

Antonymy in Mbaise Dialect of Igbo

Ifeka Juliet Onyeocha

Abstract

Antonymy is a meaning relation in which opposition is distinguished. This meaning relation has received attention in different languages. There are some evidences of this attention in the Igbo language. In Oko (2017), Mba (2016), Udemmadu & Ogwudile (2017), Omego(2014) etc. This study adds to what has been done concerning this relation in Igbo. It particularly focuses on the relation as it applies to the Mbaise dialect of Igbo with the objective to determining any dialectal facts that could provide much more description of meaning relation. The data for the study are obtained from the native speaker intuition of the researcher. However, data available are verified by consultation with older native speakers of the dialect, following from a descriptive analysis, The findings show that the following types of antonymy are displayed in the dialect: Simple antonyms, Gradable antonyms, Non- Gradable antonyms, Reverses, Converses or Relational antonyms and Taxonomy antonyms. Overall, there is no radical difference between examples of antonymy in Mbaise and other dialects of Igbo except for lexical forms. The analysis for the data is descriptive.

Key Words: Nature of opposition, Antonymy, Incompatibility.

Introduction

The study of semantics deals with meaning of linguistic expressions. Meaning, as a concept has been difficult to define. Lexical semantics is a part of semantics that deals with the

meaning of lexical items and how they relate to one another. Sense relation refers to the meaning relation between words. This study examines one of the sense relations known as Antonymy. Antonymy is a meaning relation in which opposition is distinguished. This meaning relation has received attention in different languages. There are some evidences of this attention in the Igbo language. Antonymy as defined by the Concise English Dictionary is a word opposite in meaning to another. ‘Anti’, a Greek word meaning against, then ‘Onoma’ meaning a name. According to Palmer (1981), Antonymy has been defined as when two words are opposite in meaning, they are said to be antonyms e.g big-small, good-bad, weak-strong. They are usually levels of gradation in comparative frame. Anagbogu et al (2001). According to Saeed (2003), in his book titled Semantics he defined ‘Antonyms as words which are opposite in meaning’.

In lexical semantics, opposites are words that lie in an inherently incompatible binary relationship as in the opposition pairs: e.g male-female, long- short, up-down, precede - follow. The notion of incompatibility here refers to the fact that one word in an opposite pair entails that it is not the other pair member in a set of opposites. The relationship between opposites is known as opposition.

Antonymy as one of the terms found in lexical semantics’ according to Saeed (2003). This work will look at how antonymy as a meaning relation operates in Mbaïse dialect of Igbo. In this paper, it is useful; however, to identify several different types of relationship under a more general label of opposition. The aim of this research paper is to add to what has been done concerning this relation in Igbo. It particularly focuses on the relation as it applies to the Mbaïse dialect of Igbo with the objective to determining any dialectal facts that could provide much more description of the

meaning relation. The data for the study are obtained from the native speaker intuition of the researcher. The study also identifies the different kinds of antonyms that exist in the Mbaise dialect of Igbo and how these different antonyms are represented in the dialect. It also illustrates the dimension and comparison with other antonyms from other dialects of Igbo so as to build up relevant literature on the subject matter. However, data available are verified by consultation with older native speakers of the dialect.

Mbaise dialect of Igbo, according to Nwaozuzu (2008), falls under a group of dialect known as East Central Group of Dialect (ECGD). Other dialects that are in this group include Owerrenchiise, Ohi, Emekuku, Ibeku in Mbano, Izombe, Oguta in Orlu we have Nkwere, Eziana etc. Mbaise is in Imo State and it has common boundary with Obowo, Umuahia, Ubakala, in Abia State. In chapter two of the work, the researcher drew an overview on antonymy, where she discussed works done by other scholars on antonymy both in Igbo and other languages of the world. In chapter three, the data for the work was presented and analyzed descriptively. Followed by the different antonyms found in the Mbaise dialect of Igbo, which are: Simple antonyms, Gradable antonyms, Non- Gradable antonyms, Reverses, Converses or Relational antonyms and Taxonomy antonyms were discussed. Finally, findings and recommendations among which are: This work as a dialect specific study contributes to the lexicographic project of Igbo. It also helps in developing a more comprehensive Igbo dictionary because; it has provided antonyms in Igbo with examples from Mbaise dialect. The work will serve to add more materials to Igbo lexicographic project.

An Overview on Antonymy

Here, the sense relation ‘Antonymy’ has been viewed from other researchers i.e other studies carried out on ‘opposition’ as a meaning relation thus, works in other languages are shown here to beef up literature for this work.

