

LEXICAL SEMANTICS OF VERBS OF EXCRETION IN THE IMIRYIKE VARIETY OF IGBO

Abstract

Certain system of combinability of lexical items is attested in language use. The force of this combinability derives from the relatedness of the meaning of lexical items which yields them into lexical fields. The paper examines the lexical fields of verbs of excretion in Imiryike dialect of Igbo. Though many studies have been done on lexical semantics, not much is done on the area of sense relation. The study adopts the semantic theory of sense relation as a tool for an efficient descriptive analysis of the subject matter. The verbs are categorized into two: verbs of defecation and urination. From the study, the paper recorded nineteen entries for the verbs: thirteen for the verbs of defecation and six for verbs of urination. The type of relation the verb exhibits is that of hyponym; the members show a relation of "inclusion". In the verbs of defecation "nyú is the superordinate term while má, 'táshí, 'kpà, 'kù, 'pú' etc are co-hyponyms. In verbs of urination, 'gbó' is the general or superordinate term while 'zà, wúshì, kpábu' etc. are the specific terms. Although, the noun- 'nshi' is not our focus, it is the general term for the more specific terms as: 'àvára, 'áhù, 'òtòro etc. It also discovers that every domain of Igbo life has its own register and the passing stool experience provides evidence for learning the verb classes.

Introduction

Language as a means of communication has been graded into different levels. The work focuses on the level of linguistics which studies meaning. The scientific study of meaning is termed semantics and became a preferred term to other terms as semasiology, semiotics, semology, sememic e.t.c. that were previously in use by scholars and authors not so long ago. Lyons (1977), Ndimele (1999), Agbedo (2000), Finch (2000) and a host of others agree that this level of linguistics principally studies language in a scientific way. Meaning itself has occupied a central position not only in linguistic studies but in other disciplines. In communications, utterances such as words, phrases and sentences have the function of conveying message which otherwise are referred to as utterance's meaning.

The word meaning is infested with problems because of the several functions it performs. Odgen and Richards (1923) distinguished twenty-three meanings of mean in an attempt to define meaning. Collinge (1991) observes that the problem is to ascertain what meaning means as meaning serves many functions. For instance, we are aware that speakers use implies, denote, intend etc. for the word mean. In the words of Ndimele (2003:2), meaning is a chameleon changing the colour of its effect with the change of speaker, hearer, context or setting. This concept he continues, can stand for: signifies, symbolizes, stand for, means, indicate, intend, translates etc.

For illustration purposes let's consider these sentences:

- Francis didn't mean to disgrace Mary.
- John's certificate means everything to him.
- The rainbow means onset of dry season.

Analyzing the above sentences, the word mean has different senses. In the first sentence, mean has the sense of 'intend', the second denotes a sense of value while the third has a sense

of signal. This analysis shows that the word mean or meaning is difficult to be pinned down to a specific term. In conformity, Cherry (1957:112) postulates that "meaning is a harlot among words; it is a temptress who can seduce the writer or speaker from the path of intellectual chastity". Several other linguists such as Jacobson (1960), Halliday (1970) Lyons (1977) Brown and Yule (1981), among others provided strong clues in an attempt to streamline the idea underlying the word mean yet despite their effort Palmer(1981) observes that there is no general agreement to the nature of meaning. Agreeing to the above view, Anagbogu, Mbah and Eme (2001) claim that today, there is no universally accepted definition of meaning. The centrality of meaning in communication has consequently brought an exploding array of approaches to meaning definition. Among these theories are the speech act, componential, structural, cognitive and lexical/semantic theories including others. As a matter of fact, the use of meaning as a parameter for the distinction between some lexical items and others forces such items to be highly selective in their occurrence with others. This selective nature of certain related items yields them into semantic fields. This forms the basis of our study. Sense refers to common linguistic meaning of an expression. The sense of a word according to Palmer is revealed through the relations of meaning which the word contracts with other lexemes in the language. Through the ideals of lexical semantic theory of sense relation, we shall examine the selectional restriction of the verbs of Excretion in Imiryike variety of Igbo.

Imiryike is a town in the Northern part of Igboland. Linguistically, it belongs to the Nsukka dialect cluster according to Ikekeonwu (1996). Nwozuzu (2008) classifies it under Northern group of dialects. The tone convention used is such that only contrasting pitches are indicated.

