Àmàmife (N)** — **Wisdom**, **Knowledge**

2. **Ànyà (N)**
3. **Àkpà (N)**
4. **Ìgwé (N)**
5. **Ìhụ (N)**
6. **Ìgwé (N)**
7. **Àlà (N)**
8. **Ìshì (N)**
9. **Ọnýeahia(N)**
10. **Ọnụ (N)**
11. **Àjà (N)**



12. Àkŵụkŵọ (N)

13. Ọnwà (N)

14 .Mmiri (N)

15.Ọkpọ (N)

16.Ọshishi (N)

17.Ọtọ (N)

18.Ọkụ (N)

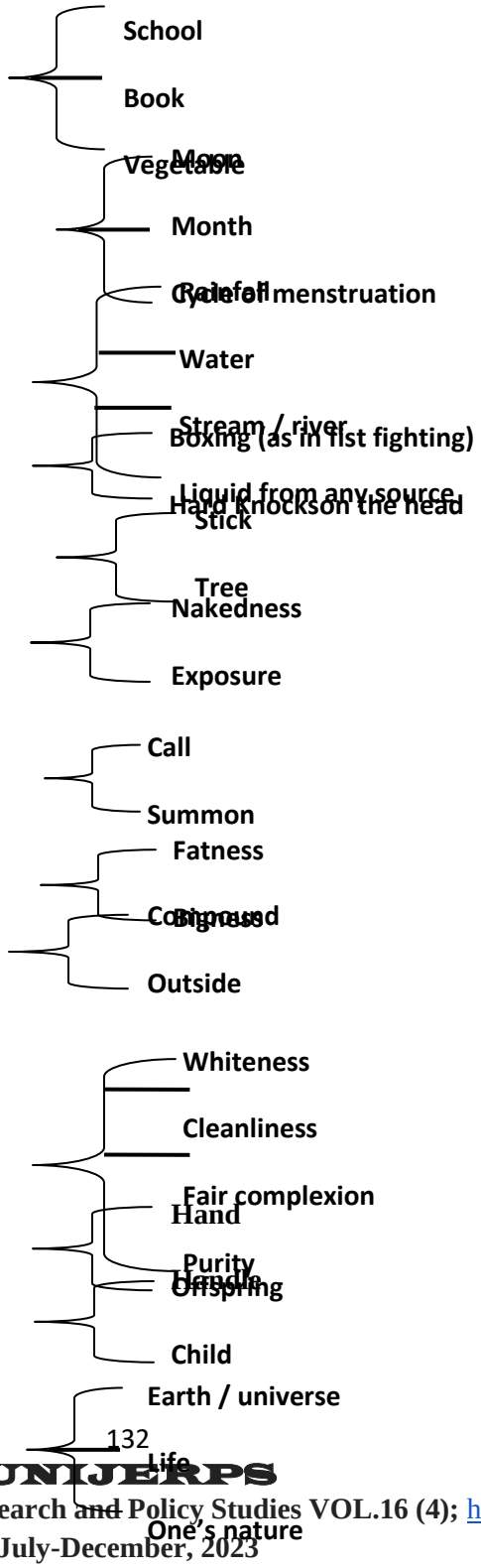
19.Ìbụ (N)

20.Ézi (N)

21.Ọcha (N)

22.Àkà (N)

23.Ńwà (N)



24.Ụwà (N)

The illustrations above show that various meanings of a polysemous lexeme are related. For example, the different meaning of a lexeme, 'ọyi' "cold/coldness, dull/dullness" are related. This similarity in sense, it should be noted, is sometimes difficult to define in words for some lexemes. For instance, whereas it is easy to explain the relatedness in sense between the different uncannings of Oto 'Nakedness' (i.e. being exposed) and others.

