

A lexico-semantic analysis of sense relations in EkeGusii circumcision social varieties

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates how EkeGusii conveys meaning and offers an insightful analysis of the relationships between meanings in the social varieties of EkeGusii circumcision. EkeGusii is a Bantu language spoken in Southwestern Kenya by about 2.6 million native speakers. The language is free of observable isoglosses, but within it are diglossia situations. Diglossia is a condition in society where two varieties of language exist side by side and each has a certain role. The paper focuses on levels of sameness and oppositeness as well as the homonymy-polysemy interface within EkeGusii circumcision social varieties. Sense relations are universal in all languages in the world. Sense relation is any relation between lexical units in the semantic system of a language. It is a relationship between words as expressed in synonymy, hyponymy, homonymy, and polysemy, as well as antonymy. These relationships are entered by being contrasted or substituted. A sense relation involving a word makes the word have the same or nearly the same meaning as another word. These words cannot be used in another context to bring out the same sense. Lexical semantic components of the lexical pragmatic approach are used. The lexical semantic component treats words as encoding concepts. Participatory observation and introspection by jotting down insightful ways of using language are used to elicit useful data. Data is also collected from a sample of twelve native speakers of EkeGusii. Data analysis involves classifying the lexical items into the respective parts of speech, glossing the words into English, and identifying the sense relations to which the words belong. Findings show that sense is realized as a case of style or register. Findings also point out that context plays a significant role in establishing meaning. Pitch and stress determine meaning in context. Differences in tone result in homonyms: words that have different meanings but are pronounced or spelled the same. Sense realization follows the different ways in which the male and the female genders manipulate language. It is recommended that more research on sense relations in other Bantu languages be carried out as a way of explaining sense relations further.

Keywords: Antonymy, Hyponymy, Lexical Semantics, Polysemy, Sense Relations, Synonymy

I. INTRODUCTION

The conceptual framework upon which the paper is hinged is lexical semantic component of lexical pragmatic approach by Wilson and Carston (2006) that applies to explain the various sense relations operating within EkeGusii circumcision social varieties (ECSV). According to Wilson and Carston (2006) a word is not fully fixed in the lexicon instead, when a word is used, listeners adjust or fine-tune meanings in context. In other words, lexical pragmatics is a process that modifies encoded word meaning during comprehension. Wilson and Carston (2006) consider meaning as a joint product of lexical meaning in the mind, and context-driven pragmatic inference. Semantic component treats words as encoding concepts. Lexical semantics studies word meanings and this includes how words structure their meanings, act in grammar, their compositionality, relationships between the distinct senses as well as uses of a word. There are six types of lexical relations namely, hyponymy, synonymy, antonymy, polysemy, homonymy and meronymy denoting apart which is found within holonymy – denoting a whole (not captured in this paper). Lexical meanings are denotational (explicit/direct meaning of a word), connotational (the feelings the word invokes) as well as its implicature. Lexical pragmatic approaches explain how word meanings are flexible and context dependent Numberg (1978, 1995). Numberg (1978, 1995) also argues that words have underspecified meanings in lexicon and that context and pragmatic inference determine the intended sense in actual usage. Therefore, lexical meaning is not fixed but modulated by the situation.

The paper investigates how EkeGusii realizes sense and provides an illuminating account of meaning relations within EkeGusii circumcision social varieties. In Mulaudzi (1999) a social variety is defined as a type of language variety that is not determined by geographical area, but instead by social factors and the social group of speakers. Social variety of EkeGusii operates within the circumcision school. EkeGusii is a Bantu language spoken in Southwestern Kenya by about 2.6 million native speakers based on the census 2010. The language is free of observable isoglosses but within it is a diglossia situation. Diglossia is a condition in society where two varieties of language exist side by side and each has a certain role Fergusson 1959 in Simanjuntak et al (2019) plays. Wardhaugh (1986) opines that diglossia exists in a society when it has two distinct codes which show clear functional separation;

that is, one code is employed in one set of circumstances and the other in an entirely differently set as is the case with EkeGusii. The social variety in this regard is linked to and shaped by the social group membership and social functions of such membership rather than by geographic distribution,

EkeGusii sense relation is based on the context (sub-variety) within which a lexeme or word is used. The term sense is understood based on Lyons (1968) who says that sense of a word means its place in a system of relationships which it contracts with. Fromkin and Rodman (2011) view words as being semantically related into what is referred to in this paper as sense relations. Sense relations involve relations between words as expressed in synonym, hyponymy, polysemy as well as antonymy. Sense relations are entered through being constructed or substituted. Sense relation involving a word makes the word have the same or nearly the same meaning as another word in line with Fromkin and Rodman (2011) who assert that words are semantically related to one another in many ways. Hlongwana (2021) posits that those relations are expressed by various types of semantic fields that often end in the bound morpheme –nym as in paronymy, meronymy, metonymy, monosomy, synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, homonymy and polysemy. The paper presents synonymy, hyponymy and homonymy – polysemy interface as expressed in EkeGusii; a Southwestern Bantu language of Kenya.

1.1 Research Objectives

The paper carries out a lexico-semantic analysis of sense relations in EkeGusii circumcision social varieties with the following specific objectives;

- (i) To identify lexical items that occur in EkeGusii circumcision social varieties and classify them.
- (ii) To describe the various sense relations that occur in the lexicon of EkeGusii circumcision social varieties.
- (iii) To account for the different sense relations in EkeGusii circumcision social varieties.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature reviewed for this paper is grounded on the social variation in language which obtains that the lexical items used in EkeGusii circumcision social varieties may also be found in the standard variety Obwoye (2014). The meanings of these lexical items however differ based on context. Language is embedded in some context (Hartman, 1983: 109) hence meaning is understood based on context. Further, Hartman (1983:109) argues that:

Language is a rule-governed behaviour in interactive context. The communicative competencies of native speakers include the ability to vary their usage according to the situation in which they find themselves. The lexical-pragmatic approach is significant in the analysis of lexical items with more than one semantic specification on one hand, and lexical items that have the same spelling but different semantic representation, on the other.

ECSV can be said to possess broad enough semantic scope. However, ECSV does not function in all normal contexts of EkeGusii communication since it is limited to the context of circumcision only. When ECSV is used within the context of circumcision, it marks off those EkeGusii native speakers who belong from those who do not. In other words, a Gusii who is not circumcised will not understand the lexicon of EkeGusii circumcision. However, this kind of variation does not fragment EkeGusii. Unlike regional variation where the language becomes fragmented through dialect variations, ECSV has not fragmented the language; instead it enriches EkeGusii. Meaning of the lexical items used in the context of EkeGusii circumcision is understood based on context. In support of this view, anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowsk of 1884-1942 in Kramsch (1998, p.26) argues that language was key to understanding the meaning but he realized that, in order to understand what was going on, it was not enough to understand and write down the meaning of words. One had to understand why, what and how in a specific context of situation. In addition, one had to link their words, beliefs, and mindsets to a larger context of culture such as tribal economics, social organization, kinship patterns, fertility rites, seasonal rhythms, concepts of time and space. Thus the semantic meanings of verbal signs had to be supplemented by the pragmatic meanings of verbal actions in context. This is because EkeGusii circumcision takes place in a spatio-temporal situation. In this regard, meanings of the lexical choices have to be understood based on the social context of situation in which they are used.

III. METHODOLOGY

The study took a qualitative research paradigm to carry out a lexico-semantic analysis of sense relations that apply in the lexicon of EkeGusii circumcision social varieties. A curious blending of methodological techniques in line with (Gilbert. 2008:270) who asserts that some amount of social interaction in the field with the subject of the study is necessary as well as a direct observation of relevant events and a great deal of informal interviewing. The social events in which lexical items in EkeGusii apply include birth and naming ceremonies, circumcision and clitoridectomy initiation ceremonies as well as marriage and burial ceremonies.

Questionnaires, conversations involving participants, interviews, as well as participatory observation by the researcher were used to collect data. Participatory observation and introspection by jotting down insightful ways of using language were used to elicit data. Data was also collected from 12 native speakers of EkeGusii (NSoE) using snowball. Data analysis involved classifying the lexical items into the various sense relations within EkeGusii and the respective parts of speech. The lexical items collected in the data were then glossed using English as the metalanguage.

Stratified random sampling using snowball method was used to select the participants for the study. Snowball is used in obtaining a sample when there is no adequate list to use a sampling frame (Gilbert, 2008:179). The nominated individuals were interviewed in turn and asked to identify further sample members in a network. The population selected contained elements found in the entire group (Kombo & Tromp, 2006, p.77). Informants were selected based on their expert knowledge of EkeGusii. A male research assistant was also used to collect data from male participants during circumcision at the site of circumcision since EkeGusii statutes do not allow women to access male circumcision sites.

Ethical considerations were considered. Permission from the administration was sought and granted. Participants signed consent forms and agreed to participate in the study. Data was collected in the months of November and December since circumcision ceremonies and rituals associated with EkeGusii circumcision social varieties take place during this time of the year.

A pilot study and maintain flow necessary to analyse was carried out in Nyakenogo village, Marani, for the male and Kiomooncha for the female to rule out deficiencies that would arise. Only one male and one female participant took part in the pilot study. Piloting was carried out to evaluate clarity, relevance and test validity and appropriateness of the instruments for data collection.

An observation check list was used by the researcher as well as observation schedule to ensure consistency. The researcher, being a native speaker of EkeGusii who comprehend the lexicon passed as a participant. The interview schedule was used to collect data on meaning of specific lexical items that occur in conceptual as well as in the circumcision social variety.

Findings were analysed in view of the choice of the lexicon within language variation of EkeGusii using narrational analysis. Narrative approach is concerned not only with the story-telling component but with the social interaction between interviewer and interviewee (Gilbert, 2008:428). Data collected reflected variation of EkeGusii lexical items depending on context and the various sense relations realized.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Findings

4.1.1 The Lexical Field of Synonymy

The lexical item 'synonymy' or sameness in meaning (Goddard, 1998) is a relation between individual sense of words. A single word may have different sets of synonyms for each of the senses. For instance, 'shut' and close are considered English synonyms because they realize the same meaning as illustrated in the table 1 below:

Table 1
English Synonyms

Shut	Close
+close	+conclude
+fasten	+final
+seal	+terminate
+secure	+wind up
+block	+finish
+slam	+end
	+shut

Clearly, it is observable that 'shut' and 'close' have limited cases of sameness, but they are synonyms. In other words, the two English lexical items are not absolute or complete synonyms. This agrees with the lexical-pragmatic approach which says that word meaning is not fixed but adjusted in context. A word's meaning is either narrowed by making it more specific or broadened by making it more general to realise a more metaphoric meaning as in EkeGusii word eng'iti (beast) whose broad meaning refers to a powerful/influential man. The term eng'iti when used outside the conceptual paradigm of reference (snake) is gender specific since it does not apply to a woman.

It is argued in Lyons (1968) that two elements cannot be synonymous in one context unless they are synonymous in all contexts. The choice of one item rather than another by a particular speaker may be influenced by the difference in their emotive associations. It can also be influenced by the context of use. Context may be conceptual

or circumcision-based contexts which require that meaning of words is understood differently from meaning realized in conceptual usage of a word.

The following synonyms are established within EkeGusii circumcision social varieties; *Bware* and *iburu* -both words refer to circumcision, *Embera* and *oboina* -refer to grave, *Omorugi* and *mok'ane* – refer to wife, *Riraya* and *ritinge* – refer to prostitute. It is established in the study that two synonyms exist in EkeGusii. Some of the words collected in the data show identical meanings and that other meaning equivalents also exist as illustrated with the lexical item; *Enyaroka* (a circumcised girl) and *Omoiseke* (girl). *Enyaroka* (circumcised girl) and *omoiseke* (girl) have limited sameness because *Enyaroka* include;

- | | |
|-----------------|-------------------|
| +female | +female |
| +circumcised | + un -circumcised |
| +above 12 years | + all ages |

Omoiseke include;

In other words, one is *enyaroka* (girl) if circumcised through clitoridectomy which is also considered female genital mutilation. One is *omoiseke* (at birth if born female), *omoiseke o'nyarebe* (female child of somebody) or *omoiseke omogusii* (a Gusii girl). EkeGusii also exhibit politeness and euphemism by using expressions such as *gotweka mo* instead of *gokwa* (to die) and *Korwa 'mote igoro* instead of *kobiara* (to give birth). *Korwa 'mote igoro* and *kobiara* are not identical synonymns since they do not apply in all contexts of use. The meaning of *kobiara* realizes a different but associative meaning when used in the death sub-variety to give account of one's children. In the death sub variety *amabiara* (one's births) which is a loose translation applies to both men and women while *kobiara* applies to women. Associative meaning provides more information beyond conceptual meanings that dictionaries provide.

4.1.2 The Lexical Field of Hyponymy

Hyponymy is defined by Lyons (1968) in terms of unilateral implication. Lyons considers hyponymy and incompatibility as the most fundamental paradigmatic relations of sense in terms of which vocabulary is structured. Hyponymy is a relation in which the meaning of a lexical item is included in another. (For instance, *x* is scarlet will be taken to imply *x* is red; but the converse implication does not generally hold.). Although a superordinate term does not generally imply its hyponym; it is frequently the case that the situational context or the superordinate term will determine it in the sense of one of its hyponyms. The paradigmatic relations between words are considered to involve a superordinate and subordinate. For example, bird (subordinate) is a hyponymy of animal (superordinate) as illustrated below;

Animal Kingdom

- + fish
- +mammals
- +reptiles
- +amphibians
- +rbirds

This makes fish, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians become co-hyponyms to 'birds.

The lexical field of hyponymy in EkeGusii is paradigmatic in the sense that meaning of a lexical item is included in another Obwoye (2014). This paradigmatic relations between words involve a superordinate and subordinate as illustrated using the following EkeGusii lexical items. *Bware* (circumcision) whose meaning is included in *enyaroka* (one who is circumcised). *Ruga* (cook) whose meaning is included in *omorugi* (one who cooks) or wife.

Hyponymy is not context dependent in English, but EkeGusii hyponymy is context-dependent just like euphemism synonymy hence presents a relationship of synonymy as symmetrical hyponymy especially within the context of the circumcision social varieties. Context affect how hyponymy in EkeGusii is interpreted. Lexical pragmatic approaches apply in hyponymy to satisfy relevance within ECSV.

4.1.3 Homonymy

Fellbaum (2000) considers homonyms as cases of different unrelated senses or meanings shared under the same surface of words. Such words often exhibit identical spelling or orthographic forms but are different in meaning (Saeed, 2003). Homonyms are words that are pronounced and spelt the same way but have distinct meaning. Lyons (1982), Nikolenko (2007); and Yule (2006) consider homonyms as lexical items that are identical in spelling and pronunciation but have dissimilar connotations. These views are significant in conceptualizing EkeGusii homonyms which may not necessarily be articulated in the same way but exhibit themselves identical orthographically. This is also the view held by Fromkin et al. (2003) who agree that homonyms may not be spelled the same. Some English homonyms are exemplified below;

Bank ¹ + Financial (Institution)	Bank ² +side of river	Row ¹ + line	Row ² + to paddle
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Al-Aabedi (2015) shares the view that homonyms are sense relations that hold between two or more lexical items which have identical forms, and correspond with separate entities in the many dictionaries, that is, every homonymous lexeme is listed as individual word in the dictionary as opposed to polysemous words.

Hlongwana (2021) has established in his study that homonyms are expressed in two broad ways; as homographs which have identical spelling and different meaning or /and as homophony with different spelling and similar pronunciation as illustrated below.

Know and no
Peace and piece
Write and right
Wring and ring

Farghal (1995) considers homonyms as being ambiguous words whose different senses or meanings are far apart from each other and not clearly related to each other in any way. Saeed (2003) argues that homonyms could pose a more serious problem whether in translation or in communication in general. Nikolenko (2007) classifies homonyms into two classes: full lexical homonyms and general and partial homonyms. Lyons (1968) consider homonyms as obsolete or pure homonyms as those written and articulated the same way, hence homotonal (they have same tonal patterns). He also identifies partial homonyms as those characterized by the same writing with different pronunciations.

EkeGusii homonyms just like their English counterparts are realized the same way orthographically but differ in pronunciation (not homotonal) and reference as illustrated using the following lexical items.

Table 2
EkeGusii Homonyms

EkeGusii	Gloss	Context of Use
Bware ¹	Circumcision(N)	Circumcision school
Bware ²	Of/from far(N)	Conceptual
Bware ³	You spread(V)	Conceptual
Soka ¹	Get married(V)	Marriage sub variety
Soka ²	Go out(V)	Conceptual
Soka ³	Be ashamed(V)	Conceptual
Soka ⁴	Dress up(V)	Conceptual dialectal
Mana ¹	Negotiate for dowry(V)	Marriage
Mana ²	Open/operate(V)	Conceptual/dialectal
Mana ³	Get ready(V)	Conceptual
Sara ¹	Process of male circumcision(V)	Circumcision
Sara ²	Feel pain(V)	Conceptual
Sara ³	To prick(V)	Conceptual
Omware ¹	Initiate(N)	Circumcision (seclusion)
Omware ²	Soot(N)	Conceptual
Omware ³	You scratch him/her(V)	Conceptual
Omosari ¹	Male circumciser (N)	Male circumcision school
Omosari ²	Sinner/spoiler(N)	Religious
Omosari ³	Spoil him/her(V)	Conceptual
Omoko ¹	In-law(N)	Marriage sub
Omoko ²	Type of tree species(N)	Conceptual

Their relation is orthographical but differentiated by tonal stress in reference. They are also dialectal (used differently in *Ekorogoro* (Northern) and *Ekemaate* (Southern) dialects of EkeGusii. Context therefore does not change the hyponymic relations but may influence usage. Tone and stress have a role to play in the realization of homonyms since they can determine whether two words become homonyms or stay as different words. In EkeGusii just like in many other Bantu languages a change in tone can create different words as in *esese*¹ and *esese*² realize different meaning and therefore, not considered as homonyms. *Omosari*¹ is not a homonym of *omosari*² and *omosari*³ respectfully. Stress applies in *omosari*² and *omosari*³ to change the grammatical category. *Omosari*² is a noun while *omosari*³ is a verb. Lexical pragmatic approach applies in disambiguating meaning that may cause confusion when using EkeGusii homonyms.

4.1.4 Polysemy

Polysemy designates multiple meanings where one lexical item has more than one definition (Leech, 1974). Polysemy designates a situation in which a single word has a set of related meanings (Goddard, 1998). It also includes symbols whose meaning realization is varied. For example, the meaning of the word 'get' include;

To become
To procure
To understand
The symbol of the 'cross' may designate.
Hospital
Church
Red cross
Graveyard
Railway crossing
Christianity

Evans and Green (2006) describe polysemy as the phenomena whereby lexical items are commonly associated with two or more meanings that appear to be related in some way. Yule (2010) notes that these multiple meanings are all related by extension. Lexical items in the study that have related meanings include the following;

EkeGusii	English (Gloss)
<i>Bware</i>	circumcision
<i>Omongwansi</i>	sacrifice

This is a sense relation in which *bware* (circumcision and *omongwansi*) sacrifice are interfaced. Syntactically, the lexical item *omong'wansi* (sacrifice) is a noun with a set of related meanings namely;

Omong'wansi

Table 3

EkeGusii Polysemy

Marriage	Circumcision	Death
Best man	Male tamer	Offers sacrifice

The meaning in all these contexts is closely related but is differentiated by the different roles *omong'wansi* (one who sacrifices) plays in each context. NSoE have intuitive knowledge of how lexical items combine and how they are interfaced based on context. Lexical pragmatic approaches are applied by the hearer of a word by igniting the mind to get the core lexical concept and retrieve appropriate meaning for it.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

EkeGusii is a Bantu language whose sense relation is context dependent. Various sense relations emerge with tone and stress playing a significant role in determining meaning. Contexts in which various relations are realized include birth, naming, circumcision, marriage and death sub-varieties. Lexical items are related in a variety of ways that only NSoE have the knowledge of the kind of relation entered by each word within the context of ECSV. Sense relations help to disambiguate meaning and make communication clear. Diglossia influences meaning in languages that have no clear isoglosses such as EkeGusii by creating functional distinctions within language use. While lexical-semantics shows absolute meaning based on conceptual or dictionary, lexical-pragmatics give implicated meaning such as politeness, register and makes considerations to cultural norms and statues to prevent meaning collision amid shifts.

5.2 Recommendations

Further research ought to be carried out to find other cases of sense relation not only in EkeGusii but also in other African languages. Sense relations in EkeGusii should be part of language patterns to be taught in grade three to socialize learners learning EkeGusii or other African languages. EkeGusii sense relations should be added into EkeGusii dictionary to increase word count for learners learning indigenous languages. Research on meaning shift because of borrowing by EkeGusii should be carried out. More research funds on studies in indigenous languages should be provided to researchers interested in profiling the sociolinguistics of African languages.

Declaration of Interest

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