

Sense Relation In Tiv

Stephen Shiaondo Ajim, Iorember Margret N. & Peter Terfa Iorfa

Abstract

This paper examines sense relation in the Tiv language spoken predominantly in Benue State. In any given language, words are used in expressing people's views. These words also relate to one another and the relationship between words is worth given attention. Sense relation is evident in many languages of the world with the Tiv language inclusive. However, there are few researches carried out on this very important aspect of meaning. None of the researches exhaustively deals with sense relation in Tiv due to its broad nature hence the need for the present study. Both the primary and secondary sources of data are used. Primary data were gotten from some selected native speakers through the researchers' interaction with the respondents. Questions aimed at sense relation in Tiv were asked and the researchers took notes of the sense relations available in Tiv with the appropriate examples. The researchers adopted a descriptive approach in the analysis of data. The following sense relations have been found to be prominent in the Tiv language: antonyms (gradable and non-gradable antonyms), synonymy (synonyms), hyponymy, homonymy (polysemy and homographs), reversives and conversives. The researchers do not claim that the above are the only sense relations evident in the Tiv language. The paper concludes that sense relation is a fascinating aspect of the semantic study of the Tiv language and that its knowledge is very vital for the effective use of Tiv language.

Key words: Language, semantics, sense relation, Tiv.

1.0 Introduction

Semantics as a field of linguistics studies meanings of words, phrases, clauses and sentences. There are differences and similarities that exist between words, phrases, clauses and sentences and these are studied in semantics under sense and reference, semantic fields, sense relations and among others. In sense relations, the emphasis is on the study of how individual words or lexical items in a language are either similar or different. The Tiv language, one of the Bantu group of languages majorly spoken in Benue State, Nigeria exhibits sense relations. This paper therefore seeks to examine sense relation in Tiv.

2.0 The concept of sense relation

In discussing sense relation, *Akase (2011:207)* asserts that "In any human language, words do not only have meaning properties in isolation, they also bear some meaning relations with each other." Furthermore, the author opines that "when words share certain semantic features, it means that they belong to a particular semantic field or they are the same." *Akase (2011)* is of the view that sense relation has to do with how the meanings of individual words are either similar or different. Agreeing with the definition, *Pushpinder and Jindal (2015)* opine that we can explain the meaning of a linguistic item by using other words and the relation of a word with another word or sense relation. Furthermore, they aver that sense is a complex system of relationships that holds between the linguistic items themselves. To

Stephen Shiaondo Ajim
National Institute For
Nigerian Languages,
Aba, Abia State

Iorember Margret N.
Department Of English,
Yobe State University,
Damaturu

Peter Terfa Iorfa
Languages And Linguistics,
Benue State University,
Makurdi

Correspondence to
Stephen Shiaondo Ajim
ajimstephenshiaondo@gmail.com

Pushpinder and Jindal (2015:145), “sense is concerned with the intra-linguistic relations, i.e. relations within the system of the language itself, such as similarity between words, opposition, inclusion and presupposition.” In a similar perspective *Saeed (2003)* states that words in a language are in a relationship with one another.

From the above explanation of sense relation, one observes that sense relations include antonyms, synonyms, polysemy, homonym, hyponym, reversive and converses, entailment, presupposition among others as can be seen below:

2.1 Antonymy as a sense relation

Antonymy refers to a sense relation of words that are opposite in meaning (*Elham, 2013*). Alternatively, antonymy is a term used for oppositeness of meaning. This means words that are opposite are antonyms (*Fromkin, Rodman and Hyams, 2007, Yule 2007*). Typical examples of antonyms are good – bad, long – short, doctor – patient, lawyer – client, ascend – descend, temporary – permanent.

According to *Akase (2011)*, antonyms have basic features that distinguish them from complementaries. Firstly the denial of one term does not imply the assertion of the other. For instance, to say something is not long does not suggest that 'it is short'. Secondly, members of an antonym pair denote degrees of some variable property which are greater or lesser than some reference value which differs from context to context.

Antonyms are usually divided into two main types which are gradable antonyms such as big – small, hot – cold, fat – thin, tall – short and these can be used in comparative constructions like 'bigger than,' 'smaller than' among others and non-gradable antonyms such as dead – alive, sitting – standing, happy – sad, man – woman.