Ayegboyin (2011:23) a primary source gives us some data in the Yoruba language where tone plays an important role in polysemous words

1a. ọwọ - regard
ọwọ - hand
1b. kókó – point
Kókó – pot

Tone in most New Benue Congo languages is distinctive in nature. This means that tones are meaning changing and preserving in such languages. Such tones that are said to have a particular shape aid such sense relations as polysemy and homonymy. Invariably, what we are saying in essence is that tone plays a crucial role in the phenomenon 'polysemy'. When there is a change in the tone pattern of the same graphical shape as is seen in the above examples of minimal pairs, it can bring about change in pronunciation and meaning of the word in tone languages. However, polysemous words are a unique feature of the Yoruba language. Examples

2a. kókó – i, 'point', ii. 'headlines'

i, Point - kọ àwọn ohun si óje kọko´ – lift the points carefully.

ii, Headlines – koko inu iwe iroyin – the headlines of the news

2b. igi – i, 'tree', ii. 'stick'

i, tree – igi osan wa ileyin – orange tree is behind the house.

ii, stick – oluko fi igi na ni – my sister beat me with stick.

From the above examples, we can see that the differences of the words stated are related to the core concept of each word even when the tone patterns are retained. Also, based on context (grammatical and situational) polysemous words in Yoruba suggest what meaning sense they speaker intends.

The Swahili language exhibits polysemy in describing the entity time, telling of time and some other entities relating to time. Ali (2004:23) puts forward these examples.

3a. sea – having the common core as 'time' and derived base on the context of use and concept 'hour and or watch (wrist) and clock'.

Sambe language spoken in Sambe village in Kaduna State Nigeria, also has instance of polysemy. Blench (2010:3-20)

4a. go – 'mountain' or 'hill'

b. utu – 'king', 'chief' or 'ruler'

c. ikpo asini – 'village' or 'settlement'.

The above examples in the Sambe language do not occur outside context. The senses of each lexical field item are context dependent. The situation or setting of the

environment where the speaker is will determine whether he is referring to a 'hill or a mountain', 'a chief, king or a ruler', 'a village or a settlement'.

Wang (2009:6) did a study of the transitive verb 'kai' in the Chinese language and notes that its dictionary meanings are as follows:

5a. sense 2: to move (a door or window) from a shut or closed position so as to admit passage:…kai men 'to open the door', kai changhu 'to open the window'.

b. sense 3: to make (a passage) usable by moving the things that are blocking it: to make (a way, path etc)…kai jianghe 'to make streams', kai lu 'open a road'.

The senses identified are **nine** in number. He describes them from a certain degree of a more concrete or physical to a more abstract or mental concept. He presents it thus;

To move from a shut position – to set going – to come to view – to begin

The French language exhibits both sense relations, 'polysemy and homonymy' as will be seen in gloss gathered from Madueke (2011). From the gloss gathered, we note that both sense relations in the French language have posed great difficulty in the study of meaning either by trying to differentiate them, study them and theoretically analyse and apply them. Examples of a word with same shape in French and Different sense (homonymy) include;

6a. date – i, comme la date du jour – 'date of the day'

ii, de longue date – 'long standing friendship'

6b. pomme – i, (humans) a feature of the humans body – pomme d'Adam – 'Adam's apple'.

ii, fruit (apples) – tomato – pomme d'amour – tomato)fruit)

6a and b outrightly points to the fact that the sense are not of the same concept. The concepts generated by the senses are not in any way related in what they mean or what is intended base on context of use

Polysemous words in French are also context based. Examples are as seen below:

7a. pompe – 'pump' i. gas pump – pompe a essence

ii. water pump – pompe a eau

7b. fraine – flour/starch – i. fraine de manioc (plantes) – flour from cassava (palnt)

ii. fraine de mais (cereals) – flour from corn (cereal)

We are able to say definitely what we intend and what senses that are represented based on context. Outside context it may be ambiguous to say what meaning or sense the word in 7a meaning 'pump' is referring to. Based on the context of use, we can determine if what is intended is a water pump or a gas pump.

Yule (1996:99) posed a question that may likely be the basis for this study in determining polysemous words in Igbo language. He asks the question "how do we usually know which meaning is intended in a particular sentence? He answers by saying that we usually do so on the basis of linguistic context".

