

A semantic prosody of *ọkụ* ‘fire’ in Ìgbò

Martha C. Egenti

Abstract

The study sets out to analyse the lexical item ọkụ ‘fire’ so as to ascertain if it has a negative semantic prosody. Semantic prosody refers to the semantic environments in which a word or phrase occurs, showing its typical behavior in lexical and/or grammatical company. Using the AntConc software, the lexical item was sourced from sixteen Igbo novels in its various contexts. The component of the Extended Unit of meaning oriented approach was adopted for the data analysis and the various meanings of ọkụ reveal that the basic meaning of ọkụ is ‘fire’, which can be confirmed as having the highest number of occurrences in the corpus. Other meanings such as ‘light’, ‘hot’ are extended meanings, while ‘desire’, ‘annoyance’, ‘quickly/urgently’ are metaphoric meanings. The study also shows that ọkụ ‘fire’ tends towards a negative SP when the meaning is ‘to burn’, even where the meaning is to ‘put something on the fire’ (in relation to cooking), especially when used in the figurative sense it has a negative meaning. Hence, on the basis of the data analysis, this study concludes that, ọkụ ‘fire’ in Igbo has a negative semantic prosody, except in a few cases where the meaning is to ‘illuminate a place’ and when it is used to refer to culinary items.

Keywords: semantic prosody, collocation, colligation, semantic preference, lexico-grammar

1.0. Introduction

Advances in corpus linguistics have increased awareness in corpus studies involving the use of corpora to study the environment in which a specific word most frequently occurs. As a result, interest of researchers and linguists in the study of lexicogrammatical behavior of words has increased the number of studies in the area of lexical semantics, including the phenomenon of semantic prosody, in which linguists try to identify semantic association and/or co-occurrence relationships of lexical items. Their findings have given rise to generalizations with regard to the collocational behavior of lexical items; showing whether they have the tendency to co-occur in positive/negative or sometimes neutral environment.

With regard to studies of this nature in the Igbo, a language spoken in the south-eastern part of Nigerian, and which belongs to the West Benue Congo sub family of the Proto Benue-Cong language family (Williamson & Blench, 2000:31), corpus-based studies involving semantic prosody has not received adequate attention. This study is undertaken in order to explore the lexicogrammatical profile of lexical item *ọkụ* ‘fire’ and to ascertain whether it has a negative or positive semantic associations following Asonye & Emma-Asonye’s (2013:400) claims that “*ọkụ* ‘fire’, in Igbo idioms, depicts *difficulty, trouble, suffering, power*”, which shows a negative semantic patterning. The study used sixteen selected Igbo novels as the source of data and the AntConc software was used to extract the lexical item understudy. The novels are as follows:

Chidozie F. Ogbalu (1972, 2008, & 2008 2nd ed.): *Dimkpa taa aku, Ebubedike, and Uwaezuoke*

J. U. T. Nzeako (2005, 1973, & 1980): *Chi Ewere Ehihie Jie, Nkoli, and Emecheta*

C. E. Ofofomata (1997, 2000 & 2009): *Achowwa Isi Ochu, Onye Chi Ya Akwatughi, and Ofunna*

Ray C. Anene (2012, 2007, & 1998): *Oja Dufuo Dike, Ogbenye Nwee Ndidi, and Mkpuru Onye Kuru*

Tony Ubesie (1977, 1975, 1974 & 1973): *Juo Obinna, Ukpama Okpoko Buuru, Mmiri Oku E Ji Egbu Mbe, and Ukwa Ruo Oge Ya O Daa.*

The Extended unit of meaning approach was adopted in the data analysis involves four levels such as “collocational profile (lexical realization/combination), colligational patterns (lexicogrammatical realizations/combination), common semantic field (semantic preference), and the pragmatic realisations (semantic prosody: negative, positive or neutral environment)” (Tognini-Bonelli, 2001:19).

The extracts of the lexical item *oku* ‘fire’ were glossed and tone marked using Igwe and Green’s (1963) tone marking convention which leaves high tone unmarked, but marks low and downstep tones. The rest of the sections are structured as follows: Section Two discusses issues on semantic prosody and studies in Igbo lexical semantics, while Section Three forms the data presentation and analysis, the last section summarises and concludes.

2.0. Semantic prosody (SP): A brief overview

The term *semantic prosody*, also called discourse or pragmatic prosody (Stubbs, 2001), or semantic associations (Hoey, 2003) was first coined by Sinclair (1987), who borrowed the term “prosody” from Firth’s (1957) notion of prosody in phonological terms in order to show how sounds go beyond segmental boundaries. However, Louw (1993) was the first who introduced semantic prosody to the public in which he tries to account for semantic associations of a lexical item with regard to its ‘tone’ and typical behavior in lexical patterning. Thus, Louw (1993:170) uses the concept of prosody to argue that some expressions prepare the reader/hearer for the production of what follows, which is sometimes something unfavourable. He illustrates SP with the expression *symptomatic of* which he claims, prepares for the production of what follows i.e something undesirable (e.g *parental paralysis, management inadequacies, numerous disorder*). He therefore, concludes that the word has an unfavourable semantic prosody. Louw therefore refers to SP as a form of meaning which is established through the proximity of a consistent series of collocates, often characterisable as positive or negative. In other words, Louw (1993:157) defines the term as “a consistent aura of meaning with which a form is imbued by its collocates”. However, in his later definition, Louw (2000:57) describes semantic prosody “as a form of meaning which is established through the proximity of a consistent series of collocates and the primary function of semantic prosody is to express the speaker’s/writer’s attitude or evaluation”.

