

RELATIONAL OPPOSITES IN IGALA LANGUAGE

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Abstract

Grammatical units in any language, exhibits quite a number of interesting meaning relations. Here we have tried to look at relational opposite, a term under lexical semantics. Lexical semantics has been observed as being related to the meanings of lexical items. It seeks to capture the various meanings of words. Relational opposite is a situation whereby the existence of one lexical item implies the existence of another in the case of two words these words exist in contrast. In other words, where one exists, the other cannot. Igala language has a clear manifestation of relational opposites. This paper examines and x-rays with adequate examples from Igala language one of the major language in Kogi State of Nigeria.

Introduction

Semantics is the study of meaning in general, particularly the meanings of words. According to Anagbogu, Mbah and Eme (2001:35), semantics also deal with the idea of meaning as used. In consonance with this, the collection of words determines meaning as in example "Don't be as ass" which means don't be silly, and has no reference to a four-footed animal (ass).

Agbedo (2000:149) proposes that semantics deals with the ways in which words are used and understood by native and fluent speakers of a given language. It is in trying to give meaning to words that lexical semantics emerges as a branch of semantics.

Lexical Semantics

Wikipedia defines lexical semantics as a sub-field of linguistic semantics. It is the study of how and what the words of a language denote. Words may be taken to denote things in the world, or concepts, depending on the particular approach to lexical semantics. The units of meaning in lexical semantics are lexical units.

Lexical semantics seeks to answer the question of whether the meaning of a lexical unit is established by looking at its neighborhood in the semantics net, or if the meaning is already locally contained in the lexical unit. Lexical semantics also explores the mapping of words into concepts.

Lexical semantics also cover theories of the classification and decomposition of word meaning. It also covers the differences and

similarities in lexical semantic structure between languages and the relationship of word meaning to sentence meaning.

Saeed (2003:83) identifies lexical semantics with the study of word, meaning- the meaning of morphemes and multi-word units. These morphemes are the minimal meaningful units that make up words and large units. The English word *hateful*, for example is made up of morphemes *hate* and *ful*, each having its meaning.

Lexical semantics also accounts for multi-word units; cases where a group of words has a single meaning that does not correspond to the compositional meaning of its parts. Examples are the idiomatic phrases: pass away, give up the ghost, kick the bucket, snuff it, all of which mean die.

Definition of Opposites

Opposites are used interchangeably with antonyms. Antonyms are words which are opposite in meaning. Oppositeness of meaning, one of the most important semantic relations. Palmer (1976:78 in Anagbogu, Mbah, and Eme (2001:158) relates two words which are opposite in meaning to antonyms.

According to the wikipedia free encyclopedia, the word antonyms emanates from Greek word *anti* (Opposite) and *Onoma* name. antonyms therefore are word pairs which are opposite in meaning for example fat/skinny, hot/cold.

Antonyms are usually associated with adjectives. The denial of one term does not necessarily imply the assertion of the other in

incompatibility. This means that when one of the terms is asserted, there are other possibilities other than the second term. Wikipedia explains the notion of incompatibility to mean that one pair in an opposite pair entails not the other pair member. For example, something that is long entails that it is not short.

Types of Opposites

There are different types of opposites, each having its unique characteristics.

Complementaries

This is a type of semantic relation of oppositeness which holds between certain pairs of words. Agbedo (2000:155) explains that in the relationship, the denial of one implies the assertion of the other. Examples include dead/alive male/female, open/shut, true/false, married/single. In other words he is not dead entails and is entailed by He is alive, and he is alive implies that He is not dead. Saced (2003:66) in his understanding calls these complementaries or binary pairs. They are non-gradable opposites which form a two-term classification. He gives the following example; pass/fail, sleep/awake.

Igala examples include:

Erakwu/enyanyi (crying and laughing)

Elolu/ekejujo (sleeping/awake).

Reversives

These are sense relations which presuppose that when a party engages in one he loses the other.

Igala examples include

Tegwu/gwọru (ascend/descend)

i.i/ee/(yes/No)

je/kọ(agree/disagree)

tene/li(look for/see)

gbẹ/wu /plant/uproot

Conversives

Anaegbu, Mbah and Eme (2010), defined conversives as contractual relationships existing between two entities such that if one exacts one of the relations, the other contracts the reverse. They are terms that describe a relation between two entities from alternate viewpoints. Examples includes: own/belong to, buyer/seller, above/below, give/receive, lend/borrow.

Igala examples include onenyi/oma efu owo (lord/servant), ta/la (sell/buy), Bi/kpa (to give birth/to kill).

Gradable Antonyms

A gradable antonym maintains a semantic relation associated with adjective. It has two features. It also has immediate terms. For example, between the gradable antonyms hot and cold, we have warm, tepid, cold. The implication is that something may be neither hot nor cold.

Secondly, terms are usually relative for example, a thick pencil is likely to be thinner than a girl. Saeed (2003:67) observes that in some binary pairs, one term is more basic and common. For example, in the pair long/short, it is more mutual to ask "How long is it" than "How short is it?"

In Igala language, Oyo and Ogbe, are examples of gradable antonyms representing fat and skinny. The Oyo (robust.....Ogbe(thin)

Iyoyo	Ola un nyọ	I che ade	igbogbe
She is fat	she is healthy/plump	she is moderate	she is thin

N.B in between oyo and ogbe that is fat and thin are plump and moderate thin which all show the grade of robust and thin respectively.