1.1 Lexical Semantics

Lexical semantic theory presumes that the actual value of a word can only be ascertained by its relatedness with other items in a paradigm. According to Asher(1994), lexical semantics refers to those approaches that rejects the view that the vocabulary of a language is an unordered set of items but instead view the lexicon as organized into groups of items that belong together on the basis of their meaning.. Agbedo(2000) claims that the value of a word is acquired by virtue of their relatedness with other items in the unit. This implies that words may not have meaning properties in isolation but rather bear meaning relation with other words *etc*. Finch (2000) defines semantic field as "an area of meaning containing words with related sense. The meaning relation is also discussed as sense relation by many scholars.

1.2 Sense Relations

Sense relation is a type of lexical semantics that concerns itself with the way people relate words to each other within their language system. Anagbogu, Mbah and Eme (2010:223) define sense relation as "the meaning relation between words; it refers to how the meanings of individual words are either different or similar". Crystal (1980) postulate that lexical semantics allows us to capture many cases where we use words even though they do not correspond to the way things appears in the real world. Asher (1994) observes that groups of words are related in sense and as such argues that alphabetical order destroys semantic structure, keeping apart words that belong together. In English for instance, the lexemes:

uncle, aunt, cousin etc. have related sense but are kept apart in the lexicon. Ndimele (1999) postulates that in every language, words not only bear meaning relation to each other but have no meaning properties in isolation. Usually, when words refer to the same area of meaning, they belong to the same semantic set. In Igbo for instance, the verb 'ghé (fry) combines with the words: àkwá, ázù, ókà, ánu to form a semantic set. The discourse accounts of lexical semantic structure recognizes many words of sense relation between items which may result from the way items occur in sequences. The interdependence of meaning of related items also culminates into yard sticks of contrasts among them, that is, the sense of such words defines themselves against each other. For example, it is difficult or even meaningless to inquire into a sense of 'bitter taste' without placing it alongside the related sense "sweet"

In sense relation there are levels of meaning relation: the word level and sentence level but our focus here is the word level. At word level, there are many paradigmatic relationships. They include: Synonymy, Polysemy, Homonymy, Complementarity, Conversives and Reversives, prototype, Metonymy, Antonym (semantic opposition) Collocation and Hyponym. The type of sense relation that interests us in this study is Hyponym. It is the type of relation which denotes 'inclusion'. Anagbogu, Mbah, and Eme (2001:157) postulate that "when two or more words are related in the sense that they can be classified under another umbrella term, they are called hyponyms". Cruse (1990:155) argues that "there are two parallel but distinct sorts of inclusion and exclusion, one type deals with classification and sub-division into smaller ones while the other deals with dividing things into constituent parts." In this respect, Crystal (1994) observes that the notion of inclusion permits us to say that 'C' is a kind of 'B'. In English for example, 'rose' is a kind of 'flower' while car is a hyponym of vehicle. In Russia, 'siniji' is a kind of 'blue' colour. In Igbo, 'onugbu' is a kind of vegetable. It places a kind of hierarchy in meaning relation such that all senses of the one of the words are included within the other. Ndimele (1999) observes that inclusion implies membership. The word that most includes the meaning of the particular term is called superordinate term while the more specific words referred to as the hyponym/subordinate. All the words whose meaning are included in the of the general word are termed co-hyponyms. Example, the co-hyponyms of the superordinate verb 'cook' are: steam, roast, fry etc.

One of the concepts that determine the criteria for classifying the items under lexical semantic field is selectional restriction. Some linguists refer to this restrictions as collocation, Wehmeier (2000) observes that collocation is the way in which particular lexical items tends to belong together or occur. Firth (1957) sees this process of belonging together as company keeping of words. He claims that a word is identified by the company it keeps which contributes part of its meaning. For instance, the word blunt co-occurs with the word blade, roaring co-occurs with the word lion (animal). This system of company keeping is conceived by some linguists as co-occurrence restrictions. They claim that words observe well formed co-occurrence restrictions. The constraints placed on lexical relations are discussed by many scholars using different terms. Porzig cited in Asher (1994:4475-6) used the term, the "essential meaning relations", Firth (1957) used 'collocation and company

keeping', Katie (1996) used selection features, Katz and Fodder (1963), Ndimele (1999) used selectional restriction yet others use co-occurrence restrictions.