2.2 Synonym as a sense relation

Stringer (2019) notes that synonyms are words with different phonology but with the same, or approximately the same meaning. Synonyms are two (2) or more forms of lexical items with closely related meanings which are often but not always inter-substitutable in sentences (*Kristin, 2010*). *Akase (2011)* asserts that, to be synonyms means to have the same communicative effect in all contexts without a dodge in meaning. *Fromkin et al (2007)* note that synonyms are words or expressions that have the same meaning in some or all contexts. Some words that are considered as synonyms are (1) àtétàn/àtô-átô yàngé – noon/midday (2) ikpà/ajùfù – hand bag/purse.

Akase (2011) however avers that it is difficult for words to be unanimously accepted to be identical. *Agbedo (2000)* notes that perfect synonyms do not exist in real languages. According to him, words are absolutely synonymous if they are interchangeable in all contexts without any change in the degree of semantic normality. This means some words can be synonyms in some contexts but not synonyms in the other contexts. The examples of synonyms are: doctor – physician, elevator – lift, casket – coffin, petrol – gas, heavenly – celestial.

2.3 Hyponym as a sense relation

Hyponym and hypernym has to do with the relationship between a general term and the more specific terms that fall under the category of the general term (*Mbapuun, 2016*). Hyponymy has to do with when two or more words that are related are classified under one umbrella term. This means that the umbrella term holds the various words that are classified together (*Akase, 2011*). The umbrella term is referred to as the generic, hypernym or superordinate term while the more specific word is referred to as the hyponym or subordinate term. All the words whose meanings are embodied in the meaning of the general word are referred to as co-hyponyms (*Akase, 2011*). Put in a different way, hyponyms are words that have same meaning of a more general word. This is relation of inclusion for example 'mother' is a hyponym' of 'women', that is the meaning of 'mother' is included in the meaning of

'woman'. The most general term is called the super-ordinate or hypernym. For example, 'dog' and 'cat' = animal (where animal is the hypernym or super-ordinate). Man, woman, boy, girl = human; pigeon, duck, hen, dove = birds. Hyponyms also express entailment as in the examples below:

- i. All men are mortal
- ii. Socrates is a man
- iii. Therefore Socrates is mortal

Source: Akase 2011:208

Akase (2011:208) gives examples of some hypernyms or super-ordinates and their co-hyponyms as seen below:

Hypernymy or super-ordinate	Co-hyponyms
a. Meat	beef, mutton, pork, chicken
b. Nyam	búà, ívò, ígò, íkyègh
c. Colour	read, green, black, white
d. Kòlò	nyíàn, kwèr, ír, púpùr
e. Body	head, hand, leg, stomach
f. Iyòl	tyòúgh, wègh, ngúhàr, yàv
g. Head	eye, mouth, nose, ear
h. Ityòúgh	ishè, dzwà (sic), íhìngà, tòúgh

2.4 Homonymy as a sense relation

Homonymy is a word that has several meanings. When a word is amenable to different interpretations we refer to such a word as being a homonym (Akase, 2011). Alternatively, Aneer and Altaie (2010:4) as quoted by Mbapuu (2016) defined homonym as a word that is identical in form with another word, either in sounds (homophone), or in spelling (as a homograph), or both, but differs from it in meaning. Homonym can be looked at from different angles beginning with polysemy.

2.4.1 Polysemy:

Yule (2007) sees polysemy as one form (written or spoken) having multiple meanings which are related by extension such as the word 'head' used to refer to the object on top of your body, on top of a glass of beer, on top of a company or department or 'foot' (of a person, a bed, of mountain) or 'run' (person does, water does, colours do). Fromkin (2007) sees polysemy as a set of different meanings associated with a word that is when a word has two or multiple meanings that are related conceptually or historically as in 'bachelor' which can be unmarried man, lowest academic degree (first degree), and young knight serving under another knight. Other examples are hook – to hold to, suspend, or catch something as in fish-hook. Bank – bank of the river, financial institution, place where blood is kept. The Tiv examples of polysemy as given by Taminu, Amende and Salisu (2020:7) are:

1. Ityough (head) – ilegh ki yolugh (part of the body), orhemen (leader), ngu a tyough (to be brilliant).
2. Wegh (hand) – ilegh ki yolugh (part of the body), wamwegh [sic] (to assist), namwegh [sic] (to shake hands).
3. Ker – jinger (to search), jingir (to throw), ken ato [sic] (inside)

2.4.2. Homographs

Words that have same spellings but with different meaning and pronunciation, for instance (a) wind; wind, fly; fly. Similar examples in Tiv language include: (b) Tòr – chief, Tòr – kind of a rat, Tór – pestle, Tor – roof (c) Ikyà – leaves, ikyá – monkey (Akase, 2011:209). Other examples of homograph in English are: lead /led/ (metal) – lead /(i:d)/(verb), bow /bau/ – bow/bəv/