Relational opposites

Agbedo (2000) defines Relational opposite as pairs of lexical items which express relationships between two (or more) persons or things". The terms are said to contract a relational opposition if the being or existence of one implies the being or existence of

another. Different types of relationships are expressed by these pairs.

Gender Relationships

Example Includes

Husband/wife, fiancé/fiancée, debtor/creditor, Landlord/tenant, father/son, mother/daughter, aunty/uncle, sister-in-law/brother-in-law, doctor/patient.

(a) Gender relations exist in Igala. These are:

Enekele/Onobule	-	son/daughter
Aikọ/Ajuwe	-	cock/hen
Okolo/ala	-	ram/sheep

(b) Spatial positions are also manifested by relational opposites for example:

Igala	Gloss
Atẹ/ogane	above/below
Ojale/ofe	up/down
Ejuogba/ubi	in front/behind
Ọwọ olu odudu/ọwọ olu ane	east of/west of
Ọwọ ojukupale/ọwọogane	north of/south of

By virtue of this relationship, if something is above, it cannot be below, if something is in front, it cannot also be at the back.

(c) There are other relationships that have to do with movement. Saeed (2003:67) gives examples of: stop/go, push,

go/return, ascend/descend, ^(go) in/out, (turn), right/left ^(go) over/under.

He explains that one whole term describes movement in one direction, the other describe movement in the opposite direction.

Relational Opposites In Igala And Their Implication To The Study Of Semantics.

Relation refers to the existence of a relationship between two or more parties. In relational opposition, the relationship that exists between words in a sentence is of utmost importance. This relationship cannot be studied without a due explanation of the meaning relationship of the lexical items.

Wikipedia reveals that semantics as a field of study is interested in three questions:

- i. What does it mean for units of language called lexemes to have meaning?
- ii. What does it mean for sentences to have meaning?
- iii. Finally how it is that meaning units fit together to complete surfaces?

These, wikipedia observes are the main point of enquiry behind studies into lexical, semantic and structural semantics.

In reaction to these questions, cache search, observes that many theories have arisen with regards to that study of the meaning of words in language. Two of such theories are the structuralist and conceptual theories of meaning.

Theories of Meaning.

Prior to these theories, the traditional theory held that lexical units could be understood as holding meaning either by virtue of a set of things they may apply to (called the extension of the word), or in terms of the common properties that hold between the things (called the intension). The intension then provides an interlocutor with the necessary condition that let thing qualify as a member of some lexical units extension. In other words the traditional semantists claimed that words have definite definitions. The unacceptability of this claim led to other theories of meanings.

The Structuralist Theory

The structuralist theory held that to understand the meaning of a word, one should understand how it functions together with or in contrast to other related words. The meaning of a word therefore consists of the relationship it has with other words in the language. Though this theory criticized the traditional theory, Anagbogu, Mbah, and Eme (2010) observed that the concept of opposites (antonyms) and other concept under the sense relations were borrowed from the traditional theory.

The Conceptual Theory

The conceptual theory came up with its claims. It says that the meaning of a word is a concept of the mind of the person using that word. In other words, communication is made possible through a shared connection between words and concept.

On what theory then do we base the relation in opposites in Igala language?

- i. Ali Enyo un mu odu ebiene du un (his good behaviour has brought him a bad name)
- ii. Oma kpikpa ka ata nwu che edudu (This is a fair child with a dark father).
- iii. Ene ki yoyo mu de ganya achigili (that fat person has suddenly become thin).
- iv. Ukpeta ane ki de i je un uroje le (the famine in this land has expelled the period of plenty).

From the examples given the meaning of the words can be said to be relative. "Ali enyo" (good behaviour) and bad name 'odu ebienne' will mean different things to different people. What is good to Mr. A. may be unacceptable to Mr. B. in this case, the conceptual theory may be applauded as the interpretation of lexical items varies in the minds of people.

Other examples

1. Ene keke ki ache enwu oti
 - (a) A little one that does great things.
 - (b) Small but mighty.

In this example, enwu oti (great things can be explained by different people in different ways). For example.

- i. Stealing successfully and making much money
- ii. Huge success in abortion attempts
- iii. Ability to insult and subdue ones elders.
- iv. Academic success despite problem.

In the example *Ele ɔma mi mu ama du wa un mi*, my child blessing has brought me a curse can have different meanings of interpretations within the context of use.

- i. My child Ele (name) has brought me a curse
- ii. My child's blessing has brought me a curse

In this case, the manifestation of the relational opposites blessing and curse is not a matter of the concept of the mind. The interpretation varies within the context (sentence of their use). This shows that opposites in Igala also manifest meaning as use.

Igala language has been observed to manifest idiomatic phrases as bilateral opposites examples from central dialect.

Owo mi che efufu/uche ene kia done la no, the expression owo mi che efufu could mean:

- i. My hand is clean
- ii. My hand is white
- iii. I am innocent
 - a. *ɔma ei imoɔ lewa akoji eyi ogijo* (his younger child came and replace the older child).
 - b. *Adu akola ugbo k amone jon* (a slave doe not talk in the presence of a free born).

From these and other examples, relational opposites in Igala can be said to have different manifestations in sentences. They can therefore not be tied to any known theory of meaning.

Conclusion

This study has delved into the relational opposites with reference to the Igala language. Judging from these types of

opposites and examples given from the central dialect, relational opposites in Igala language, with regards to the meanings of lexical items within sentences, the different theories of meaning have been examined.

Igala language has been observed to manifest meanings of lexical items in use, in line with the context or relationship between the words in sentence. Other researchers are encouraged to delve further into this area of bilateral oppositions for greater results.

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