

An Evaluation of Lexical Relations in Nigerian Online Media: A Case Study of Neptune Prime

Ahmed Mohammed Bedu & Hauwa Giwa-Ali

Abstract

As the emergence of online media allows journalists to utilize a limited vocabulary in packaging detailed information on their websites, the meaning properties of lexical words tend to exhibit different relationships within news stories and opinion articles. This paper evaluates the lexical sense relations in the Nigerian online newspaper *Neptune Prime* to explain how journalists use a single word to convey multiple meanings in their reportage. The research generated its data from the archival page of the online newspaper to assess the semantic behaviors of lexical items and their individual relations in various contexts within news stories and opinion articles. The findings of the research reveal that the semantic properties of lexical words and their relationships, including polysemy, homonymy, homophony, antonymy, and others, enable online media journalists to manipulate English words effectively. This manipulation not only conveys clear information but also attracts the attention of their audience, encouraging them to engage with the full content of the stories.

Key words: Lexical relations, structural semantics, online media, journalism, newspapers

Introduction

Scholars of media discourse assert that mass communicators (media writers) across the globe use English more than the owners of the language in educating and informing its overwhelming populous audience. In this regard, media practitioners are using the resource of the English language vocabularies to tailor information within a short space and in journalistic parlance, this type of language use which is peculiar to the journalism profession is known as ‘journalese’ (Galprine, 1977; Bedu, 2017).

It is explained in many literatures that mass media employ special use of language vocabularies to compact gist of the news stories into few eye-

snaring words to arouse readers' curiosity to consume the whole information in clear and simple manner (Bedu, 2014). This involves unique utilization of lexical in organized syntactic constructions to achieve brevity, clarity and attractiveness. In all the syntactic constructions in the newspaper narratives, words tend to exhibit their relationships of the meaning property to other words. The semantic scholars dub such relationship as 'lexical relations' (Bolinger, 1968:11).

According to Lyons (1977:57) meaning property is one of several features or components which together can be said to make up the meanings of a word or utterance. There are many kinds of lexical relations which can be distinguished by its use in any text like newspaper stories or any context in discourse. There is particular lexeme may be simultaneously in a number of lexical relations such as synonymy, antonymy, homonymy, polysemy, hyponymy, meronymy, metonymy, prototype and collocation. And it may be more accurate to think of the lexicon as a network, rather than a listing of words as in a published dictionary (Cruse, 1986).

In view of this, the present paper intends to evaluate the lexical relations used in English Nigerian online newspaper *Neptune Prime* as little or no attention has been paid to ascertain the role and utilization of semantic field in news writing that always allows journalists to maximally single word to denote several meaning senses in their reportage.

Literature Review

Lexicalization is a stylistic variation of lexical choice that typically exhibits the power of journalists as wordsmith in narrating information about events and actions in the day-to-day activities of the people (Bedu, 2017). Media practitioners often explain the meaning of words in terms of their relationship. In this regard, journalist might simply use the word "conceal" in different stories but denoting different relationship in another story as you can in example (1) below:

- i. He **conceals** the facts and evidences ---it is same as '**hide**', '**obscure**', '**cover**' '**given shallow information**' etc.,

In the example (1) above, the word ‘conceal’ establishes different meaning properties that characterize itself not in term of its component but in term of its relationship to other word in form of synonymy in other structure.

As semantics is the study of meaning in languages, it always attempts to focus on what the word conventionally means, rather than on what a speaker or writer might want the word to mean on particular occasion (Lyons, 1977; Yule 2006). Bolinger (1968) and Yule (2006) state that relationship of the meaning of a word to other words is what is referred as ‘lexical relationship’. Palmer (1976) along with other scholars identify the following as types of lexical relationship:

SYNONYMY: Means the “sameness of meanings”. The sets of words that have same meanings are called the synonymy of one another (Palmer, 1975 p.88). “Synonyms is the term that overlap in denotative meanings, connotative meanings or both. The best known of these relations is synonymity in which terms have the same denotation.”e.g. “car-auto” (Hermann, 1978).

There are two types of synonymity:

1. Dimensional synonymity (similarity): It involves denotative agreement that is not sufficient for synonymity but that occur at adjacent points on a common dimensional. E.g. laugh-smile.
2. Attributive synonymity (similarity) The term in which salient attributes of one term reasonable of another is called attributive similarity. E.g. rake-fork.

ANTONYMS: According to Yule (2006), antonyms are words which are “opposite” in meanings. It is useful to identify several different types of relationship under opposition. “/” sign is used to indicate antonymy. As Good/bad, life/death, come/go, dead/alive, pass/fail.