2.4.3. Homophones:

Homophones are words which have the same pronunciation but different meanings as seen in the examples below: write, right, rite/rait/, see, sea/si:/, meet, meat/mi:t/, site, cite, sight/sait/, air, heir/ε̄ r/, scent, sent, cent /sent/, tale, tail/tell/, peace, piece/pl:s/, fair, fare/fε̄ /, allowed, aloud/principle, principal/prinsip̄ l/, sun, son/sʌn/, knight, night/nait/break, brake/breik/, sail, sale/sell/, born, borne/bɔ:n/, some, sum/sʌm/, knew, new/nju:/ among others

2.5. Reversives and converses as sense relations

Reversive presupposes that when a party engages in sense relating he loses the other. For instance:

- a. Agree: disagree; tie: untie; cover: uncover
- b. Lúmùn: venda; dzer: sagh; cir: búgh (here, tone mark are placed on 'lumun' (agree) and 'bugh' (uncover) to indicate or mark the simple present tense of the verbs).

In all those examples, the reversive relationship involves the reversal of the direction of change between terminal states (*Akase, 2011:208*). Converses on the other hand refer to contractual relationship that exists between two entities so that if one exerts of the relations, then the other by implication contracts the other. (*Akase, 2011*). *Palmer (1976)* refers to reversives as relational opposites which are pairs of lexical items that express relationships between two more persons or things. For instance: (1) husband/wife, buy/sell, give/receive (2) nòm/kwàsè, yàm/tèè, na/ngòhòl.

In buy/sell relationship, buy is the converse of sell and sell is the converse of buy. This goes that if Mr. Iorfa sells to Mr. Ajim, Mr. Ajim buys from Mr. Iorfa. Each of these sentences expresses a converse relationship between the two participants Mr. Iorfa and Mr. Ajim. From the foregone discussion, it could be observed that reversives are complementary antonyms because the assertion of one entity implies the denial of the other as in kú (death/úmá (life) one cannot be dead and alive at the same time.

3.0 Methodology

The methodology adopted for this paper is descriptive in nature. The paper uses the primary and secondary sources of data. The primary data was sourced from the native speakers during interactive sessions with the researchers. In such interactive situations, the researchers took note of lexical items that have sense relations. The respondents were also asked questions on certain sense relations like synonyms, antonyms, homographs, hyponymy among others. The intuitive knowledge of the researchers as the native speakers of Tiv language also helped in data gathering, refinement and subsequent analysis. The secondary source of data was from the already existing literature such as textbooks, journals, internet among others.

4.0 Sense Relation in Tiv

Sense relation is not only evident in English and other European languages. It is evident in all languages, the Tiv language inclusive. Sense relation in Tiv is examined as seen below:

Antonyms in Tiv: the Tiv language has words that are opposite in meaning as seen below:

Tiv	gloss
1. Via – kôugh	ripe – unripe
2. Doo – vihi	good – bad/fine – ugly
3. Lihe – tion	long – short
4. Yuha – peese	heavy – light
5. Nom – kwase	husband – wife
6. Ortwer – oruange	doctor – patient
7. gbeev – mtsera	loss – profit
8. Kehe – ndahar (depends on context)	big – small

9.	Wannomso – wankwase	son – daughter/boy – girl
10.	Gbanger – hough	wide – narrow
11.	Shagba – ican	wealth – poverty
12.	Tav – tion	tall – short
13.	Tsee – ndôhôr	hot – cold
14.	Va – yem	come – go
15.	Uma – ku	life – death

From the above examples, it is crystal clear that the Tiv language exhibits antonymy as a sense relation. In each of the examples illustrated above, there is sense of oppositeness in the meaning. It should be known that words that are opposite in meaning share all that one of their semantic property. The semantic property which words do not share is present in one but absent in another for example: shagba/ican (shagba = + human, + wealth, ican = + human, - wealth)

Antonyms in Tiv can be classified into:

- a. Gradable antonyms involve comparison (Lyons 1977). Alternatively, gradable antonyms are adjectives and as such can be used in comparative and superlative forms. Examples gradable antonyms in Tiv are follows:

	Tiv	Gloss
1.	Via – kough	ripe – unripe
2.	Doo – vihi	good – bad/fine – ugly
3.	Lihe – tion	long – short
4.	Yuha – peese	heavy – light
5.	Kehe – ndahar	big – small
6.	Gbanger – hough	wide – narrow
7.	Tav – tion	tall – short
8.	Tsee – ndôhôr	hot – cold

The examples above indicate that Tiv language has gradable antonyms. Gradable antonyms according to Lyons (1977) are adjectives and can be used in comparatives and superlative forms as seen below:

- b. Non-gradable antonyms are not adjectives and they occur in complementary distribution as in the examples below:

S/N	Div	Adjective	Comparative form	Superlative form
1	Nom	Doo (good)	Hemba doon (better)	Hemba doon cii (best)
2	Or	ortwer – oruange (doctor – patient)	Hemba lihen (longer)	Hemba lihen cii (longest)
3	G	Gheev – mtsefa (loss – profit)	Hemba taven (taller)	Hemba taven cii (tallest)
4	Wannomso	wankwase (son – daughter/boy – girl)	Hemba tseen (hotter)	Hemba tseen cii (hottest)
5	Shagba	ican (wealth – poverty)	Hemba hough (narrower)	Hemba hough cii (narrower)
6	Va – yem	hough (narrow)	Hemba hough (narrower)	Hemba hough cii (narrower)
7	Uma – ku		life – death	

8. Or – kwase man – woman

From the examples above, it could be observed that non-gradable antonyms are not adjectives but could either be nouns as in “ortwer (doctor) – oruange (patient)” and verbs as in “va (come) – yem (go)”. It could also be known that non-gradable antonyms occur in complementary distribution such that the assertion of one entity implies the denial of the other as in “wannomso (son/boy) – wankwase (daughter or girl)” where one cannot be both, that is one could either be “wannomso” or “wankwase” but can never be the two (both) at the same time.

Synonymy as a sense Relation in Tiv

In Tiv language, certain lexical items have the same or similar meanings as seen in the examples below:

Tiv	Gloss
------------	--------------

1.	Hur-or/ijende/ikyár	friend
2.	Orhyom/oryongo	enemy/foe
3.	Ikyár/mlumun	answer/reply
4.	Ibumegh/iyuughsugh	stupidity/foolishness
5.	Kimbi/timbi	pay ô
6.	rom/oren (dialectal)	tell me
7.	gbodi/adigboo	dried okro
8.	atyever/icankyôôndo	a type of vegetable
9.	ayali/ayaase/asaase	comb
10.	ikyeghdam/agwagwa/agabi	duck
11.	aie/akera	lie
12.	ior/iyor	people
13.	dooga/bena	bad/not good
14.	gbar/kyar	big hoe
15.	agir/agbur	ridge
16.	gambe/ndaa	bed
17.	kpenga/ayakpa	side stool
18.	tiir/iyô	snake
19.	pirjer/umankyuleke	dried maize
20.	iyohov/yav	pregnancy
21.	tia/zwajirigh	fine
22.	igyôr/angbyankwase	sister
23.	swase/nyam	meat

From the above examples, the synonyms number four to seventeen (4 – 17) are possible as a result of the dialectal differences in the Tiv language. Similarly, words used by the Tiv people of older generation are rarely used by the people of the present generation because of the gradual language change. From the above examples, number eighteen – twenty three (18 – 23), words like tiir (snake), pirjer (dry maize), iyohov (pregnancy), tia (fine), igyôr (sister) were used by the older generation and presently used by old people. The words have been replaced with iyô (snake), umankyuleke (dried maize), yav (pregnancy), zwajirigh (fine), gbiankwase (sister) by the present generation. When the words like tiir (snake), pirjer (dried maize), iyohov (pregnancy), tia (fine) among others are used during communication by the older generation of Tiv native speakers the younger generation of the Tiv native speakers find it difficult to comprehend.

Hyponymy as a Sense Relation in Tiv

Tiv language has words that have relation of inclusion. The umbrella term is the generic, hyponymy or super-ordinate term where the more specific is the hyponym or the subordinate term. Below are the examples of hypernyms and their co-hyponyms:

Hypernym	co-hyponyms
1. nyam/ilev 'animal'	iwya, kpatema, igo, ihyo 'dog', 'cat', 'pig', 'antelope'
2. inyon 'bird'	atii, ikyeghdam, ikyegh, ikungur 'pigeon', 'duck', 'hen', 'dove'
3. Umace 'human'	or, kwase, wannomso, wankwase 'man', 'woman', 'boy/son', 'girl/daughter'
4. Sule 'farm'	suleyou, sulekyon, sulelogo, suleatsaka 'yam farm', 'trees farm', 'cassava farm', 'potato farm'.
5. Angbian 'blood relation'	angbiankwase, angbiannomso 'sister' 'brother'

From the above demonstration, the Tiv hypernyms have the inclusion of the meanings of the co-hypernyms. Put in a different manner, if any object or thing is 'iwya' (dog), then it is possibly 'nyam' (animal). Therefore the meaning of 'iwya' (dog) is included in the meaning of 'nyam' (animal/meat/livestock).