In his study of the word *set in*, Sinclair's (1987, 1991) observation of the phenomenon of SP in the collocational behaviour of words, i.e, that some words often appear together with certain linguistic units, concludes that the word has a negative connotation because its main collocates include: *rot, decay, malaise, ill-will, decadence, inflection, prejudice, vicious, rigour, mortis, numbness, bitterness, mannerism, anticlimax, anarchy* e.t.c. (Sinclair, 1991). In his later work, Sinclair's (1996) approach of extended unit of meaning states that "so strong are the occurrence tendencies of words, word classes, meanings and attitudes that we must widen our horizons and expect the units of meaning to be much more extensive and varied than is seen in a single word". This means that, so strong are the co-occurrence tendencies of words (collocation), word classes (colligation), meaning (semantic preference) and attitudes (semantic prosody) that we must widen our horizons and expect the units of meaning to be much more extensive and varied than is seen in a single word (Sinclair 1996:94). This is to say that, Sinclair believes that meaning cannot be said to belong to a single word, but to the phraseology as a whole. This implies that, SP is not discernable from the lexical item alone, but requires those words to be used by a particular set of participants to obtain a particular effect relative to particular objects. Sinclair's (1996:94) approach, therefore, presents four types of co-occurrence relations in extended lexico-semantic units such as: collocation (lexical choices), colligation (grammatical choices), semantic preference (the association of formal

patterning with a semantic field) and semantic prosody (attitudes).

The SP of a lexical item is classified into three categories: positive prosody, negative prosody and neutral or mixed prosody (Hunston, 2007). A node word is designated a positive prosody if the collocations with the node word are positive words, in negative prosody, the node words always collocate with negative words, while in neutral prosody, there are both positive words and negative words.

Semantic prosody has been widely studied by many scholars such as Stubbs (1995, 2001), Bublitz (1996), Tognini-Bonelli (2001), Hunston (2002), Partington (1998, 2004), Hoey (2000) and Stewart (2010), Alcaraz-Mármol & Almela (2016), e.t.c. and cross linguistic studies of SP have been carried out in different languages which cut across the use of different language data such as monolingual data (Stubbs, 1995, Supanfai, 2017), comparable cross linguistic data (Berber-Sardinha, 2000, Dam-Jensen & Zethsen, 2006, Xiao & McEnergy, 2006) and translational data (Ebeling, 2013) e.t.c. For instance, Stubbs (1996:176) defines SP as “a particular collocational phenomenon”. His studies of the words *provide* and *cause* reveal that while *provide* collocates with words like: *assistance, funds, opportunities, relief*, etc. in the semantic fields of *care, food, help, money*, and thus, building up a favorable or a positive prosody; on the other hand, *cause* (both the verb & noun forms) reveals that 90% of the collocates are of negative nature: *cancer, crisis, accident, delay, death, damage, trouble*, etc.

Hunston (2002:104) further suggests that in addition to collocating with positive or negative groupings of words, lexical items can also collocate with semantic sets. In this regard, she asserts that: “A word may be said to have a particular semantic prosody if it can be shown to co-occur typically with other words that belong to a particular semantic set”. The idea is that we can tell the SP of a word by the types of words it frequently co-occurs (collocates) with and the environment it prefers (positive, negative or neutral). For example, the word *impressive* tends to have a positive semantic prosody when it collocates with lexical items like: *dignity, talent, gains, achievement, performance*, etc. While the word *rife* tends to have a negative semantic prosody through its collocation with words like: *crime, misery, corruption, cheating, racism*, etc.

Stubbs (2001:63) summarises two closely related key ideas of Sinclair’s approach which shall form the basis of the data analysis for this study. The first idea is that meaning is typically dispersed over several word-forms which habitually co-occur in text and the second is that, these co-occurring word-forms ‘share’ semantic features. The next section discusses studies of collocation in Igbo.

2.1 Collocation in Igbo studies

Various studies of collocation in Igbo have been done by different scholars such as Anōka (1983), Oweleke (1996), Omega (2007), Ezenwafor (2012), Agbo (2013), Oguagha (2016), e.t.c. showing the co-occurrence relationship of lexical items. A few of these studies will be reviewed here.

Oweleke's (1996) study of the verb-noun selectional restriction in Igbuzo-Igbo shows that there exists a very high degree of selectivity between the verbs and their nominals. While some verbs select numerous items, others select very few. According to her, a lexical item in Igbo which has the meaning 'peel' in English can be realized through many different verbs, each of which selects some varying number of 'peelable' items and rejects others. Using the Igbuzo dialect of Igbo, Oweleke posits that example (1a-e) contains all the items 'peel' or 'remove an outer covering of some sort'.