Studies of Antonymy in Different Languages

According to Khalilova (2016), in his study titled ‘Gradual Antonyms in the English and Azerbaijani Languages’, ‘It is revealed that distinguishing feature of the given class of words is graduality of their opposition where the other members of opposition have maximal degree of feature. The placement of other words, for which middle degree of feature is typical between these members, is allowed’. According to Khalilova (2016), ‘Antonyms is one of the types of ties formulated on the basis of contradiction, opposition supplementing each-other. Such units, establishing pair, stand in the opposite to each-other poles; such pairs are called antonymous pairs. Antonyms possess other type of units in which intensification and weakening of contradictions between the units, standing in opposite poles to each other makes it possible for the placement of other units between them’. Here, he studied gradual antonyms.

In addition to the numerous studies centred on Antonymy in English, according to Ekaterina (2014), in his work titled ‘Antonyms and Linguistic Nature of Opposition’. Here, the study illustrated the problem that arises in the study of antonyms in respect to incompatibility and negation. According to him efforts have been made to define linguistic antonyms through diagnostic tests such as: experimental research Kay, Cruz, Lyons (1977)

etc..., who study minimal incompatibility structures within sentences as follows”.

1a. The bread is fresh.

1b. The bread is stale.

From such approaches can identify pairs of words incompatibly distinguished but not those words which have incompatible reference only those that are countering the antonyms. They fail to appreciate the antonym canonical lexical opposition, some Antonyms (canonical) couples constitute ‘better’ compared with other pairs of opposing words such as ‘alive/dead’ is a better couple than ‘alive/expired’.

Also in the study by Caritaetal (2011), the work offers a cognitive semantic approach on antonymy in language and thought. Using series of recent empirical investigations on different observational techniques, they analyzed (i) the nature of the category of antonymy and (ii) the status of its members in terms of goodness of opposition. The purpose is to synthesize these empirical investigations and provide a theoretical framework that is capable of accounting for antonymy as a mode of thought in language use and meaning-making.

In another study, ‘A linguistic study of Antonymy in English Texts by Chunming Gao and Qianzhen Zheng. The study aims at studying the use of antonymy in specific English texts from Linguistic Perspective, in which abundant examples of antonyms are quoted to help the illustration and prove that comprehending and investigating into antonymy can help the understanding of different texts and the rising of literature flavour. Here antonyms used in the following genres are classified and analyzed: Example in poetry, ‘O loving hate’, ‘O anything or nothing first created’.

2. In the Drama 'Romeo and Juliet' Act 1 Scene 5. In the Novel titled 'A tale of two cities' by Charles Dickens. 'It was the best times, it was the worst times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness'.
3. In speech, observing Barack Obama's first victory speech in 2008. 'It's the answer spoken by young and old, rich and poor, Democrat and Republican , black, white, latino , Asian.....'
4. In proverbs 'More haste, less speed, 'Easy come, easy go'

Examples 2-4 as listed above show a kind of beauty of harmony can be sensed which helps convey profound messages' Chunming Gao et al (2014).

Looking at the work of Khisamova VN, Safina DR (2017), 'Ways of expressing complementarity in English and Tatar language'. The article aims at studying the problem of complementaries in a comparative aspect. They presented examples of this opposition type in English and Tatar languages and identifies the parts of speech forming it. Based on this, a conclusion was made that both in English and Tatar languages complementaries express binary opposition, which refer to different persons or denotes, do not express the direction, denial of one concept means the presence of the second concept. Some pairs of complimentary opposition may be gradual. They may have some degree of the feature. Complementarity in the given different structure languages can be expressed by nouns, adjectives, adverbs and verbs. Complementary opposition expressed by verbs can form triplets both in English and Tatar languages.

Studies of Antonymy in Igbo

Here, the sense relation 'Antonymy' has been viewed from Igbo scholars' perspectives, i.e others studies carried out on 'Antonymy' as a meaning relation. Works in Igbo language and dialects of Igbo

are shown here to also improve literature for this study. In Oko (2017), examines antonyms in Afikpo dialect using the Use theory of meaning. He observes that Antonyms in the Afikpo dialect is not restricted to any word class in the dialect. All word classes can be antonymous. The researcher identified the different kinds of antonyms that exist in the dialect which include; Gradable, Non-gradable, Converse, Reverse and Taxonomy antonyms. It was discovered that antonyms abound in the Afikpo dialect the same way it does in the English language. However, while some antonyms in the English language are formed by adding prefixes, gradable antonyms in the Afikpo dialect are formed by suffixing – *tu*, *-turu* to the verb or imperatives to signify the extent or degree of gradeability, the presence of *ezibe* also represents the scale of the antonym. Single words can however also be used to identify degree or scale in the dialect.

Mba (2016), examines antonyms in Nsukka dialect. Using the mentalist theory she observes that antonyms in the dialect are not restricted to adjectives alone and includes categories such as nouns, pronouns and verbs. Udemmadu & Ogwudile (2017) observes antonymy in the Igbo language using the descriptive method, they observed that antonyms in the Igbo language can be grouped into gradable, non-gradable (or complementary/binary) antonyms, relational opposite/converse and reverse opposite.