Atowa (2006:45) in her dissertation introduces concept and context as basic

determinants of the meanings of a polysemous word in the Igbo language. As regards concept Atowa (2006:45) illustrates with the examples below:

8a. ivi (N) – as in fatness and bigness Fatness and bigness can be said to be semantically related. This relatedness refer to the concept of magnitude of size (of something). Other example she gave of the Ngwa dialect of the Igbo language include:

8b. oke (N) – boundary and discrimination. She notes that both refer to the concept of demarcation.

8c. olu (N) – voice and dialect. Both refer to the concept of sound.

Because of the semantic relationship (i.e. similarity in sense) they exhibit regarding the concept they denote or connote, they are said to be different related senses of a single lexeme. Another criterion for determining relatedness among senses of the same word is the grammatical context which Yule (1996:99) sees as linguistic context. According to Atowa (2006:67), it is the grammatical context that provides the clue to identifying the senses in which a particular lexeme is used". She notes that it invariably means that "the meaning if a lexeme may vary according to the context of a lexeme in which it is used". Examples are as seen below.

9a. uto (N)-I, happiness, ii. Delicious, iii. sweetness, iv. Beauty

i. Happiness – obi ndi m uto – heart is sweet – I am happy
ii. Delicious – ofe a ndi uto – soup this is sweet – the soup is delicious.
iii. Sweetness – manụ aṅụ nji atọ utọ – honey is sweet – honey is sweet.
iv. Beauty – chinwe ndi uto – chinwe is sweet or beautiful.

9b. uru (N) i. usefulness – mmiri mbara uru – water is useful.

ii. profit – uru ndi I'ahia ngwa iri – selling of consumable goods is profitable.

Atowa , also identifies relatedness of senses to a word by way of usage which can be primary or secondary. Primary usage of the word points to the etymology or origin of the word. Examples is as seen below.

10a. uzo (N) – road, door and meaning as its meanings. But road is the meaning or sense that is primarily in use.

10b. obi (N) – heart, courage and chest. The sense used primarily is 'heart'

She also agrees with Ravin and Leacock (2000) that relatedness can be as a result of literal or transferred meaning.

11a. agu (N) i. 'tiger/lion' – a large animal or ii. 'a powerful person'. The transferred form is 'a powerful person'. Udoka mbu agu – Udoka is strong.

11b. ugo (N) i. 'eagle' – a kind of bird or ii. 'a beautiful person'. Chinwe mbu ugo – Chinwe is beautiful.

She acknowledges that polysemy as well as homonymy creates ambiguity outside context.

We note that 'context of use' stands out as a basic determiner for the occurrence of a particular sense of a polysemous word. It will not be an overstatement to say that polysemy is a universal phenomenon

judging from what has been observed in the above literature(s) of languages. In tonal languages, tones contribute largely to the realization of polysemous words.

Polysemy in the Igbo Language

Polysemy is notably a feature of contents words in Igbo language. Some function word classes such as preposition and pronouns exhibit some polysemous feature. An example of polysemous pronoun in Igbo;

12a. Ọ – it, he, and she.

Ọ na abia – it/ he/ she is coming.

"Ọ" is ambiguous in context and outside the context. But when a sentence referring to the noun of any of the sense 'it/ he/ she' have been used in an early statement made after the above statements then we can say what sense is intended. In this paper, our analysis will be hinged on the nouns in the Igbo language. Also, we will bear in mind that polysemy is a sense relation that has no influence from homonymy. The place of tone in determining the senses of a polysemous word, types of polysemous senses, reasons for and features of polysemous forms the focus of the preceding section.

Derived Meaning of Polysemy Igbo Words

Palmer (1981) portends that there is a possibility of having the cases of metaphors and other senses being transferred from the core meaning. Though sense or semantic extension has been queried, it is no gainsaying that metaphor and metonymy are in use and as Atunano (1999:34) puts it , they are two basic imaginative cognitive mechanisms that account for some derived senses. He notes that metaphor is the projection of a concepted domain onto another separate domain, while metonomy is the projection that takes place within the same domain. Other derived meanings or senses may not necessarily be figurative; they can as well be derived and literal. Examples:

13a. achicha – 'a local dish' and 'bread'.

'Achicha' before the coming of the white man's bread was introduced has been a local dish in some parts of the northern Igbo province like Nsukka. For want of the word to represent the phenomenon 'bread' 'Achicha' was introduced. 'bread' is the derived sense of the word 'achicha'.

14a. i. 'anya' – 'the eye' ii. 'high taste'

14a. i. 'the eye' – anya gi buru ibu – eye you big to big – your eyes are big

14a. ii. 'high taste' – chinwe nwa kwara anya – chinwe has (emphasis) eyes – chinwe has high tast

14b. ukwu – i. 'waist' ii.'hip' iii.'base of a tree'

14b i. 'waist'- ukwu ka eji agba egwu igbo – waist complimentizer use to dance play Igbo the waist is used for dancing Igbo dance.

14. ii. 'the base of a tree' - si n' ukwu osisi ahu puo – come from the base tree that go – go away from the base of that tree.

The above examples in 18 aii and 18b ii according to Saeed (2007) are more of analogical mapping than a derived meaning. What we mean here is that an analogy/comparison can be drawn using the 'eyes to compare ones taste for things' 'the waist in comparison with the base of the tree'. We therefore say that whether it is more of an analogical mapping or not the examples above are derived meanings which can as well be seen as extended or transferred meanings of the core sense.

Uses of Polysemous Words

Yule (1996:99) identifies two basic contexts; the linguistic and physical contexts. Atowa (2006:34) represents linguistic context as 'grammatical context'. 'Situation context' best describes Yule's physical context. Grammatically, we look at polysemous words in relation to other lexical items in a grammatical construction outside the situation. but when wrongly used whether literally or in its derived patterns or ways. it is said to be contextually or grammatically wrong.

15a. akwukwo - i. 'text books' ii. 'Note books'. iii. 'Leaf (vegetables)'. iv. 'School'. v. 'paper'.

15b. iwu - i. 'laws'. Ii. 'Principles'

15c. usoro - i. 'ways' ii. 'Pattern'

15d. isii - i. 'head' ii. 'Head of the home'. iii. First

The above sense examples of the polysemous words can be determined by situational context. The problem of ambiguity mat arise if the various lexical items used above are mentioned outside the grammatical and situational context. Within the context we can know or tell what is intended by the speaker. When an igbo speaker says the word 'akwụkwọ' the various senses in the 19a come to mind but when he contextualized the sense he intends, it will be understood by those he is communicating. Examples

15a.i/ii/v. 'text book, notebooks and paper'- Nye m akwukwo ahu – give me textbook/notebook/paper that- 'give that book (note book, text books or paper).

15a. iii. 'leaf (vegetables)- Betere m akwukwo nri- cut me leaf (vegetable) food- cut the vegetable for me.

15a. iv. 'school'- ọ bu kwa nwata akwukwo- he/she is (emphasis) child. Leaf.book- he is a student.

Summary of Findings and Conclusion

This paper has studied polysemy in the Igbo language and has not really come up with something much different from what authors have said. Atunano said that polysemy should be treated on its own as a sense relation that has a

lexical items operating from a related semantic field. The important contribution of this paper is the identification of the features and variables of polysemous words in the Igbo language and the reason of preservation of the lexicon of the languages by the sense relation 'polysemy'. It is worthy of note to state that polysemous words outside context may be confusing and ambiguous but in a grammatical and situational context, lexical items with several related meanings will be clearer in such a way that the sense in question will be understood by the listener judging from what was intended.

The basis for studying polysemous words are for senses that are related to each other by a common core to be identified and associated together as polsemous. Their contexts of use are to be identified and defined for dictionary compilation, for easy communication and for proper analysis of meaning of the various senses whether literal or derived. Controversly, tone is said to play a crucial role in achieving all that has been mentioned above in the Igbo languages.

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