- (1). a. *bacha*
 b. *kwacha*
 c. *fù`cha*
 d. *kpacha*
 e. *mecha*

According to Oweleke, the verb *-fùcha* has a fixed collocation with 'corn'. She also notes that the class of selectable nouns show that nouns in each set have certain features in common which qualify them to be selected by the verbs. Such features define the manner in which an action is performed, the time or duration of the action, or the physical nature of the noun (that is, weight, size, quality and quantity of the noun). These features, as she claims, have strong roles to play in determining the selection of nouns by verbs. This is exemplified in (2):

- (2). *-fùcha* [ɔkà] peel {fixed collocation with 'corn'}, while
-mecha has different selections:
-mecha [ākṵā, ɔ` pàpàyàbààsì, ògèdè òtìtì, ùkwà]

-peel [egg, groundnut, onion, banana, breadfruit]

A similar study by Oguagha (2016) also investigates selectional restrictions of some selected Igbo verb classes using a valency theory approach, with the goal of analysing the semantic restrictions and the possible co-occurrences of lexical items. The author analyses some classes of Igbo verbs such as action process verbs, verbs of perception, verbs of cognition, inherent quality verbs, true locative verbs, meteorological verbs, surface contact verbs, identificatory and equative verbs based on three levels: the verbal pattern, semantic role and the semantic component levels. The findings of the study show that each verb class has a different valency and verb patterns, in addition to its inherent semantic differences. While, some verb classes have just one valency (i.e monovalent) and verb pattern like meteorological verbs, verbs of perception, manner motion verbs, inherent verbs of quality, true locative verbs, identificatory and equative verbs all have a divalent pattern and a valency of two. Other verbs are either divalent and/or trivalent. Thus, the study notes that every verb has a valency or slot which can only be filled by arguments with certain features. The author concludes tentatively that there is no difference in the valency of the verbs in the different Igbo dialects investigated in spite of the dialectal variation. From the above examination, it is clear that these works do not go into the negative/positive profiles of the lexical items which is the object of SP.

Also, Omega (2007:548), in her relational study of synonyms in Owere Igbo examines whether absolute synonyms exist in the dialect. She observes that there are

collocational restrictions existing between sets of synonyms in the sense that both cannot occur in all contexts; as such, they do not qualify as absolute synonyms. Omego argues that two lexemes which are thought to be synonymous in one context may differ in another. She further explains that “collocation, connotation and emotional overtones e.t.c. are possible factors that can reveal this difference”. To illustrate this, she uses the examples in (20a & b):

Context 1**Context 2**

- (3) a. Meshie/gu` shie ʊzò ọ` Meshie/*gu` shie akwukwò ọ`
 ‘Close this door’ ‘Close this book’

- b. Umerē/àgwà ya rì mma Àgwà/*umerē nwaanyị wu
 mma yā
 ‘Her behaviour is good’ ‘A woman’s beauty lies in her
 behaviour’

(Omego, 2007:548)

According to Omego, the synonyms *Meshie/gu` shié* ‘close’ in Owere Igbo differ only in respect of collocational restriction because *meshie* ‘close’ co-occurs only with the lexeme *ʊzò* ‘door’, while **gu` shie akwukwà*s collocationally unacceptable because it violates the collocational restrictions of one of the synonyms. This is because in collocationally restricted synonyms, the rule of selectional restriction operates and determines what synonym occurs with what lexeme. She, therefore, argues that since the synonyms cannot substitute one for the other in all contexts, they do not qualify as absolute synonyms in Owere Igbo because of the slight but detectable

differences that are invariably present. Omega's findings seem to confirm the fact that perfect synonymy is rare in a language just as O'grady & Katamba (2011:198, 201) assert that "it would be inefficient for a language to have two words or phrases with absolutely identical meanings, perfect synonymy is rare, if not impossible...as languages do not permit two or more structures to have absolutely identical meanings". In line with Cruse (2010:142–145) and Storjohann (2010:69–94), Paradis (2012) also comes to the same conclusion that there are no absolute synonyms in language use; rather, there is a gradient of conceptual and communicative similarity.

Omega further explains the connotative meaning of synonyms as they are influenced by context in Owerre Igbo. For instance, *àmàmihe* and *àkọ* 'wisdom' could be said to be synonymous, but *àkọ* has connotations of craftiness and trickiness which *àmàmihe* does not share. Also, *ibèriibè*, *nzuzù* and *àpàrì* 'foolishness/stupidity' are synonymous in one of their senses, but *àpàrì* has the connotation of imbecility or utmost stupidity. According to the author, the examples simply show that an apparent pair of synonyms on close observation proves to have similar or identical denotation, but have different shades of meaning of association in their connotative sense. In essence, she emphasizes the role of context in determining the meaning of collocation, and all lexical meaning relations can be correctly understood in context. Her study is similar to this current one with regard to the co-occurrence relationships.

