



Research Article

A Semantico-Pragmatic Analysis of Selected Polysemous Words in Igala

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ABSTRACT



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This seminar paper will discuss the semantico-pragmatic aspects of polysemous words in Igala, which is the language of people of central Nigeria mostly. It also examines how contextual influences determine the meaning and application of words with multiple related meanings, and its dynamic nature of meaning and functionality in the Igala discourse is realized. Polysemy adds to the richness of the linguistic and the effectiveness of the communicative process, and it is necessary to learn the semantico-pragmatic aspects of it to communicate successfully in the Igala-speaking communities. The research follows both qualitative and quantitative design and uses the data of the interviews with native speakers, ethnography, and textual analysis of literary works. The information was precisely categorized and examined to determine polysemous expressions, different meanings of these expressions, and contextual indicators upon which they are used. The theoretical background is based on Speech Act Theory (Austin and Searle, 1962) and the Theory of Implicature which together give a hint into the contextual influence of meaning as well as its intent by the speaker. Results indicate that a lot of Igala polysemous words obtain their expanded meanings due to metaphorical application and cultural meaning. These words are used tactically by speakers to make their expressions or speech artful and communicative. The research highlights the significance of semantico-pragmatic analysis in unveiling the interaction between the language, culture, and meaning and it promotes future comparative studies among the African languages.

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1.0 Introduction

Language is an event that offers an orderly and clear platform of communication that ensures an effective interaction between human beings. This is what has seen a number of scholars insist that language is the only phenomenon in which human beings in different communities have managed to interact with each other effectively and convey information. Supporting the above school of thought, Yusuf (2016) believes that: 1) language is the rope that binds the members of the speech community in the relationship of continuity. The Igala language which belongs to Niger-Congo language family is mainly used by the Igala people of central Nigeria, in the State of Kogi. These socio-political and cultural forces have affected the historical aspect of the Igala language and therefore, they have not only affected its linguistic forms but also its pragmatic application of the language, particularly the phenomenon of polysemy. (Akwaja, 2018)

Polysemy, which is the meaning of a single word that is represented by several meanings which have a similar semantic genesis, is an important feature of the expressive scope of the Igala language. The Igala people have an interesting history which is reflected in the rich array of traditions and migrations and interaction with the neighbouring tribes. This cultural and linguistic heritage has eased the process of developing polysemous expressions without which Igala discourses cannot be complete. The Igala kingdom has a history of its establishment in the late 15

th century, whereby the Wada ruling dynasty was said to have established the kingdom. Polysemy in the Igala language has also been affected by the interaction with the other neighbouring languages like the Yoruba and the Ebera languages. Lexical diffusion and borrowing usually result in the emergence of polysemous terms, word acquisition of new meanings which appeal to cultural practices. (Atadoga, 2013)

An example of this is the Igala traditional narratives and proverbs which often make use of polysemy to create a multi-layered meaning, making communication easier and simpler to capture not only the culture of one place but also the philosophical knowledge. One may also say that Agba ti o tiru, which translates to the old person who is wise, is a phrase that may be used to mean an experienced person, and this aspect may act to demonstrate the value that the community places on wisdom (Idoko, 2020). Additionally, the polysemous terms are very essential in the socio-cultural ways of the Igala people such as storytelling, ritualistic expressions and proverbs. As an example, a word Ita, which means a road or a path, reminds of both physical movement and figurative traveling in life or decisions. Such polysemous expressions are used to emphasize a communal concept of the significance of the context and mutual knowledge that guided comprehension of meaning (Egbe, 2019).

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1.1 Statement of the Research Problem

It is a fact that the interest in the study of Igala has been on the increase in recent times. Language experts as well as students, especially of Igala extraction have provided insightful perspectives on the language. This interest is ignited by the understanding that the development of any language is faster and more successful if it is subjected to rigorous scholarly studies and investigations. Among the studies embarked on by scholars are, Ejeba Salem Ochela's "The Pronominal System of Igala" (2011), Omachonu, G. S "Fundamentals of Phonology and the Study of Igala Language" (2000) and "Question Formation in the Igala Language" (2007); also, Atadoga's "Levels of Meaning Relations in Igala Language" (2013). However, none of these works, to the best of the researcher's knowledge has explored the semantico-pragmatics aspect of polysemy in Igala. Therefore, the exploration of polysemous words in Igala language using semantics and pragmatics will not only expand the understanding and interpretation of meaning in the language but will open up the language to another angle of linguistic study. Hence, the present study undertakes an in-depth analysis of Igala polysemy from the perspective of semantics and pragmatics.