In this study we shall limit our work to restrictions/sense relations of verbs of excretion in Igbo using Imiryike variety as a case study. The type of relation is hyponym.

2.2 Sense relations of Igbo Verbs

Many Igbo linguists have in one way or the other examined meaning relations while discussing semantic classes of Igbo verbs, selectional restrictions of Igbo verbs or other areas of the language though most of the comments are on the periphery. For instance, Mbah (2001) in his work on precede and command in Igbo syntax comments that selectional restrictions imposed by word order in Igbo has ruled out the possibility of proceed and command. Nwachukwu (1983b, 1985), Emenanjo (1984, 1986), and Ubahakwe (1976) in their discourse on transitivity of Igbo verbs mentioned collocation.

Nwachukwu (1987) and Uwalaka (1981), discussing on the lexical semantics of Igbo verbs upholds that selectional restriction of a verb determine the type of items whose meaning relations constitute semantic set. Uwalaka points that most Igbo verbs are inherent complement verbs and the inherent character sets apart a subclass of Igbo verbs For instance the verb 'gba' in the subclass below, there is the existence of a sense relation of hyponym. It involves a notion of inclusion.

gbá	egwū.....	dance
gbá	egbè.....	Fire a gun
gbá	ufā.....	shot an arrow
gbá	bọl.....	Play football gba' and its
gbá	ugboàla.....	Drive a car
gbá	àsiri.....	Spread gossip
gba	obara.....	Bleed.

Nwaozuzu (1991) Observes that Igbo verbs are selective in picking their complements. She uses the infinitive word 'Ibe' to illustrate her point

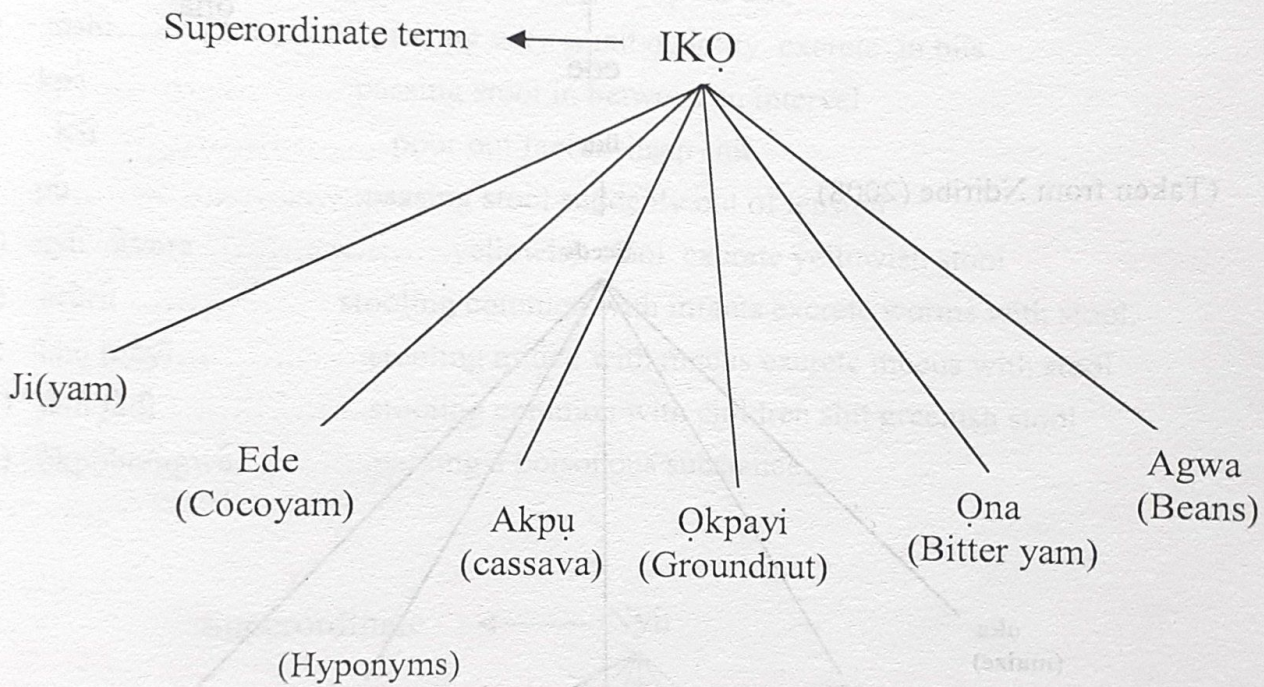
Íbè úgū.....	To cut vegetables
Íbè ákwà.....	To cut cloths
Íbè úgwù.....	To circumcise
Íbè égō	To reduce price