The researches in Igbo language recognize the interrelationship between different lexical items in the form of

selectional restrictions which is indeed a relationship that goes beyond one lexical unit. However, this does not yet amount to the recognition of semantic prosody. There are other studies of meaning in Igbo which go deeper into the semantics of lexical items in Igbo such as lexical semantic studies which need to be separated from the study on SP. Such studies dwell on semantic issues at the lexical level and give a lot of insights into the semantics of Igbo individual items which are relevant in SP. However, they overlook the issue of negative or positive semantic associations but provide enough material for establishing SP. Such studies in Igbo lexical semantics can be generally divided into the cognitive linguistic approach (Uchechukwu, 2011; Mbah & Edeoga, 2012; Ogbonna, 2013; Obitube, 2014; Ifeagwazi, 2014; Okeke, 2015) which examines the semantics of lexical items using the image schema approach; the role and reference approach (Agbo 2009, 2010, 2013) discusses events denoted by the action of the verb and not the structure; while the relational approach (Omega, 2007; Ezenwafor, 2012; Okeke, 2015; Okeke & Igbaku, 2015, Onwuekwe, 2015, Egenti, 2017.) discusses the meaning relations of lexical items showing their different relationships. Each of these approaches gives a lot of insights into the semantics of individual lexical items in Igbo but no attempt has been made to analyse Igbo lexical items with regard to their positive or negative profiles using a corpus-based approach. This is precisely where this study diverges from previous works on the lexical semantics of the language; hence the relevance of the study. In what follows, is the data presentation and analysis of *oku* ‘fire’.

3.0 Data presentation and analysis

This section presents the different senses of the node word before going into the different levels of co-occurrence relationship following the components of extended unit of meaning approach.

3.1 Concordance results of *oku* ‘fire’

The concordance tool fished out a total of 176 occurrences of *oku* including lexical items that have the same form but with different tones such as *òkù* ‘call/summon/meeting’ and *ókù* ‘utensil made of clay’. These meanings fall outside the scope of this current study and, therefore, are excluded from the analysis. However, a total of 41 occurrences of the meaning *oku* ‘fire’ were found.

Oku ‘fire’ is glossed as ‘light’ and ‘fire’ in Echeruo’s (2001) dictionary, but its various senses in the concordance lines indicate that it is polysemous. The different senses are viz: *fire, light, hot, desire, annoyance* and *quickly/urgently*. While ‘hot’ and ‘light’ are extended meanings, ‘desire’, ‘annoyance’, ‘quickly/urgently’ and ‘quarrel/fight’ are metaphoric meanings. These different senses are illustrated below.

- ***Oku* ‘fire’** (29 occurrences)

The sense of *oku* ‘fire’ has the highest occurrence in the corpus. This is exemplified in (4a & b) below:

(4) a. Ò wère kùlie gawa kà o

- PRO take get up go-INCHO
 COMPL PRO
 sinye ihē n'òkū
 cook-give thing PREP-fire
 'S/he got up to cook something'
- b. Bikō mègee ụzò nà òkū nà-
 àgba ụlò akwukwo
 please open door COMPL fire
 AUX-burn house book
 'Please open the door, the school is ablaze'

- **Òkū 'light'** (6 occurrences)

- (5) ...Ò lɔta bàa n'ime ụlò wèrè ǹt̀ukpè
 m̀nye
 ...PRO came back enter PRO house take
 lamp light
Òkū òzìgbo wèè hụ Chigozie ebe o s̀èkp̀ụ àl̀à
 fire immediately take see Chigozie place PRO
 kneel ground
 'S/he came back, went into the house, quickly lit the lamp and
 saw Chigozie where he was kneeling down'

The sense of fire in (5) is 'light' because here the verb *munye* 'ignite' forms an ICV with *òkū* as *munye òkū* to mean "start up/ignite fire".

- **Òkū 'hot'** (3 occurrences)

- (6) a. O jì mmiri *okū* mechaa òkukò
 ahù...
 PRO hold water fire do-all hen
 DEM
 ‘S/he used hot water to remove the feathers off the chicken’
- b. Nkòli nwā m̄, ñke à ò bù àhù
okū?
 Nkòli child PRO, DET PRO be
 body hot?
 ‘Nkoli my child, is this fever?’

The meaning of fire with regard to ‘hot’ in (6a and b), simply shows that it is in its modification with other nominals that the sense of ‘hotness’ is derived.

Oku ‘desire’ (one occurrence)

Only one occurrence for this meaning is found in the concordance lines.

- (7)...kà ò b̀àrà ilētā ànyì kà ò
 gwàrà
 ...COMPL PRO come-rV₂ to visit PRO COMPL PRO
 tell-rV₂
 ànyì otu o sì anū yā *oku* n’obì ìmàlità
 ndù akā yā
 PRO how PRO take hear PRO fire PREP-heart to start
 life hand PRO

‘...it was when he visited us that he told us of his desire to start a life of his own’

Here, the sense ‘desire’ arises from its role as a complement in the verbal complex: *inù òkù n’obì*. *Òkù* in isolation does not translate as ‘desire’ but *nù òkù* with the complement *n’obì* ‘does, which give rise to the literal meaning ‘stir fire in the heart’. It is, therefore, only with its complement that the meaning ‘desire’ is realized. Thus, *òkù* is the inherent complement of the root verb *nù* ‘get warm’ and the entire complex is [verb + IC + PP] _v.

- ***Òkù* ‘annoyance’** (one occurrence)

The meaning of ‘annoyance’ is seen in (8):

(8)... Ò mee kà iwe Okwudiri ghàrà idī
 òkū
 PRO do COMPL anger Okwudiri CONJ to-
 be fire
 òkè ukwu ebe Chigozie nò...
 very big place Chigozie stay...
 ‘...s/he made Okwudiri not to be very angry with
 Chigozie’

The construction is *iwe (m̄mādù) ghàrà idī òkū* which is from *iwe idī òkū* ‘anger to be hot’ = to be highly annoyed.

- ***Òkù* ‘quickly/urgently’** (one occurrence)

(9) Mmàlìte okwu dī nà ya bù nwa
 agboghò

beginning word be PREP PRO be child
 young girl sòkwàrà ya
n'òku n'òku sègbue yā
 follow-EXT-rV₂ PRO PREP-fire PREP-fire
 draw-kill him
 'The first point in this matter is that, the young girl quickly
 followed him up and killed him'

This is a fixed expression in the form of a reduplicated prepositional phrase *n'òku, n'òku*, and it is in this construction that it has the sense of 'quickly/urgently'. In other words, *òku* on its own does not translate as 'quickly', but rather it is the concatenation of Prep. + N, Prep + N; i.e., *n'òku, n'òku*, which translate as 'quickly'.

The various meanings show the polysemous nature of *òku* 'fire'. Observe that the basic meaning of *òku* is 'fire' which can be confirmed in its having the highest number of occurrences in the corpus. Other meanings such as 'light', 'hot' are extended meanings, while 'desire', 'annoyance', 'quickly/urgently' are metaphoric meanings. However, the meanings share some relatedness with regard to 'hotness' whether concrete/abstract or light/heat emitting from the fire. In what follows, the collocational, colligational patterns, and semantic preferences showing the lexico-grammatical profile of *òku* 'fire' will be presented.

3.2 Collocation, Colligation, Semantic preference and Semantic prosody of *òku* 'fire'

3.2.1 Collocation of *òku* 'fire'

The noun *ọkụ* ‘fire’ combines frequently with the verb root *gba* to derive verbal complexes and compound verbs. This is shown in the collocates below with their number of occurrences.

gba ọkū ‘burn’ (8 occurrences), *ndù ọkū* ... (5 occurrences), *gbanyuọ; fùnyuọ* ‘quench/blow out fire/light’ (4 occurrences), *hūnye* ‘roast’ (4 occurrences), *suọ ọkū* ‘to set on fire, to put fire to’, (2 occurrences), *ahu ọkū* ‘fever’ (2 occurrences), *egbu ọkū* ‘match box’ (2 occurrences), *mmanu ọkū* ‘kerosine’ (2 occurrences), *ntùkpè* ‘lamp’ (2 occurrences), e.t.c. *sīnyē* ‘cook’ (1 occurrence), *mūnyè* ‘light up’ (1 occurrence), *tinye* ‘put into’ (1 occurrence), *tūnye* ‘throw into’ (1 occurrence), *fùọ* ‘blow’ (1 occurrence), *dajūọ* ‘subside’ (1 occurrence), Also, animate and inanimate things that can be heated, roasted or burnt down such as *ulọ*, *be* ‘house’ (3 occurrences); *ofe* ‘soup’, *ọkà* ‘corn’, *mmà* ‘knife’, *ewu* ‘goat’, *ọkukù* ‘chicken’, *oke* ‘rat’ (1 occurrence), e.t.c were also found.

3.2.2 Colligation of *ọkū* ‘fire’

The following colligates were found in the corpus:

(A). It colligates with the complementizer *ka* and with the preposition *na* such as *hūnye n’ọkū*, *sinye n’ọkū*, e.t.c (see e.g. 4a & b).

It is observed that the nouns which colligate with preposition share the same semantic field of ‘cooking’, but when the meaning is ‘fire’ in relation to ‘set on fire’, ‘to burn’, ‘to catch fire’ and ‘to be burnt down’, it collocates with the verb root *gba*.

3.2.3 Semantic preference of *ọkụ* ‘fire’

The choices of lexical items fall into two semantic fields: the first is that it collocates with foods and animals that can be cooked or roasted such as *ji* ‘yam’, *ọkukù* ‘hen’, *ejùlà* ‘snail’, *ewu* ‘goat’, *ọkà* ‘corn’; hence, they collocate with culinary items such as *hụnye* ‘roast’, *sinye* ‘cook’, *fùọ* ‘blow’, *egbu ọkū* ‘match box’, *mmanụ ọkū* ‘kerosine’. Also, when the meaning is ‘light’, it collocates with instruments involved in giving out light such as *egbu ọkū* ‘match box’, *ntùkpè* ‘lamp’, e.t.c. Secondly, when the meaning is basically ‘fire’, i.e. ‘to set on fire to’, ‘to burn’, ‘to catch fire’ and ‘to be burnt down’, it takes the collocates: *gba* and *suo ọkū* ‘to set on fire, to put fire to’, ‘burn’ which involves things to be burnt down such as *ulọ/be* ‘house’ or persons that can be aggrieved. The lexical groupings simply share similar preference for things that are heated up by cooking or roasting and situations that depict *chaos*, *mishap* and *trashing* or *total loss*. These are summarized in fig 1:

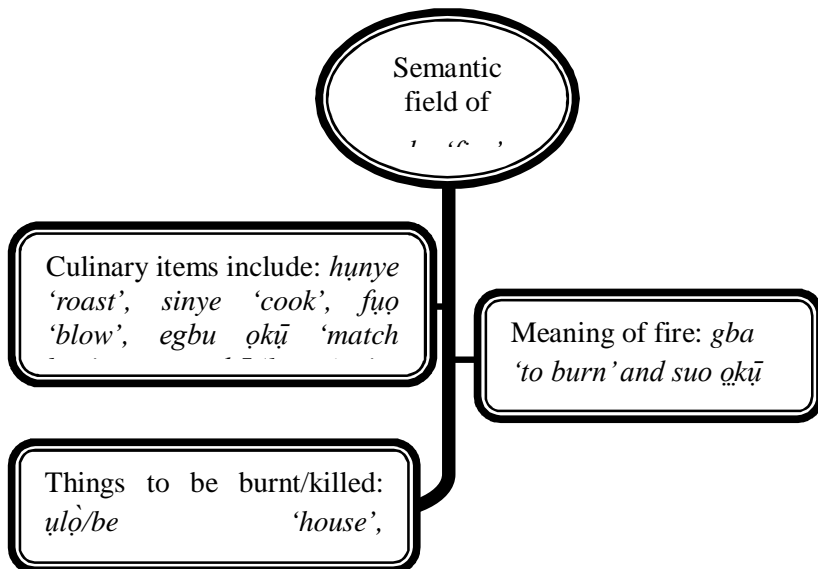


Fig 1: Semantic Field of *oku* 'fire'

3.2.4. Semantic prosody of *oku* 'fire'

The lexical environment of the noun *oku* 'fire' with the meanings *gba okū* and *suo okū* 'to set on fire, to put fire to', 'burn', connote situations of *chaos*, *mishap* and *do away with something*, following from the semantic preferences. All these point to a negative semantic prosody. In addition, the sense of heat/hotness which arises as a result of the modification of some lexical items, contributes to giving it a negative meaning in most contexts even in metaphoric usages. This explains why Asonye & Emma-Asonye (2013:401) affirm that "*oku* 'fire', in Igbo idioms, depicts difficulty, trouble, suffering, power e.t.c". We have also noted that where it has the meaning of 'heat/hotness' in relation to cooking, it connotes a positive

semantic prosody. The colligational patterning gives it the meaning of cooking with the use of the preposition *on*, and where it depicts something that is on fire (which is not necessarily cooking). Also, the lexical choices with *oku* in this regard are NPs that are food related lexical items. Similarly, the meaning of ‘light’ with regard to illuminating up a place where there is darkness has a semantic prosody that is also positive.

Following from the foregoing, we can, therefore, say that *oku* ‘fire’ when used in the sense of ‘to set on fire, to put fire to’, ‘burn’, which is its basic meaning, is predominantly negative except in cases where it collocates with culinary items. In addition, it also points to an emotive meaning that is negative where it is used figuratively as in idioms. This is exemplified in Asonye & Emma-Asonye (2013:400):

- (10) a. \emptyset gà-àdì kà è siri ya
 n'oku
 PRO AUX-be COMPL PRO cook-rV
 PRO PREP-fire
 It will be as if it is cooked in fire (lit.)
 ‘it will be a difficult thing’ (fig.)

- b. Àgwà ojoō gī à gà-ètinye gī
 n'okū
 Character bad your DEM AUX-put
 you PREP-fire
 This your bad character will put you head in fire (lit.)

‘this your bad character will land you in trouble’
(fig.)

In (10a) *oku* ‘fire’ collocates with ‘cook’, but it is figuratively used to imply ‘difficulty’, while the sense in (10b) means ‘trouble’ with the colligate *tinye gī* ‘put you (someone) into’ and the grammatical subject *àgwà ojoō* ‘bad character’, adds up to give it a negative meaning.

4.0 Summary and Conclusion

The study shows that *oku* ‘fire’ has negative SP where the meaning is ‘to burn’, even where the meaning is to ‘put something on the fire’ (in relation to cooking), especially when used in the figurative sense, it connotes a negative meaning contingent upon its lexical and grammatical combinations (co-occurs mostly with the preposition *na* ‘on’). The lexical groupings simply share similar preference for things that are heated up by cooking or roasting and situations that depict *chaos*, *mishap* and *trashing* or *total loss*. All these reflect the attitudinal or pragmatic meaning intended by the language user. Hence, this study agrees with Asonye & Emma-Asonye’s (2013:400) assertion that *oku* ‘fire’ in the language has a negative profile, except in a few cases where the meaning is to ‘illuminate a place’ and when it combines with culinary items. The various meanings of *oku* ‘fire’ as identified in this study would contribute to studies in lexical semantics and phraseology in the language, and also be useful not only to lexicographers, but to translators and linguists in general.

References

- Agbo, M. S. 2009. The syntax and semantics of verbs of cooking in ÌgbòIn *SKASE Journal of Theoretical Linguistics*, 6, 2:12-21.
http://www.skase.sk/Volumes/JTL14/pdf_doc/05.pdf
- Agbo, M. S. 2010. Verb classification and aktionsart in Igbo. *California Linguistic Notes*. Xxxxxv, 1:1-21.
- Agbo, M. S. 2013. A Role and Reference Grammar Analysis of the Igbo verb. Unpublished PhD dissertation. *University of Ibadan*.
- Alcaraz-Mármol & Almela, S. 2016. The SP of the words inmigración and inmigrante in the Spanish newspapers. www.scieto.cl/pdf/signos/v49n91/art01.pdf. 21/12/16.
- Anene, R. C. 1998. *Mpuru onye kuru*. Onitsha: Elites' Publishers.
- Anene, R. C. 2007. *Ogbenye nwee ndidi*. Onitsha: Elites' Publishers.
- Anene, R. C. 2012. *Oja dufuo dike*. Onitsha: Elites' Publishers.
- Anthony, L. 2014. AntConC: a freeware corpus analysis toolkit for concordancing and text analysis. www.laurenceanthony.net/software.html. on September 2014.

- Anoika, G. M. K. 1983. Selectional restrictions of verbs meaning 'to buy'. In *Readings on the Igbo verb* in Nwachukwu, P. A. (ed), 171-206. Nsukka: Africann-FEP Publishers Ltd.
- Asonye, A. & E. Asonye. 2013. Igbo idioms and their expression of thought: A grammatical cum Pragmatic Approach. In Ndinele, O.M. Yuka, L.C. & Ilori, J. F (eds). *Issues in Contemporary African Linguistics. A festschrift for Oladele awobuluyi*. 11(391-403). Port Harcourt: M & J. Grand Orbit Communicative Ltd.
- Berber-Sardinha, T. 2000. Semantic prosodies in English and Portuguese: a contrastive study. *Cuadernos de Filología Inglesa* (University of Murcia, Spain), 9/1:93-110.
- Bublitz, W. 1996. 'Semantic prosody and cohesive company: somewhat predictable'. *Leuvense Bijdragen: Tijdschrift voor Germaanse Filologie*, 85/1-2: 1-32.
- Cruse, A. 2010. *Meaning in language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dam-Jensen, H. & K. K. Zethsen. 2006. Pragmatic patterns and the lexical system – A reassessment of evaluation in language. *Journal of Pragmatics* 39: 1608 -1623.
- Ebeling, S. O. 2013. Semantic prosody in a cross-linguistic perspective in Vibecke C. D. Haslerud & Petter Henriksen

(ed.). *Studies in Variation, Contacts and Change in English 13: Corpus Linguistics and Variation in English: Focus on Non-Native Englishes*. <http://www.helsinki.fi/varieng/series/volumes/13/ebeling/10/6/2014>.

- Egenti, M. C. 2017. The semantic prosody of Igbo lexical categories. A PhD dissertation submitted to the Department of Linguistics, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.
- Ezenwafor, C. A. 2012. Semantic fields and collocational restrictions: insights from Igbo. A PhD seminar paper presented to the Department of Linguistics and Communication Studies, University of Port Harcourt.
- Firth, J. R. 1957. *Papers in Linguistics 1934-1951*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Green, M. M. & G. E. Igwe. 1963. *A descriptive grammar of Igbo*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Hoey, M. 2000. Persuasive rhetoric in linguistics: a stylistic study of some features of the language of Noam Chomsky. In Hunston, S., & Thompson, G. (eds.), *Evaluation in text: authorial stance and the construction of discourse* (pp. 28-37). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Hoey, M. 2003. Lexical priming and the qualities of text. <http://www.monabaker.com/tsresources/LexicalPrimingandthePropertiesofText.htm>.
- Hunston, S. 2002. *Corpora in Applied Linguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hunston, S. 2007. Semantic prosody revisited. *International Journal of Corpus Linguistics*, 12/2: 249-268.
- Ifeagwazi, P. A. 2014. Cognitive semantic analysis of the Igbo verb 'Ba'. A PhD Seminar paper presented to Department of Linguistics, Igbo and Other Nigeria languages, *University of Nigeria, Nsukka*.
- Louw, B. 1993. 'Irony in the text or insincerity in the writer? The diagnostic potential of semantic prosodies', in M. Baker, G. Francis and E. Tognini-Bonelli (eds), *Text and Technology: in Honour of Sinclair*. Amsterdam: John Benjamin, pp. 157-175.
- Louw, B. 2000. 'Contextual prosodic theory: bringing semantic prosodies to life', in C. Heffer and H. Saunston (eds), *Words in Context: in Honour of John Sinclair*. Birmingham: ELR, pp. 48-94.
- Mbah, B. M. & P. N. Edeoga. 2012. Image schema of the verb 'Se' in Igbo semantics. *Research on Humanities and social sciences*. 2, 7:41-47

- Nzeako, T. J. U. 1973. *Nkọlị*. London: Longman Nigeria Ltd.
- Nzeako, T. J. U. 1980. *Emecheta*. Ibadan: Caxton Press Ltd.
- Nzeako, T. J. U. 2005. *Chi ewere ehiehie jie*. Onitsha: God's Eagle Publishers.
- Obitube, K. O. 2014. Cognitive semantic analysis of the Igbo verb 'kụ'. A PhD Seminar paper presented to *Department of Linguistics, Igbo and Other Nigerian languages, University of Nigeria, Nsukka*.
- Ofofomata, C. E. 1997. *Achowa isi ochu*. Enugu: Format Publishers.
- Ofofomata, C. E. 2000. *Onye chi ya akwatughị*. Enugu: Format Publishers.
- Ofofomata, C. E. 2009. *Ofunna*. Enugu: Format Publishers.
- Ogbalu, C. F. 1972. *Dimkpa taa aku*. Onitsha: Varsity Publishing Company Ltd.
- Ogbalu, C. F. 2008. *Ebubedike*. Onitsha: Varsity Publishing Company Ltd.
- Ogbalu, C. F. 2008. *Uwaezuoke* (2nd ed.). Onitsha: Varsity Publishing Company Ltd.

- Ogbonna, J. E. 2013. A cognitive semantic analysis of the verb 'kwa'. A PhD Seminar paper presented to *Department of Linguistics, Igbo and Other Nigerian languages, University of Nigeria, Nsukka*.
- O'grady, W. & F. Katamba. 2011. Semantics and pragmatics, in O'grady W., Archibald J, & Katamba F. (eds.), *Contemporary linguistics: an introduction* (2nd ed.). England: Pearson Education Ltd.
- Ogugha, U. E. 2016. Igbo verbs and selectional restrictions: a valency theory approach. Unpublished MA thesis. *Department of Linguistics, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka*.
- Okeke, C. 2015. A cognitive domains of the sense relation of selected Igbo verbs. A PhD Thesis. *Department of Linguistics, Igbo and Other Nigerian languages, University of Nigeria, Nsukka*.
- Okeke, C. & B. Igbeaku. 2015. Igbo verbs of cooking: a lexical semantic analysis. *Studies in the languages of Africa*, vol 46:1. 81-97. SA: Routledge.
- Omega, C. 2007. A case for absolute synonymy in Owerre Igbo in Ndimele O. (ed.). *Trends in the study of languages and linguistics in Nigeria: a festschrift for Philip Akujūobi Nwachukwu*. 545-556. Port Harcourt: Grand Orbit Communications and Emhai Press.

- Onwukwe, C. 2015. Hyponymous relationship of verbs of cooking in Igbo. *International Research Journal of Arts and Social Science*. 4,3:61 -69. <http://dx.doi.org/10/14303/irjass.2015.014>.
- Oweleke, E. N. 1996. Verb-Noun selectional restrictions in Igbuzo-Igbo. Unpublished Masters Thesis. *University of Port Harcourt*.
- Paradis C. 2012. Lexical semantics. In *The Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics*, Chapelle, C.A. (ed.) Oxford, UK: Wiley- Blackwell, 3357–3356.
- Partington, A. 1998. *Patterns and Meanings: Using Corpora for English Language Research and Teaching*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Partington, A. 2004. “Utterly content in each other’s company”: semantic prosody and semantic preference’. *International Journal of Corpus Linguistics*, 9/1:131-156.
- Sinclair, J. 1987. *Looking Up*. London/Glasgow: Collins.
- Sinclair, J. 1991. *Corpus, Concordance, Collocation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sinclair, J. 1996. ‘The search for units of meaning’. *Textus*, 9: 75-106.

- Sinclair, J. 1998. 'The lexical item', in E. Weigand (ed.), *Contrastive Lexical Semantics*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1-24.
- Stewart, D. 2010. *Semantic prosody: a critical evaluation*. London-New York: Routledge.
- Storjohann, P. 2010. Synonyms in corpus texts: Conceptualisation and construction. In P. Storjohann (ed.), *Lexical-semantic relations: theoretical and practical perspectives*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Stubbs, M. 1995. 'Collocations and semantic profiles. On the cause of the trouble with quantitative studies'. *Functions of Language*, 2,1: 23-55.
- Stubbs, M. 1996. *Text and corpus analysis: Computed assisted studies of language and culture*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Stubbs, M. 2001. *Words and Phrases: Corpus Studies of Lexical Semantics*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Supanfai, P. 2017. Semantic prosody in Thai. A PhD thesis, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences – Linguistics and English Language, *University of Lancaster*. <http://eprints.lancs.ac.uk/86038> on 6/6/17.

- Tognini-Bonelli, E. 1996. *Corpus Theory and Practice*. An unpublished PhD thesis, *University of Birmingham*.
- Tognini-Bonelli, E. 2001. *Corpus Linguistics at Work*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Ubesie, T. 1973. *Ụkwa ruo oge ya*. Ibadan: Oxford University Press Limited.
- Ubesie, T. 1974. *Mmiri ọku e ji ebu mbe*. Ikeja: Longman.
- Ubesie, T. 1975. *Ụkpana okpoko buuru*. Ibadan: University Press Limited.
- Ubesie, T. 1977. *Juọ Obinna*. Ibadan: University Press Limited.
- Uchechukwu, C. 2011. *Igbo verb and cognitive linguistics*. Igbo language Series 3. Onitsha: Edumail Publishing.
- Williamson K. and Blench R. 2000. African languages: an introduction. Heine & Nurse (ed.). UK: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 11- 42.
- Xiao, R. and T. McEnery. 2006. 'Near synonymy, collocation and semantic prosody: a cross-linguistic perspective'. *Applied Linguistics*, 27,1:103-129.

Yen-yu, L. and Siaw-Fong, C. 2016. A corpus-based study on the semantic prosody of 'challenge'. *Taiwan Journal of TESOL*: 13, 2: 99 – 146.
www.birmingham.ac.uk/documents/college-artslaw/corpus/conference-archives/2011/abs-28.pdf.
22/10/16.

Martha C. Egenti is a lecturer in the Department of Linguistics, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.