1.2 Research Questions

The following questions were posed to guide the study:

- i. How does the knowledge of semantics and pragmatics help in negotiating sense and understanding polysemous words in Igala?
- ii. To what extent does polysemy affect the meaning and understanding of conversation amongst the Igala people without a background knowledge of a given discourse?
- iii. How are semantics and pragmatics sensitive to providing materials for interpreting polysemy?

2.0 Theoretical frameworks

Pragmatics is a study which belief is what is communicated is more than what is said. The utterances that the speakers produce in communication contain deeper sense than the actual meaning of the words or phrases themselves. Pragmatics has consequently more to do with the analysis of what people mean by their utterances than what the words or phrases in those utterances might mean by themselves. Pragmatics also strongly related with context or situation when something is being said, thus it is very important for the speakers to focus on the context. Leech (1983: 6) also states that pragmatics is the study of meaning which is related to the speech situations.

Speech act is a variety of verbal communication and also a subdivision of pragmatics, often takes place in verbal and nonverbal communication. Bach (1979: 19) explains that an action in verbal communication has message in itself, so the communication is not only about language but also with action. Speech act is the utterance that occurs and act refers to an action. Austin (in Tsui, 1994: 4) explains that speech acts are acts that refer to the action performed by produced utterances. Here, people can perform an action by saying something. Through speech acts, the speaker can convey physical action merely through words and phrases. The conveyed utterances are paramount to the actions performed.

2.1 Classification of Speech Acts

Speech acts can be classified into five categories as Searle in Levinson (1983: 240) states that the classifications are representatives, directives, commissive, expressive, and declaratives.

2.2 Representatives

Representatives are speech acts that the utterances commit the speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition. The utterances are produced based on the speaker's observation of certain things then followed by stating the fact or opinion based on the

observation. When someone says "she's beautiful", the speaker can state the sentence based on the fact or just give his or her own opinion about physical condition of a person.

It also states what the speaker believes to be the case or not. Statements of fact, assertions, conclusions, and descriptions are all examples of the speaker representing the world as he or she believes it is. For example, when someone says "The earth is flat", it represents the speaker's assertions about the earth. The speaker has opinion that the earth is flat. Representative speech act can be noted by some speech acts verb, such as: remind, tell, assert, deny, correct, state, guess, predict, report, describe, inform, insist, assure, agree, claim, beliefs, conclude.

2.3 Directives

Directive's area speech acts that speaker uses to get someone else to do something. These speech acts include requesting, questioning, command, orders, and suggesting. For example, when someone says "Could you lend me a pencil, please?" the utterance represents the speaker requests that the hearer to do something which is to lend him a pencil.

2.4 Commissive

Commissive are speech acts that the utterances commit the speaker to some future course of action, these include promising, threatening, offering, refusal, pledges. For example, when someone says "I'll be back", represents the speaker's promise that he/she will be back.

2.5 Expressives

Expressives are speech acts that the utterances express a psychological state. These speech acts include thanking, apologizing, welcoming, and congratulating. For example, when someone says "don't be shy, my home is your home." The utterance represents the speaker's expression that he/she welcomes someone.

2.6 Declarations

Declarations are speech acts that the utterances effect immediate changes in the institutional state of affairs and which tend to rely on elaborate extra- linguistic institutions. These speech acts include excommunicating, declaring war, christening, firing from employment. For example, "you are dead to me."

3.0 Methodology

This chapter covers methodology aspects ranging from the design of the study, sources of data, method of data presentation and analysis. Considering the nature of the study, sources of data for this research include: electronic medium, verbal exchange, WhatsApp voice note and organised Igala meetings. Data for this study were collected from the following areas; Ígálà populated area of Kaduna city (Kakuri, Angwan Shanu) and Igala meetings (Kakuri, Barnawa and Badiko). The researcher's choice of these areas is informed by the fact that the study focuses on identifying the polysemic terms, their semantic and pragmatic uses in various contexts in Ígálà. The collated data used for analysis in this research include the following:

- i. Three unstructured interviews.
- ii. Two WhatsApp group created by the researcher.
- iii. Three casual conversations.