They observe that *tu*, *turu*, *etiti*, can be used to represent gradable antonyms in the Igbo language. Sometimes they are infixed in a verb.

- 5a. *gá*→*gághì*
go→did not go
- 5b. *sí*→*sìghì*
cook - did not cook.

Omego (2014), Analysis of lexical opposites in Owerri Igbo in Journal of West African Languages XLI.I. This study analyzed the semantic properties of polarity and markedness of oppositeness in the dialect, using the direct oral interview method in a form of a descriptive survey. She concluded that there exists a kind of interplay between the semantic properties of polarity and markedness in the use of lexical opposites in Owerre dialect of the Igbo language. Then, in Nkamigbo (2009), 'Deixis and Opposition'. This paper argues that the relationship which exists between deixis and opposition cuts across languages. It claims that opposition that depicts direction may be specified or unspecified. Specified directions mark spatial deixis while unspecified directions mark person deixis. In Eyisi et.al, (2014), an antonym is one of a pair of words with opposite meanings. Each word in the pair is the antithesis of the other. A word may have more than one antonym.

Data Analysis

Antonyms in Mbaise Dialect of Igbo

Having seen the various kinds of antonyms, the data will be analyzed based on the type of antonyms found in the Mbaise dialect of Igbo.

Gradable Antonyms in Mbaise Dialect

This is a relationship between opposites where the positive of one term does not necessarily imply the negative of the other as shown in example six.

6. Rich - poor
Fast - slow
Young - old
Beautiful - ugly

This relation is typically associated with adjectives and has two major identifying characteristics. Firstly, there are usually intermediate terms so that between the gradable antonyms Hot-cold we can find warm, tepid, cool and tall, average tall (not too tall, not too short), short etc. In Mbaïse dialect you can also find gradable antonyms being realized as:

7a. Ókú-ókú → ñàfàñàfà → Óyìóyì. Hot → tepid → cold

7b. Ókà → ndíndí → ntìshì Tall → average tall → short.

This means of course, that something may be neither hot nor cold. Secondly, the terms are usually relative, so a thick pencil is likely to be thinner than a thin girl as shown in example seven.

Simple Antonyms (Non Gradable antonyms) in Mbaïse Dialect

This is a relationship between words such that the negative of one implies the positive of the other. The pairs are also sometimes called complimentary pairs or binary pairs. Saeed (2003) calls it non gradable antonyms or 'simple antonyms'. According to him this is a relation between words such that the negative of one implies the positive of the other. The pairs are also sometimes called complementary pairs or binary pairs.

8a. dead-alive

8b. Up - down

8c. Go - come

8d. Pass - fail

8e. Ascend – descend etc.

In Mbaïse dialect you will have pairs like:

9a. ónwù → òndù

b. Élú → àlà

c. Ókà → ntìshì

d. mgbágo → mgbádà

- e. Óchá→Ójì
- f. mímá→nìjò
- g. Ójije→Óliló
- h. Ókeòkpà→nnekwú
- i. òkòchì→ùdùrù-mmiri.

Reverses in Mbaise Dialect

The characteristics of reverse relation is between terms describing movement. Where one term describe movement in one direction →and the other, the same movement in the opposite direction ←. Example: push - pull on a swing door, which tell you in which direction to apply force.

In Mbaise dialect you can find:

- | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------|
| 10a. Kpúmìe - kpúmìte | toward - away |
| b. Bìá - gáwá | Come - go |
| c. Bá?á - fùwá | Enter- out |
| d. Dóótíá - Sùkóó | Elongate - shorten |
| e. Rígóó - rìdà | Ascend - descend |
| f. Élú - òkpùrù | Above - below. |

As we can see from 10a-f here, the reverses describe movement in opposite direction. This tells you in which direction the movement is going.

Converses or Relational Antonyms in Mbaise Dialect

They are pairs in which one describes relationship between two objects and the other describes same relationship when two objects are reversed. It also means that in this relationship, the two opposites must both exist for example, if someone is selling, there must be someone buying. Simply you may say that the term describe a relation between two entities from alternate viewpoints. For example:

- 11a. Nnàùkwù - nwáóðìbò Master-servant
Enyeribe bu nnaukwu Obinna (Enyeribe is Obinna's master). If Enyeribe is Obinna's Master, automatically Obinna is Enyeribe's servant.
- b. Ónyéńkúzí – íwáákwúkwo Teacher - Student
c. Zùó - réé buy - sell
d. Dí – íwùnyè Husband - wife
e. Élú – álá Up - down
f. Akànrì-ákáìkpà Righthand - lefthand

We can see from example 11a-f, the Converse terms can also be applied when one is used, the other automatically assumes the opposite side.