The term antonym is used for “oppositeness of meaning” and words that are opposite are antonyms. Antonymy is often thought of as the opposite of synonymy, but the status of the two antonyms are very different (Palmer, 1975, p.94). For example. The words such as wide/narrow, old/young, big/small, are antonyms.

Therefore, all words that their semantic relations and meanings signify contrast, oppose or contradicts the other words in term of meaning representation are called antonyms (Bolinger& Sears, 1981; Cruse; 1976; Lyons, 1968). Semantic scholars identify four types of antonyms which are as follows:

1. **Contradictory antonyms:** These are terms opposed dichotomously e.g. alive-dead.
2. **Contrary antonyms:** These terms are opposed symmetrically on a continuous dimension. E.g. hot-cold.
3. **Directional antonyms:** These are concepts opposed in time or space. E.g. before-after, above-below.
4. **Reverse antonyms:** Reverse antonyms, sometimes are called converses, represent opposed actions. E.g. buy-sell.

Other form oppositiontypes of relations that semanticists regarded themas antonymous include the following:

1. **Asymmetric antonyms:** It is opposed on a continuous dimension but the term indicates asymmetrically i.e. imperfect symmetry. E.g. hot-cool. The imperfect symmetries is the reason the relationship is not generally regarded as antonymic (Katz, 1972).
2. **Incompatible antonyms:** It is a term in which denotative meaning of one term is opposed to only part of the denotative meaning of the other term. E.g. “frank” is incompatible with hypocritical in that hierocracy involves dishonesty, whereas, frankness involves both honest and outspoken involves. Because the opposition does not involve the full denotative meanings of these terms, they are not antonyms.
3. **Pseudo Antonyms:** These are so called pseudo antonyms because they opposition is based on a connotative meaning of one term. E.g. “popular” and “shy” are opposed because popularity connotes extroversion, which is denotatively opposed to shyness (Hermann, 1979).
4. **Simple antonyms:** The relationship between the words in which the negative of one implies the positive of the other is called

simple antonyms. The pairs are also sometimes called complementary pairs or binary pairs. As Dead/alive (e.g. human beings), pass/fail (e.g. exams); hit/miss (e.g. a target).

5. **Gradable antonyms:** The relationship between opposites is that the positive of one term does not necessarily imply the negative of the other. As Rich/poor (e.g. status), fast/slow (e.g. speed), young/old (e.g. age), beautiful/ugly (e.g. complexion). This relation is associated with adjectives and it has two major features which are as follows:

HOMONYMY: Are un-related senses of same phonological word. Homophones and homographs come under homonyms (Yule, 1996). As Bear (to carry) and bear (animal), tale and tail, etc. the term homonymy adds two further categories in it which are homophones and homograph. These terms show some sort of sameness in words. According to F. R. Palmer, homonymy is that there are several words with the same shape and important thing is that they are different meanings of same word as in the case of flight that can be trip, plane, delivery, etc.

George Yule distinguishes different types of homonyms depending on their syntactic behavior and spelling such as:

1. Lexemes of the same syntactic category, and with the same spelling: e.g. lap “circuit of house” and lap “part of body when sitting down”
2. Of the same category, but with different spelling: e.g. the verb ring and wring;
3. Of different categories, but with the same spelling: e.g. the verb keep and the noun keep;
4. Of different categories, and with different spelling: e.g. not, knot.

HOMOPHONES: Homophones are the senses of the same “spoken words”. E.g. site and sight right and write, etc.

HOMOGRAPHS: Homographs are senses of same written word. E.g. lap “circuit of a course” and lap “part of body when sitting down”. There are some complications in the fact that we do not make the same distinction in writing and speech. There are some words such as lead (metal) and lead (dog’s lead) are spelt in the same way but pronounced differently. They

come under homograph. And the same time, there are some words such as site and sight, rite and right are spelt differently but pronounced in the same way. Another form of homographs is 'capitonym which is a word that changes meaning when its first letter is capitalized as in Turkey (country) and turkey (bird).

They come under homophony. (F. R. Palmer, p.101). There are some homonyms and homophones that are also very nearly antonyms. E.g. cleave (part asunder) and cleave (unite), raise and raze. (F. R. Palmer, p.102). There are some variations in pronunciation and it means that all the speakers do not have the same set of homonyms. For example, English speaker pronounce the pairs click and clique, talk and torque in the same way. (George Yule, p.64).

POLYSEMY: This term refers that not only different word have different meanings but it is also the case that same word may have a set of different meanings. This is called polysemy and such a word is called polysemic. (F.R. Palmer, p.100). For Examples the word "flight" which dictionary defines it in many ways such as passing through the air, power of flying, air journey, unit of the air force, volley, digression, series of steps, etc.

"The term polysemy refers to multiple senses of the same phonological word. It is the word with two or more meanings". (George Yule, p.64) For instance, the word 'foot' exhibits kind of polysemous representation as illustrated below:

2. He hurt his foot
3. She stood at the foot of the stairs.

A practical problem, in this regard, is that if one form has several meanings, it is not always clear as it happened in polysemy in which a word has several meanings. E.g. in dictionary the word "flight" is a single polysemic word but it recognizes no less than for words for mail such as armour, post, halfpenny, payment and spot. And important thing is that they are not shown as different meanings of the same word. And polysemic item is treated as a single entry (Palmer, 1975 p.101).

From the literature review, one can understand that English language is endowed with various kinds of lexical relations that journalists explore for expressing their intended communication and informative content in their story. It is fact therefore that the semantic properties of the lexical words are helping journalists to effective use words that attract not only the attention of their audience but simplifying the proposition of the information provided in their news stories effectively. The specific features of the vocabulary entries equally help to achieve unique characteristic of brevity, attractiveness and clarity in the news stories. Therefore, the paper sets to interrogate these semantic relations in news story of the online news medium the Neptune Prime in the data analysis section.

Theoretical Framework

The present research adopts structural semantics that is emphasizing the importance of relations of both syntagmatic and paradigmatic relationship between different lexical words especially their meaning/sense (Lyons, 1977). The structural semantic framework views meaning as composed of smaller structural units that are defined through social interactions, and may become meaningless without such context. The framework of structural semantics focuses on the meaning system that underlies language and allow for the organization and understanding of word sense(s) (Bedu 2017). Under the framework, the relationship between terms within a sentence is a top priority since all thought must be present in the vocabulary and syntax of the languages so that meaning of an idea can be accurately expressed (Fillmore, 1982).

The Data

To support the intent of the paper, this research uses purposively sampling to select 15 out of 45 news stories and opinion articles that were published between January-July, 2024 in the online news medium the *Neptune Prime* with a view to eliciting the nature of the semantic lexical relations in the data. The research data are retrieved from the archival page of the online newspaper and analyzes them qualitatively using model of the structural semantics to ascertain the semantic behaviour of the lexical from their individual relations in the generated data.

The paper adopts bird-view approach to x-ray the extent of semantic relations among the various lexical to justify how the news writers or writers of the opinion articles are rendering the communicative intentions to the readers through qualitative explanations of the data.

Data Analysis

As lexical sense relations are not only universal but evident across all forms of discourse genres, the usage of English lexical various stories and opinion articles in Neptune Prime online newspaper exhibit several forms of sense relations in the news narratives of the mass media outlet as you can see below:

4. The senate member utilizes the debate to **polish** the idea of his colleague's motion
5. **Polish** investors are willing to invest in Nigeria's power sectors...

The word Polish in the two stories as exemplified above is a typical case of homograph and homophone since the two words have the same spelling and pronunciation but different meanings due to capitalization of the first letter in the structure (2) that indicates Polish as person or people whose nationality is Poland while the polish in (1) serves as the verb to mean reshape or refine the idea of his colleague motion. In this regard, it is typical case of **capitonym** in lexical sense relation.

Furthermore, there are substantial usage of various forms of antonyms in the different news and opinion articles in expressing the nature of various issues and events by the news outlet. Consider the following excerpt:

6. In recent years, countries in the Sahelian region experience **hot** weather in the day time due to the effect of global warming and climate change unlike the past ten years in which people in the region enjoyed much more **warm** weather and **cold** one in the night

In the excerpt in (3) above, the opinion article writer uses gradable antonym to describe the weather in the Sahelian region. Gradable antonym is a sense relation in which pair of words with opposite meanings exhibit

relations where meanings lie on continuous spectrum as in the case of **hot**, **warm** and **cold** in the article.

Another form of antonym that the research discover in the data is the reverse antonyms which some scholars called as converses to represent opposed actions. Consider the following excerpt in (4) below:

7. Government must punish those **ignite** crisis in Plateau State and equally reward patriotic elders in the various communities that are working round the clock to **dowse** tension in their respective communities

The words **ignite** and **dowse** in the above excerpt in (4) are in reverse antonyms as their sense relations tie to change the cause of action in the Plateau State against crisis.

On the usage of synonymy that means the “sameness of meanings, the data show that the online media outlet utilizes such form of lexical sense relations to enrich their both news stories and opinion articles to avoid monotonous use of words in its narratives. Below are the some of the available examples in the data:

8. Federal Government plan to cut its **budget** for 2025 to service foreign debt
9. Economic analysts insist that cutting the nation **financial plan** will worsen inflation in the county.
10. Present Tinubu is to present 2025 **appropriation bill** before the joint session of the National Assembly.
11. Senators are to scrutinize government’s **expenditure plan**

In the excerpts (5-8), the boldface words that include **budget**, **financial plan**, **appropriation bill** and **expenditure plan** as references are semantically denoting one and only referent ‘budget’ even though some of the lexical items in the stories are morphologically compound words. In this case, the relations that exist among these lexical words are synonymous relationship as the individual words mean precisely or nearly the same as another word in the context of the news stories.

Still on the synonymy, the propositions of numerous headlines of *Neptune Prime* newspaper are usually crafted with monosyllabic verbs and nouns that are used as substitutes for longer, more colloquial expressions. Many of the words that are probably rarely found outside the main text of the stories.

The following is a list of common headline vocabularies that synonyms in nature that the data exhibit as illustrated in table (1) below:

Table 1. Common headline vocabularies that synonyms in nature

Headline Word	Meaning	Example
Alert	alarm, warning	Flood alert in East coast
Ban	Prohibition	Government bans street hawking
Cut	reduce, reduction	Britain cuts oversea aid
Deal	agreement, bargain	Teachers reject new pay deal
Hail	welcome, praise	PM hails peace plan
Face	Be threatened by	Hospitals face more cuts
Jail	Imprisonment	Court jailed activists for peace march

On polysemous words, the data in the online paper exhibit quality of polysemy relations where word has more than one related meaning as you can see below:

12. The judicial arm of government must be independent and autonomous, if we want credible democracy in Nigeria....
13. Governor Buni urged the local government chairmen to ensure judicial utilization of all funds given to them.....
14. The recent flood displaced many communities along Hadejia-Kumadugu river bank in Bade and Bursari Local Government Areas in Yobe State.
15. The cashless policy forced people to withdraw all their savings from the banks

The two underlined words **judicial** in the excerpt (9-10) are not only different based on their grammatical class but they are semantically

different as the judicial in (9) is related to noun judiciary while in structure (10), it is an adjective that is emphasizing ‘good/adequate use’ of the funds. On one hand, the underlined words **bank** in (11-12) are all nouns based on their grammatical class but their referents differ as the one in (11) denotes place which is at the edge of the riverside while the one in (12) denotes financial institutions.

However, there are some complex semantic behaviours of some words in the Neptune Prime news stories that based on structural semantics are not polysemous rather they are metaphorical extension of meaning. Consider the following structures in online newspaper:

16. Troops arrest man in Yobe for smuggling government distributed farm machinery
17. Vice President Kashim assured that government is working tirelessly to arrest the situation

The word **arrest** in (13) denotatively means apprehension and the one in (14) connotatively means control.

Conclusion

From the discussion above in the data analysis, it is evident that journalists utilize the rich semantic properties of lexical words and their relationships, including polysemy, homonymy, homophony, antonymy, and others, not only to convey clear information but also to capture the attention of the audience. This is because the primary function of language is social interaction, and the social impact of language is a key concern for journalists and the journalism profession as a whole. Consequently, the authors of news stories and opinion articles in *Neptune Prime* make strategic use of a variety of words, leveraging both their denotations and connotations, to avoid ambiguity and any form of linguistic distortion of reality. In summary, this paper argues that the concept of lexical semantics is not merely about denoting a proposition; rather, it refers to the relationship between lexical words, which may have different meaningful referents based on structural semantic principles. This approach helps

achieve brevity, attractiveness, and clarity in news stories and opinion articles.

References

- Bedu, A. M. (2017). Semantico-pragmatic interrelation of editorials and their headlines in English-speaking Nigerian Newspapers, Unpublished Ph.D Thesis SüleymanDemirelÜniversity, Isparta.
- Bedu, A. M. 2014. Pragmatic Markers in Nigerian Newspaper's Headline. *Journal of Nigerian Languages and Foklore*, XXIV 224-244
- Bolinger, D. (1965), 'The atomization of meaning', *Language* 41, 555-73.
- Bollinger, D., & Sears, D. A. (1981). *Aspects of language* (3rd ed.). New York: Harcourt Brace.
- Carnap, R. (1943). *Introduction to semantics and formalization of logic* (Vols. 1 & 2). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Carnap, R. (1947). *Meaning and necessity: A study in semantics and modal logic*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Cruise, D.A (1986)*Lexical semantic*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Filmore, C. (1982) Frame semantics in the Linguistic in the society of Korea Eds. *Linguistic in the morning calm*. Seoul: Hanshin.
- Galperin, I. R.(1977).*Stylistics*. Moscow: High School.
- Harbermas, J. (1979).*Theory of communicative action*. Vol. 1, trans. McCarthy, T.,Heinemann.
- Katz, J. J. (1972) *Semantic Theory*. Harper and Row.
- Lyons, J. (1977) *Semantics*. 2 vols. Cambridge University Press.
- Palmer, F. (1975). *Semantics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Yule, G. (2006). *Semantics*. Cambridge: CUP