The selection of excerpts for analysis is based on the fact that they are more appropriate to language use in different contexts. Also, the decision to select at least two polysemous words from each context for analysis was informed by the need to limit the volume of the work. Twenty polysemous words were presented in different situational uses. The researcher applied deductive research method and also relied on introspection amidst other methods such as personal observation, unstructured interview and electronic medium. Personal observation, unstructured interview and translation of data were adequately utilized.

3.1 Data Presentation

This section adopts the methodology discussed in chapter three for its analysis. Data is presented first in Igala language with each datum carrying its polysemous examples in words and sentences for clearer identification of context. In order to disambiguate meaning and context. The work further explores what interlocutors imply in their utterances as documented in this research.

Table 1: Summary table of speech act

S/No.	SPEECH ACT	FREQUENCIES	PERCENTAGE
1.	Representative	5	62.5
2.	Directive	3	37.5
3.	Expressive	0	0
4.	Commissive	0	0
5.	Declarative	0	0
		8	100

Source: Field survey, 2023

3.2 Summary table of speech act

This table presents results and analysis of findings. Survey results are presented in frequency distribution tables according to the research questions. The in-depth interview findings on the other hand are presented to compliment the survey report. In collecting data for this dissertation, three (3) Igala polysemous word analysed. To arrive at this findings, 24 despondences were interviewed with all of them contributing actively to the outcome in Badiko, Kakuri, Ungwan Shanu, Ungwan Rimi, Angwan Kanawa, Sabo, Kudenda and Maraban Rido, in line with the research objectives.

The responses generated from the respondents were analysed under analysis of tables. Thereafter, major findings were discussed to ascertain their relationship with the literature reviewed. Results are presented in frequencies and rounded percentages for readers' easy understanding.

4.0 Data Analysis

The researcher provided translation, transliteration, locution, illocution, perlocutionary effect of utterances, their presuppositions and what every speech implies.

4.1 Datum 1

Ukpalu could mean tongue/side talk

Ukpalu could mean: tongue (part of the body) and gossip or slide talk.

a. *odugba unana le fu ukpalu mi gwujo*

i. Transliteration

Pap fire fire that has tongue my burnt.

i. Translation/locution:

The hot pap burnt my tongue.

iii. Illocutionary: a representative act of informing.

Perlocutionary effect of sympathizing.

a. The statement "The hot pap burnt my tongue" implies that:

i. The speaker expected the pap to be at a safe temperature for consumption.

ii. The speaker blames possibly the cook or server for the hot pap.

The speaker express pain, surprise and possibly anger and blabme instead of stating the obvious.

b. *ukpalu a kpu'nyi*

i. Transliteration

Side talks do kill house.

ii. Translation/locution

Gossip destroys kinship.

Illocutionary: a representative act of stating.

Perlocutionary effect of repenting.

Presupposition: It presupposes that there is a conflict amongst family members.

Context: In the sentences A and B above, the term "ukpalu" is presented in two different contexts; sentence A states how a part of the body got burnt in the cause of drinking pap. Sentence B depicts the context of dispute settlement resulting from gossip.

b. The statement "Gossip destroys kinship" implies that:

i. Gossip has a negative effect on relationships.

ii. The speaker values kinship and considers gossip a threat to it.

The speaker warns against side effects of gossip and how it can lead to a loss of peace and harmony amongst family members.

4.2 Datum 2

Ushó could mean: breakfast / ill-luck

Examples of usage are:

a. *Nà gó dó òskápá kpúná kà dú kpúshó*

i. Transliteration:

Please carry rice warm let us carry breakfast.

ii. Translation/locution:

Please warm the rice, let us have it as breakfast.

iii. Illocution: a directive act of requesting.

iv. Perlocutionary effect of agreeing.

v. Presupposition: it presupposes the presence of two persons that are about to have breakfast.

The statement "Please warm the rice, let us eat it as breakfast" implies that:

i. The rice was likely cooked previously (perhaps leftover).

ii. The speaker and possibly others are hungry and ready for breakfast.

iii. The speaker is suggesting a convenient or practical solution for breakfast.

The implicature here is that the speaker is expressing a desire for a quick, easy, and possibly familiar breakfast option, while also making a polite request for assistance.

b. *Dá álú úshó wé bú mí té.*

i. Transliteration:

Take mouth ill luck your away me from.

ii. Translation/locution:

Take your ill-luck mouth away from me.

iii. Illocution: a directive act of insulting.

iv. Perlocutionary effect of annoying.

v. Presupposition: it presupposes an early morning conflict situation between two persons.