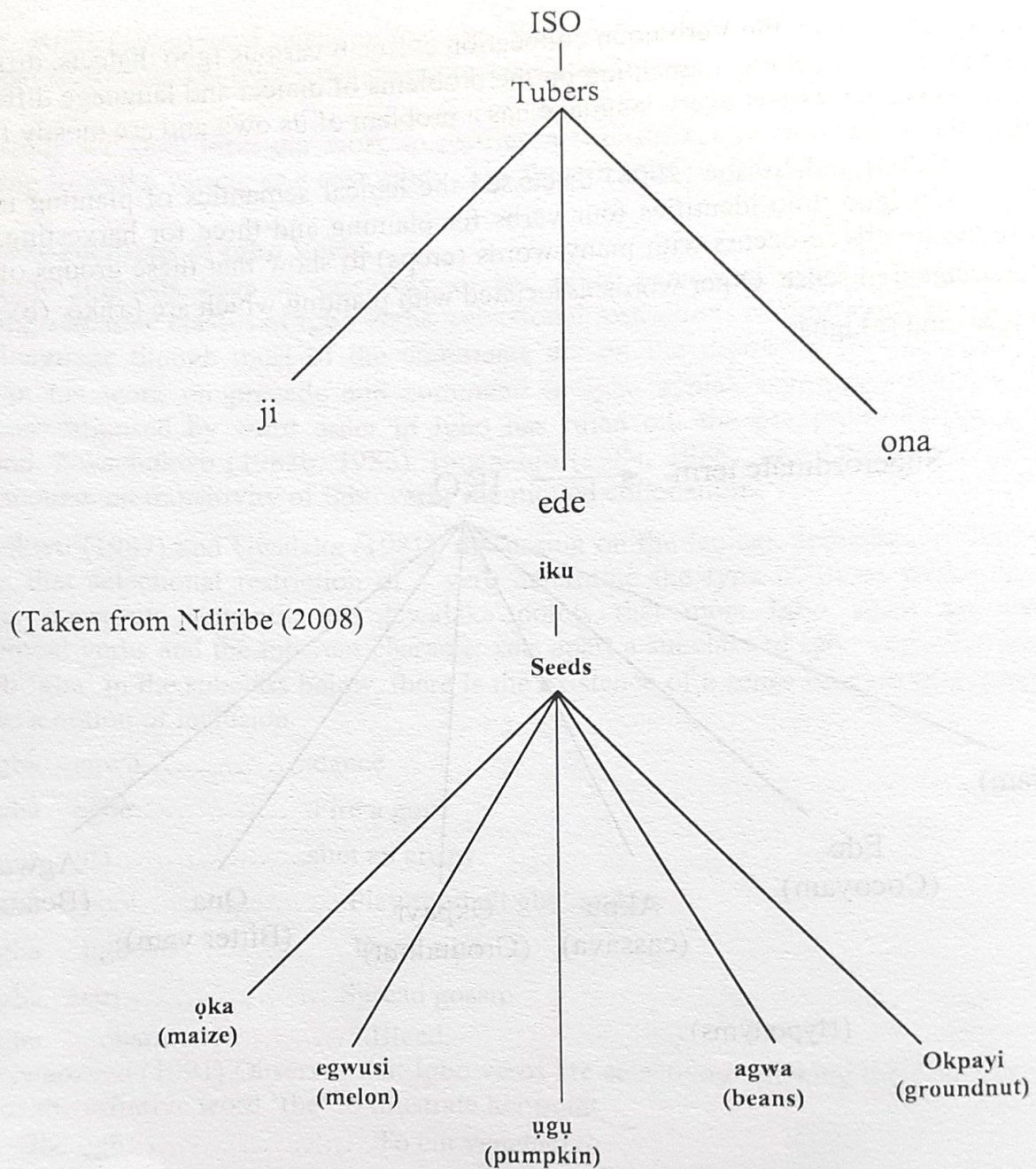
In the above meaning relations, 'gba' and 'ibe' are the words that most includes the meaning of the general term called superordinate while the more specific words refer to the hyponyms.

Anoka (1983) argues strongly that selectional restriction have been observed in Igbo verb phrase and they are essentially semantic claiming that the matching of verbs with their corresponding items are determined by the inherent meaning of the verbs. In Mbaise Igbo, he identified about seventeen enteries epressing the word zù (buy). He further notes that though

selectional restriction on the Verb/noun collocation exists in various Igbo dialects, differences may exist in terms of details. Lamenting on the problems of dialect and language differences, Leech (1973) postulates that every language has a problem of its own and are mostly found in the area of the verbs.

Imo (2003) and Ndrife (2008) discussed the lexical semantics of planting in Ihiala and Umuawulu Igbo, Imo identifies four verbs for planting and three for harvesting. In the discourse, each verb co-occurs with many words (crops) to show that these groups of words below are related in sense. Other words associated with planting which are (a) *íkò* (b) *ísò* (c) *íkù* (d) *ìgbā* and (e) *ìghā*





Each of these sub sets forms a lexical set which realizes a semantic field of planting.

Having gone through some work devoted to sense relations of hyponym in lexical semantics, we shall present the semantics of verbs of Excretion in Imiryike. We shall gloss the terms in English as much as we can but when we are handicapped owing to the reason that they may not have direct one-to-one interpretation in English, we resort to a transliteration method.

3. Lexical Semantics of Verbs of Excretion in Imiryike variety of Igbo

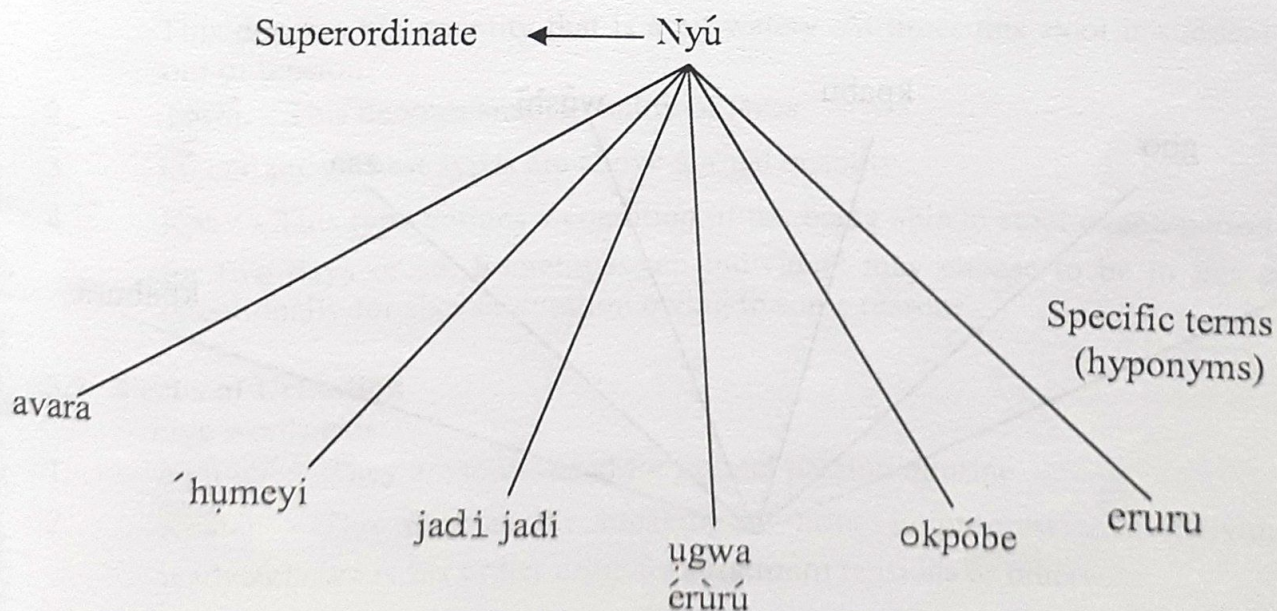
By verbs of excretion we mean all verbs that denote the passage of feces and urine out of the human body. These terms will be subcategorized into two:-