Homonymy as a sense Relation in Tiv

In Tiv certain words are amenable to different interpretations. These words can be grouped into two as seen below:

(a) Polysemy: one form of word having multiple meanings which are related by extension as in the examples below:

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------|
| 1. Swase | 1. Animal |
| | 2. Meat |
| 2. Orya | 1. Husband |
| | 2. Someone's name |
| | 3. Elder of a house or compound |
| 3. Saa (tone can give it a different meaning) | |
| | 1. Lost |
| | 2. Death |
| 4. Kwa | 1. Bathroom |
| | 2. Leaf |
| | 3. Time |
| 5. Akpera | 1. Mortal |
| | 2. Harlot |
| 6. Zwa | 1. Mouth |
| | 2. Language |
| | 3. Hole |

From the above illustration, it is clear that the Tiv language exhibits polysemy (a type of homonymy) as a sense relation. Here, words have the same form, same pronunciation but different meanings.

(b) Homographs: In Tiv, certain words have the same spellings with different meanings and pronunciations as seen below:

1. dàà - 'table', dāā - to push, dáà - Tiv traditional draft
2. sùlè - money, sùlé (farm) sùlè - to die/to become cool
3. wúhé - coldness, wúhē - a co-wife, wùhē to uproot/to close
4. wùà - to kill, wùà - to grind, wúā - guinea corn
5. gbōr - stomach, gbór - to pluck roughly, gbòr - age grade
6. tsér - a local plate in Tiv, tsēr - hot, warm, tsèr - to be neat, to multiply
7. kùà - to flow or wash away, kùà - together with/with
8. gàndé - waterly, gàndè - beyond control measure.

From the above demonstration, it could be observed that words spelled the same with different pronunciations bring about variation in meanings. The Tiv language is one among the tonal languages in Nigeria. A change in tone of a word can result to a semantic change as in "dàà (low-low tone) - table, dāā (mid-mid tone) - to push, and dáà (high-low tone) - Tiv traditional draft.

Conclusion

In Tiv language, there are semantic affinities between certain words and there are also semantic differences evident in some words. These are studied under sense relation. The sense relations found in the Tiv language by the researchers are antonymy (antonyms - comprising gradable antonyms and non-gradable antonyms), synonymy (synonyms),

hyponymy and homonymy (polysemy, homography (homographs)). The researchers discovered sense relations as a fascinating aspect of the semantic study of the Tiv language. The understanding of the sense relation in Tiv can enhance effective communication. Alternatively, the knowledge of sense relation in Tiv is vital in effective use of Tiv language and thorough comprehension when the language is used. This study therefore, stands to benefit the native speakers that have access to it. It can also benefit researchers who are interested in the linguistic study of languages

References

- Agbedo, C. (2000). *General linguistics: an introductory reader*. Nsukka: ACE Resources Konsuit
- Akase, T. (2011). Semantics in Omachonu G. (2011) Nsuk texts in general linguistics vol. 1
- Elham, A. (2013). An assessment of lexical sense relations based on word association test. *European Scientific Journal*. Retrieved from <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322005861>.
- Fromkin, V., Rodman, R. & Hyams, N. (2007). *An introduction to language*. USA: Wadsworth Cengage learning.
- Kristin, D.A (2010). *Linguistics for everyone: An introduction*.
- Lyons, J. (1977). *Semantics, 2 vols*. London and New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Mbapuun, T.F. (2016). *Lexical semantic relations in the Tiv language*. Retrieved from <https://www.academia.edu/28536027/lexical.semantic-relations-in-the-Tiv-language>.
- Palmer, F. (1976). *Semantics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Pushpinder, S. & Jindal D.V. (2015). *An introduction to linguistics: language, grammar and semantics*. India: Prentice Hall of India private limited.
- Saeed, J.I. (2003). *Semantics*. UK: Blackwell publishing.
- Stringer, D. (2019). *Lexical semantics: relativity and transfer*. USA: Indiana University. DOI: 10.4018/978-1-1-5225-84-4.ch007
- Taminu, Y; Amende, A.C; & Salisu, M.R. (2007). Lexical and structural ambiguity in Tiv discourse. *Mabi Journal of Languages*, volume 1, number 1.
- Yule, G. (1996). *The study of language*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press.