Context: The above instances show how the word *úshó* can be used in more than one context.

- In sentence A, *úshó* was used in the context of breakfast,

- While in sentence B, *úshó* was used to mean ill-luck, in an insulting early morning conflict.

The statement "Take your bad luck mouth away from me" implies that:

i. The speaker perceives the person's words as a curse or bad omen.

ii. The speaker feels vulnerable to the person's negative influence.

iii. The speaker is commanding the person to leave them alone.

The implicature here is that the speaker is expressing strong emotions, such as fear, anger, or frustration, and is seeking to protect themselves from perceived harm.

4.3 Datum 3

Óji could mean: thief, head (part of the body) & head (leadership). The context of usage is seen below:

a. *āmi choja fo oji le mu*

i. Transliteration

Soldiers have caught the thief.

ii. Translation/locution:

The thief was caught by the soldiers.

iii. Illocutionary: It is a representative act of informing.

iv. Perlocutionary effect of rejoicing.

v. Presupposition: it presupposes the presence of a thief and military men.

a. The expression "The soldiers caught the thief" implies that:

i. The thief was trying to escape captivity.

ii. Military men went after the thief.

The military men's operation was successful in capturing the thief, and that the thief was involved in an illegal act.

b. *Óji mi a womi.*

i. Transliteration

My head ache me.

ii. Translation /locution:

My head is aching.

iii. Illocution: a representative act of stating.

iv. Perlocutionary effect of sympathizing.

v. Presupposition: it presupposes ill health condition of a person.

b. "My Head is aching" Implies that:

i. The speaker is going through physical pain.

ii. The speaker is asking for help or relief.

Apart from expressing an emotional state, the speaker is also stating a fact and possibly seeking a need for relief or assistance.

C. Tinubu *cha agbo oji najeriya yi.*

i. Transliteration

Tinubu i is the head of Nigeria.

ii. Translation/locution:

Tinubu is the president of Nigeria.

iii. Illocution: a representative act of informing.

iv. Perlocutionary effect of enlightening.

v. It presupposes a country named Nigeria and the presence of its president named Tinubu.

Context: in the above sentences, the term "oji" as used in sentence A showed the context of a robbery, sentence B the context of an illness and in sentence C to indicate the context of leadership.

c. "Tinubu is the president of Nigeria" implies that:

i. Tinubu was officially elected as the president, holding the highest office in the country.

ii. It also suggests Tinubu is accepted and recognized by relevant authorities and international community inclusive.

5.0 Discussion of findings

The findings of the study reveals that the selected polysemous terms as investigated in this research performed different speech acts such as; representative and directives. Set within the problem-fields of semantics and pragmatics, this study also shows that meaning at both levels of linguistics is determined by context of use. Building from that perspective, the study foregrounds that meaning is determined by the linguistic environment within which a word or an expression fall.

The investigations from this study have clearly revealed that interlocutors perform direct illocutionary acts of informing, stating, sympathizing, praying, requesting, describing, claiming, requesting, insulting and questioning. They also perform a direct

Perlocutionary act of sympathizing, repenting, affirming, rejoicing, enlightening, jubilating, relieving, admiring, congratulating, agreeing, surprising, annoying, answering, laughing, waking and nagging. The analysis shows that although there are three (3) polysemous terms subjected to analysis. 19 illocutionary and Perlocutionary acts were realized respectively.

5.1 Conclusion

Prior to this investigation, it was inferred that it is expected that language in use be understood by both interlocutors. To achieve this, it is necessary for language users to approach the study of language not only from a semantic perspective, but apply a combination of linguistic tools that will aid to explicate meaning and enhances understanding among interlocutors in any given speech event. This research has attempted to identify and classify speech acts in selected polysemous terms in Ígálá language, the principal of speech acts and their presuppositions as used by interlocutors to deploy and perform such pragmatic acts as informing, stating, sympathizing, praying, requesting, describing, claiming, rejoicing, enlightening, relieving, admiring, congratulating, agreeing, exciting, saddening, etc. Some of the speech acts are set out to produce intended and unintended pragmatically reactions.

Finally, the research work concludes that polysemy has pragmatic implications because interlocutors are able to convey intended and unintended illocutionary force effectively to generate the desired perlocutionary effects. This is achieved by skilfully manipulating linguistic elements of communication.

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