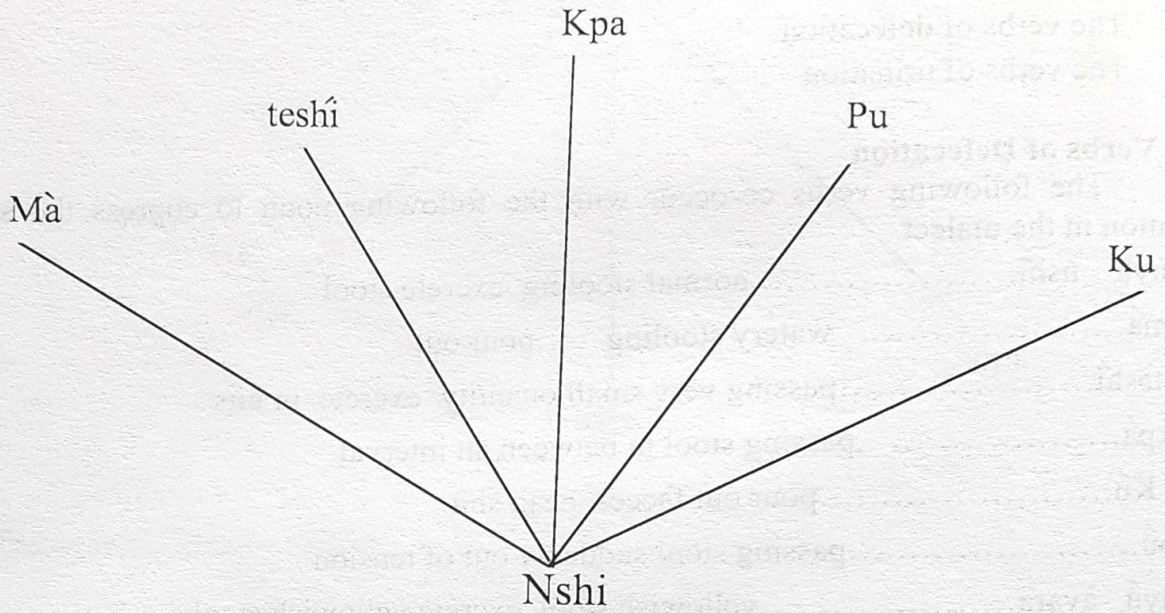
- The verbs of defecation
- The verbs of urination

3.1 Verbs of Defecation

The following verbs co-occur with the following noun to express the sense of defecation in the dialect.

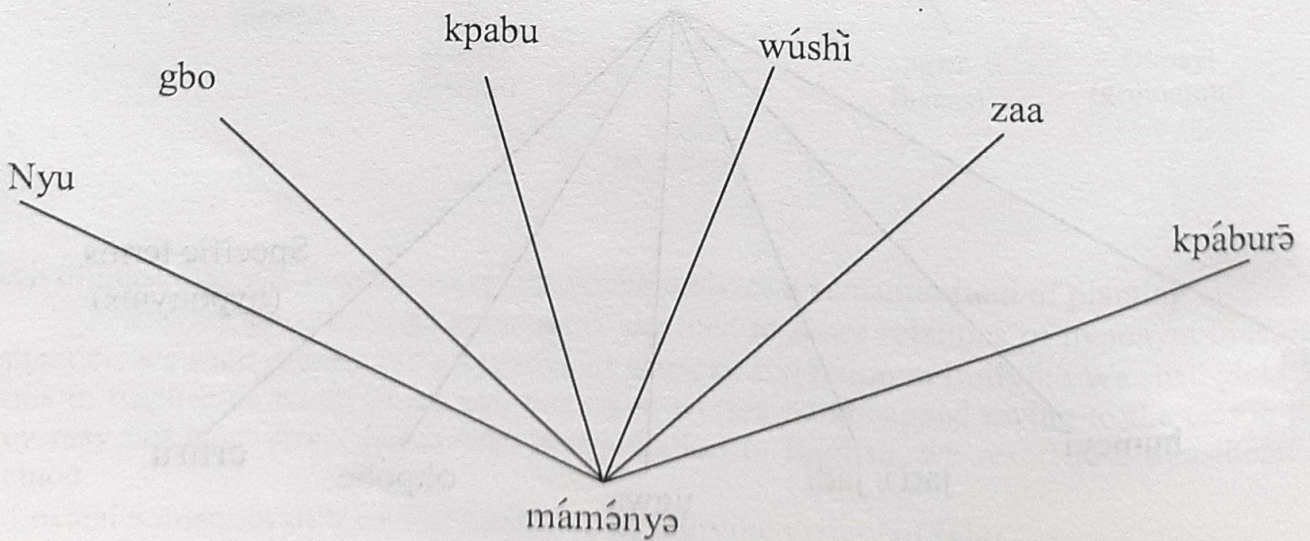
- 1) nyú nshĩ.....normal stooling excrete stool
- 2) má..... watery stooling ...pour out
- 3) tashĩ.....passing very small quantity excrete in bits
- 4) kpá.....passing stool in between an interval
- 5) Kú.....pour out faeces heap shit
- 6) pù.....passing stool suddenly out of tension
- 7) nyú àvara.....yellowish stool excrete yellowish stool
- 8) érurú stooling common with infants excrete worms with stool.
- 9) éhù méyĩ.....stooling mixed with mucus excrete mucus with stool
- 10) jàdí jàdí.....stooling common with children shit greenish stool
- 11) òkpóbe/ùgwá.....passing a poisonous substance





Verbs of Urination

This includes all individual words that denote the sense of removal of urine from the body. The words may either be similar or different and these similarities or differences ranges from close to distant relationships.



Analysis

There are many terms used and each term has its own unique implication on the individual concerned. Beginning from the words of defecation, nine words exist

1. Nyú nshī: - This term is used particularly for normal stooling.
2. àvara: - This type of feces is related to infant stooling. it is also normal with infants without stooling problems.
3. áhè meyi: - This is the type of feces that comes with mucus. This situation indicates the presence of dysentery in the individual concerned.
4. jàdí jàdí: - This is the type of stooling peculiar to infants who have jaundice. The stool is usually greenish in colour.
5. érùrù: - It describes the type of feces that comes with worms. Health wise, the individual is suffering from worms
6. òkpòbè: - This type of feces usually is abnormal in terms of the colour, or the substances that come with it. The individual concerned is suspected to have poison.
7. áhù: -(farting) this is the normal passage of air through the anus.
8. ñshi meyi: - this is the act of passing stool with blood mixed with it. this shows that the person has Hemorrhoids. If treatment is delayed the person may lose much blood through the anus
9. òtoro: - This involves watery and frequent stooling of an individual. The individual is believed to have diarrhea.
10. Five other words exist for describing the quantity of stool

1. Mǎ nshī:-
This denotes big quantity that is a bit watery. At times this stool is suddenly passed out of tension.
2. Tǎshí: - This denotes small quantity of feces.
3. kú and pù: - These types are above normal quantity.
4. Kpá : - This type defines a condition of not being able to stool over a period of time, for two days or so. Sometimes, an individual may choose to be in this condition intentionally for shorter duration owing to some reasons.

3.2 Verbs of Urination

Five words exist –

1. Nyú/gbò: - They are terms used for normal passing of urine
2. Kpábù: - This denotes the breaking of urine in progress. An individual may inadvertently break his or her urine for reasons of tensions or otherwise.

3. Wúshì māmānyə: - This denotes big quantity of urine passed. This may result from excessive in-take of alcohol or water.
4. Kpábùrē: - The term denotes a situation of frequent passing of urine usually big quantity is involved.
5. zà: This denotes sudden passing of urine.

Summary and Conclusion

The work concerned itself with the process of combinability of certain words with others to express meaning and specific features of an item. As a matter of fact, it specifically explored the sense relation of the type hyponym under lexical semantics of the verbs of excretion in Imiryike variety of Igbo. The verbs and the senses involved belong together on the basis of relatedness and constitute semantic field. It brings all items that have one common activity connected to removal of human waste yet dividing them into peculiar varying activities. Our finding is that the members of the group exhibit a relation of 'inclusion' which shows that selectional rules are strictly observed. In Imiryike variety, the verb -Nyú (pass) is the superordinate term while the more specific terms are co-hyponyms. There is also a subclassification in relation to the sense of quantity and members reject any item that does not belong. For instance, the item 'teshi' cannot join the membership of the subsets: 'òkpòbe', 'otoro', 'jadijadi' etc due to their specific properties to avoid violation or ill-formedness in sense relations. The leading terms are 'nyú and gbó'.

Conclusively, Imiryike Igbo is very rich in verbs of excretion. The paper recorded nineteen entries for that very verb, thirteen for the verbs of defecation and six for verbs of urination. This shows that every domain of Igbo life has its own register of terms and excretion is not an exception.

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