

# A Lexico-Semantic Analysis of a Nigerian Professor's Inaugural Lecture

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*Abstract - Professor Stephen Owa's inaugural lecture is a complex system of significant meaning which requires lexico-semantic approach for comprehensive understanding. The lexico-semantic approach attempts an account of some words and their meaning in the inaugural lecture. It also evaluates the uses of these features in terms of their relevance to the theme of the lecture. The study is meant to afford African writers the opportunity to appreciate and understand the purpose of feature transfer and coinage of a bilingual person in a bilingual speech fellowship. Also, the research is meant to influence the perception of some scholars about the existence of Nigerian English and the ability to create or coin lexical words for the purpose of communication and comprehension. Furthermore, the research emphasises that Nigerian English is a reality. It also shows that Nigerian English is a variation which reflects Nigerians' 'ownership' of the English language as it reveals the aesthetic creation of new English words drawn from the rich repertoire of the Yoruba lexicon.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Professor Stephen Owa's inaugural lecture is a complex system of significant meaning which requires lexico-semantic approach for comprehensive understanding. The lexico-semantic approach attempts an account of some words and their meaning in the inaugural lecture. It also evaluates the uses of these features in terms of their relevance to the theme of the lecture.

This work aims at contributing to the understanding of the inaugural lecture in general by using the approach of componential analysis in analysing the lecture. Componential analysis is the approach to lexical semantics which involves the analysis of the sense of a lexeme into its components parts in order to simplify and bring clarity to the lexical words in the overall sense of the lecture. In a sensible way, the comprehensive meaning of any work or write up cannot be achieved without giving attention to the lexical word which is syntactically arranged to form the text or write-up. In other words, lexical understanding gives a syntactic understanding.

On the other hand, lexis is the level of linguistic form at which variables can be treated with the greatest freedom and they are significant for semantic study. Lexical semantics is sacrosanct in linguistic semantics because it is a subfield of linguistic semantics. It is the study of how and what the words of a language denote. (Pustejovsky, 1955:17). Words may either be taken to denote things in the world, or concepts, depending on the particular approach to lexical semantics. It covers theories of the classification and decomposition of word meaning, the differences and similarities in lexical semantic structure between different languages, and the relationship of word meaning to sentence meaning and syntax.

## II. DATA ANALYSIS

Lexico-semantics is the study of the words of a language and what they denote. Words may either be taken to denote things in the world, or concepts, depending on the particular approach to lexical semantics.

The units of meaning in lexico-semantics are lexical units. One can continually add new lexical units throughout one's life, learning new words and their meaning. It also covers theories of classification and decomposition of word meaning, the differences and similarities in lexico-semantic structure between different languages, and the relationship of word meaning to sentence meaning and syntax.

### RESEARCH QUESTION 1

"What specific coinages and Nigerianism are visible in Owa's inaugural lecture?"

The following are coinages and Nigerianism in the inaugural lecture:

Catavolution

Iridorilus Kayodei

Nsukkadrilue Funmie  
Foodlogist  
Earthwormologist  
Ecologist  
Jejelly  
Terunlly  
Ecologhetti  
Okangba lele Kongba  
Push during Child birth  
Obirin ti won ba fun ni Ounje ekolo, o peju, wakati  
meji o gbodo  
bimo ti owo aiye ko ba si nibe  
Akintola  
Ejedidi  
Sokoyokoto  
Baba Elekolo  
Baba Oniyan  
Queen  
Olori Oluwa Obanikan soso  
Ownerless chip  
Dundu  
Dodo ko gbodo koja won a jeun jeun won a senu  
roboto  
Igbe maaluu  
Ito maaluu  
King  
Ofada rice

#### RESEARCH QUESTION 2

‘What semantic meaning do the lexical words in Owa's 44th inaugural lecture have?’

The lexical words can be categorised into three semantic categories as follows: Semantic transfers, semantic contrast and coinages or loan creation.

#### SAMPLE 1: COINAGES (LOAN CREATION)

It involves creating lexical words which denote Nigerian English experience. It also shows the ability of the recipient country to generate an infinite number of lexical items out of those handed over to them. In other words, lexical coinages are a result of acculturation and indigenisation of English language into Nigerian speech community. That is, the contact of L1 (indigenous language) and L2 (English Language) the listed words below are loan creation identified in the inaugural lecture.

i. CATAVOLUTION: It is a coinage which involves the combination of two languages to produce a single new term. In other words, it is the blending of two separate forms of words to produce a single word.

The first form 'cata' is derived from the Yoruba word 'cata' (Bastard, Breakdown). The word 'cata' is employed as a result of loss of compatibility which is as a result of genetic growth which gave birth to more species and is general as against the original creation of the same species.

ii. IRIDOSRILUS KAYODEI: it is a compound word of two separate words to produce single words. 'Iridosrilus' is an earthworm specie while 'kayodei' is coined from Kayode his biological teacher. The word 'Iridosrilus Kayodei' is a mixed semantic transfer of compound word from two different languages. Iridosrilus is a botanical name of earthworm species while kayodei is a Yoruba word. In his words, it is a borrowed word of two different languages into English language.

iii. NSUKKADRILUS FUNMIE: it is a coinage which involves an outright semantic transfer. Nsukkadrilus funmie is named after earthworm species discovered in Nnsuka in Eastern part of Nigeria. Nsukkadrilus is coined from Nnsuka while 'funmie' is derived from Nigerian linguistic environment which is an outright semantic transfer to English language..

iv. FOODLOGIST: The word is a coinage from the word 'food' which means a thing that people

or animals eat. While 'logist' means a person who involves in a subject of study 'Foodlogist' as used in the lecture refers to the person who study food. This word is borne out of language growth and development. It also shows the ability of the recipient country to generate an infinite number of lexical items from the limited lexical items handed over to them by Britain. The native speakers of English refer to the person who studies food as a food technologist. 'Foodlogist' denote Nigerian English experience, which are also present in native English.

v. EARTHWORMOLOGIST: It is a word which derives as result of language growth which is peculiar to Nigerian English but denotes native English experiences which are also present in native English. The study of earthworm denotes native English speaker's experience which is known as vermicologist. In the inaugural lecture, 'earthwormologist' is referred to as a person who studies earthworm. The word 'earthwormologist' is borne out of 'earthworm and involves in a subject of 'logist', which means a person who study. The word can be classified under Nigerian English.

vi. ECOLONOLOGIST: it is a coinage which involves a mixed transfer. Items partly from the mother tongue and partly from English are collocated to form a lexical word. 'Ecolo' is a Yoruba word which means earthworm and 'logist' an English word that means a person who concentrates on a particular area of study, 'Ecolonologist' as used in the lecture means a person who studies earthworm who is referred to as vermicologist in native English speech environment.

vii. OWNERLESS CHIPS: it is a loan creation that is peculiar to Nigerian English but denotes Nigerian English experiences which are also present in native English. Going by the context of the lecture, 'ownerless chips' is used to refer to waste chips which the native speakers of English referred to as 'scrap'. To the native speaker 'scrap' refers to food left after a meal or a small amount of something.

viii. JEJELLY: It is a coinage which has a mixed semantic transfer with two parts. The first part is the mother tongue 'jeje' from the Yoruba language (meaning 'gradual') while the second part 'lly' is clipped from the English morphological pattern. 'Jejelly' as it is used in the lecture means gradually. It is presented deliberately for interpretation here out

of interest and also in order to show the acceptability of creativity in language.

ix. TERUNLY: It is a mixed semantic transfer which is coined with two parts. The first part 'Terun' is the mother tongue while 'lly' is clipped form English word. 'Terun' is a Yoruba word which means satisfaction while 'lly' is clipped from the English morphological pattern. 'Terunlly' means satisfactorily. This coinage is as a result of language contact. That is, Yoruba language (L1) contact with English Language (L2)

x. ECOLOGHETTI: It is a coinage which is also a semantic transfer with a mixed transfer. The concept it expresses is present in native English. The word has two parts from two different languages. The word 'ekolo' is a Yoruba word which means earthworm and 'ghetti' is clipped from English word. The word 'ecologhetti' has its semantic import from the word 'spaghetti'

#### SAMPLE 2. SEMANTIC EXTENSION

This is a situation in which some items in Nigerian English have equivalence in native English but express a wider meaning in Nigerian English. It shows the ability of the recipient country to indigenise and acculturate English language to suit the alien linguistic environment.

The following words reflect semantic extension in the lecture:

i. QUEEN: The word is given an extensional meaning in the lecture. The word is not use in its literal sense but given an extensional semantic meaning. In other words, it extends the native meaning as used by the native speakers of English. The native or literal meaning of 'Queen' is the wife of the king but in Nigeria, it is at times use for a beautiful woman or a woman who possesses the qualities of a queen. In the lecture, it is used to refer to the speaker's beautiful wife who possesses the qualities that qualifies her as a queen (a woman of noble prestige).

ii. KING: The word is used in the wider sense, that is, it is given a wider meaning that can be traced to cultural factors. In other words, it expresses the local colour of socially recognised phenomenon. 'King' in native English means the male ruler of an independent state that has a royal family but in the

lecture, it has an extended meaning which points to the fact that the speaker is an important personality. In other words, it is used in Nigerian English context to elevate a personality to a royal status.

iii. Push: It is given an extended meaning which transcends its native meaning. Although the word 'push' is a polysemous word (a word with many meanings) none of the meanings falls in the context of child delivery. In Nigerian speech community, the word is at times used during child delivery to persuade the prospective mother but the sentence 'you can do it' is use by the native speakers of English language.

### SAMPLE 3: SEMANTIC TRANSFER

Some words in Nigerian English are present in native English but the concepts they express in the former are absent in the latter. Semantic transfer could be mixed transferor outright transfer. In mixed transfer items partly from the mother tongue and partly from English are conjugated. While outright transfer can be observed in loaning or borrowing items.

The following words reflect semantic transfer in the lecture:

i. AKINTOLA: It is an outright semantic transfer which can be observed in loaning or borrowing of items. The word 'Akintola' is loaned into English. The word as used in the inaugural lecture is a species of grass used in Nigeria to cure malaria and other types of sicknesses or diseases. 'Akintola' is borrowed into English from the Yoruba language as a result of language growth and development.

ii. EJE DIDI: It is a loan word into the English language from the Yoruba indigenous language in Nigeria. It has an outright transfer of semantic meaning. 'Eje didi', a Yoruba word which means clot of blood.

iii. BABA ELEKOLO: It is a borrowed word into the English language. It is also an outright transfer of semantic meaning which can also be regarded as loan translation in which the word expresses. The word 'Baba Elekolo' in the lecture refers to vermicologist, who is a person that study earthworm not a biological father of earthworm. 'Baba' in the word is used in the extended form (semantic extension) in which additional meaning is

given to the word beyond its native or dictionary meaning. The contextual meaning of the word is a vermicologist not a biological father of earthworm.

iv. BABA ONIYAN: It is loaned into the English language. The word is loaned or borrowed from Yoruba language into English language. This lexical interference is inevitable as a result of language contact. The word 'baba oniyani' has a semantic import. The word 'baba' extends to the literal or native meaning of father in English language but a person who is interested in a subject of study. Contextually the word is borne out of the speaker's love for pounded yam. In other words, the word 'Baba Oniyani' in the translation in the mother tongue means 'father of pounded yam' but contextually, it means a person who has passion for pounded yam.

v. DUNDU: It is a loan word to English from the Yoruba language. It has equivalence in native English. It is a word transferred to English language which means 'fried yam'.

vi. OFADA RICE: It is a borrowed word into English. It is a mixed semantic transfer which is a combination of mother tongue 'Ofada' from Yoruba language and 'rice' from English language. 'Ofada rice' is a particular type of rice which grows in Nigeria. It is named after a particular region, 'Ofada' in western part of Nigeria. In other words, 'Ofada rice' is a compound noun which expresses a particular thing. Ofada rice lays credence to the existence of Nigerianism which is an aftermath of the acculturation of English language that exists as a consequence of the contact of the second language with the mother tongue.

vii. GIRI: it is an outright transfer of semantic meaning which is loaned into the English language. It is also regarded as loan translation in which the word expresses mother tongue. 'Giri' is a Yoruba word which means 'convulsion' in English language. Convulsion is a sudden shaking movement of the body that cannot be controlled.

### RESEARCH QUESTION 3

Which grammatical category do the selected words from Owa's inaugural lecture fall into?

A word is the smallest of all the linguistic units, which often occur in either speech or writing. In

writing, word boundaries may be recognised by space among words. In other words, a word may be made up of one or two morphemes, which could reflect tense, number, action, size and state of being etc.

Words of English can be classified into different grammatical word classes. In English language, four basic word classes could be identified. They are nominal class, verbal class, adjectival class and adverbial class.

The selected words fall into the following word classes:

- i. NOMINAL CLASS: Catavolution, Indosrius Kayodei, Nsukkadrilus funmie, Foodlologist, ecologgetti, Akintola, Ejedidi, Sokoyokoto, Baba Elekolo, Baba oniyan, Queen, ownerless chips, Dundu, King, Ofada rice, Girl,
- ii. Verbal class: Push
- iii. Adverbial class: Jejelly, Terunlly,

#### RESEARCH QUESTION 4

'How appropriate are the lexical words for the overall understanding of the lecture and what implications do they hold for the Nigerian English as a whole?'

First, the lexical words make reference to the syntactic structure in a precise way. The words are used in a way that they conform to the syntactic principles. They occupy their specific environment in the structure. In other words, they follow the normal order of arranging the system to form a sentence: Nominal + Verbal + Adjectival/Nominal + Adverbial. This is what can be referred to as SPCA.

They also systematically represent the meaning to the single words or more generally, of the lexical elements, including lexicalized phrases like idioms, isolated compounds etc. They show how structure of words and syntactic relations interact in order to constitute the interpretation of sentences. Finally, they indicate how these interpretations are related to the things spoken about.

#### III. FINDINGS

Though, the research was restricted to the research questions, different developments were found to be useful for both native speakers and non-native speakers of English.

First, English is considered as bi-parental language because its original parent is Britain and its second

parent is whichever socio-cultural environment that acculturates it.

Also, most words in English have their literal and contextual meaning, most especially the polysemous words. Most times the contextual meaning differs from the literal meaning or gives extended meaning to the literal meaning.

Lexical coinages are inevitable in English language as a result of language growth, improvement, acculturation and indigenization which brings about varieties of English language like Ghanaian English, American English, Nigerian English, British English and so on.

Furthermore, the research emphasises that Nigerian English is a reality. It also shows that Nigerian English is a variation which reflects Nigerians' 'ownership' of the English language as it reveals the aesthetic creation of new English words drawn from the rich repertoire of the Yoruba lexicon.

#### IV. RECOMMENDATION

For the benefit of literary analysis, lexical words should be given priority or prominence so as to make reference to the syntactic structure in a precise way. Also, attention should be given to how structure of words and syntactic relations interact in order to constitute the interpretation of sentences while also indicating how these interpretations are related to the entire discourse.

#### CONCLUSION

Putting into consideration, the lexico-semantic approach in the analysis of professor Owa's inaugural lecture, one must come to agree that any literary work needs an approach of componential analysis in analysing the work. This is an approach to lexical semantics which involves the analysis of the sense of a lexeme into its component parts in order to simplify and make clearer, to the lexical words in the overall sense of the work.

Also, the research work has widened our horizon to note the existence of Nigerian English as a result of language growth and development.

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