Taxonomic Antonyms in Mbaïse Dialect

Taxonomic antonyms' is a term used for the classification of items that belong to one group. Example:

12a. Market days: Éké, Órìé, Afò, Nkwó

If today is Éké it can never be Órìé, Nkwó or Afò at the same time. It does not mean that Éké is opposite of Órìé but the presence of one means absence of the others. This particular group of antonym is closed because new market days cannot be added.

12b. Birds:

- i. Guinea fowl (ògàzì)
- ii. Parrot (íicheòkùó)
- iii. Owl (ìkwùìkwí)
- iv. Goose (òbògùmà)

These sets from i-iv are antonyms because if a man buys ògàzì (guinea fowl) from the market, it implies that he did not buy Goose (òbògùmà).

12c. Vegetables:

- i. *ńchànwú* (scent leaf),
- ii. *úgbógùrù* (pumpkin leaf),
- iii. *ákwùkwóánara* (garden-egg leaf).

These sets are taxonomic antonyms because a soup that is cooked with *úgbógùrù* (pumpkin leaf) means that it was not cooked with *ńchànwú* (scent-leaf) unless if there were mixture of vegetables in the soup.

Conclusions and Recommendations

As we can see from the analysis, antonyms abound in the Mbaise dialect of Igbo. The following kinds of antonyms are displayed in the dialect; Gradable, Non-Gradable, Reverses, converses and taxonomy. Words can be reduplicated to signify degree in (Gradable antonyms) *náránára*, tepid *andńdíńdí*, in-between tall and short. Anyway, not all words in the dialect are gradable e.g. *ńjójó*-ugly and *mma*- beauty, because, you cannot say *ńjójó* or *mmámá*.

Antonyms in the Mbaise dialect of Igbo are not restricted to any word class in the dialect. All word classes can be antonymous. However, there is no radical difference between examples of antonymy in Mbaise and other dialects of Igbo except for lexical forms. This work as a dialect specific study contributes to the lexicographic project of Igbo. It also helps in developing a more comprehensive Igbo dictionary because; it has provided antonyms in Igbo with examples from Mbaise dialect. The work will serve to add more materials to Igbo lexicographic project.

References

- Anagbogu, P.N, Eme C.A, Mbah, 2001. *Introduction to linguistics*. J.F.C Ltd. 181 Ziks Avenue Awka, Anambra State.
- Anagbogu, P.N, Mbah, B.M & Eme, C.A. 2010. *Introduction to linguistics*. 2nd Edition. Anambra: Amaka Dreams Ltd.
- Alan, Cruse D. 1986. *Lexical Semantics*. London: Cambridge University Press.
- Chunming, .G & Qianzhen, .Z 2014. A Linguistic study of Antonymy in English Texts. In *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, Vol. 5, 1:234-238.
- Carita, P., Caroline, .W 2011. Antonymy: From Conventionalization to meaning making. *Review of cognitive linguistics* .9 (2) 367-391. Laud University.
- Ekaterina, S.G 2014. Antonyms and the Linguistic Nature of Opposition. *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*. Vol. 3 No. 4. MCSER Publishing. Rome Italy
- Khisamova, VN, & Safina DR, 2017. Ways of Expressing Complementarity in English and Tatar Languages. *It JSC Stud*. Vol.5 (6) 151-155.
- Lyons, J. 1977. *Semantics* 2. Cambridge University Press.
- Mba, O.J. 2016. Antonymy in the Nsukka dialect of Igbo. Seminar paper presented in the Department of Linguistics, Igbo and Other Nigerian Languages, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
- Nwaozuzu, G. I. 2008. *Dialects of Igbo Language*. University of Nigeria Press.
- Nkamigbo, L.C. 2009. Deixis and Opposition. A paper in *Awka Journal of Linguistics and Languages (AJILL)* Vol. 5.
- Oko, Uko, Eyi 2017. Antonymy in Afikpo Dialect of The Igbo Language. Department of Linguistics, Igbo & Other Nigerian Languages. University of Nigeria Nsukka.

- Omego, 2014. Analysis of lexical opposites in Owerre Igbo. *Journal of West African Languages* (XLI.I).
- Palmer, F.R. 1981. *Semantics*, 2nd edition, Cambridge University press, London.
- Saeed, J.I 2003. *Semantics*. (2nded). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- SevdaKhalilova, 2016. Gradual Antonyms in the English and Azerbaijani languages. in international *Journal of English linguistics* Vol.6 No.6 . Canadian Center of Science and Education
- Udemmadu, T.N&Ogwudile, C.E 2017. A descriptive analysis of antonym in the Igbo language. *Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies (JHUCS)*.2, 138-159

Ifeka Juliet Onyeocha is a lecturer in Department of Linguistics, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria.