An account of homonymy in Owere Igbo

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Abstract
Meaning relations refer to the organization of the lexemes of a language in such a way that groups of lexemes that are semantically related by virtue of shared semantic properties are not kept apart, but belong together and form a sub-group within the lexicon of a language. Several types of lexical meaning relations have been recognized in semantic study. These include antonymy, synonymy, polysemy and homonymy. This study is a descriptive work that analyzed the phenomenon of homonymy, illustrating from Owere Igbo. The study specifically investigated whether differences exist between the different senses of a homonymous lexeme. The study further examined the ways through which homonyms can arise in the language. Twenty-two fluent speakers of Owere Igbo were interviewed in the course of collecting data for this investigation. Data from our field work revealed that the various meanings of a homonymous lexeme are, in no way, related. Our findings further showed that the different and unrelated meanings of homonyms may or may not belong to the same word class. It was also discovered that factors such as phonetic convergence, semantic divergence, dialectal differences, euphemism and omission of some prosodic features could give rise to homonymy in Owere Igbo.

1.0 Introduction

Structural semantics seeks to discover certain relationships among lexemes in the vocabulary of a language. The term, 'structural semantics' is sometimes used to refer to the study of meaning relations between lexemes. It has attracted increasing attention in linguistics. The question, according to Crystal (1987), is no longer 'what do lexemes refer to in the 'non-linguistic world'? or 'how do sets of lexemes parcel out experience'?. But rather 'how do lexemes (or sets of lexemes) relate to each other'. The most ambitious

attempt to provide an integrated view is Lyons (1977). It is also worth pointing out that words enter into some kind of meaning relations to make different meanings other than they could have made in isolation. It is this notion that gave rise to different meaning relations that obtain both at word and sentence levels. At the word level, we have lexical meaning relations such as hyponymy (class membership), antonymy (oppositeness in meaning), synonymy (sameness in meaning), homonymy (sameness of

form but difference in meaning), polysemy (multiple meaning), while at sentence level, we have paraphrase (semantic equivalence), anomaly (semantic deviance) and entailment (semantic consequence).

This study will be confined to lexical meaning relations, i.e. relationships that obtain at word level. We have deliberately restricted our discussion to homonymy because we have limited the scope of this study to lexical semantics. Our study will, therefore, require us to examine homonymous lexemes and provide sentence frames or contexts in determining homonyms in Owere Igbo.

2.1 Methodology

The data for this study have been mainly through interview with competent native speakers of Owere Igbo. I had to rely on the intuition of other native speakers in order to enrich the study and to also confirm what I know as a native speaker. These informants (or research collaborators) have spent, at least, the greater part of their lives in Owerri town and have a vast knowledge of the dialect. Such persons who were invaluable to me during the period of data collection were Jude Ejimofor, Chinwe Opara, Maria Owuamalam, Philomena Odor,Chinwe Osuagwu,Austine Onyekwe, Chinenye Okere, and others who are also trained linguists. Other sources of information for the work are carefully documented in the references of the study.

3.1 Defining homonymy

Allan (1986:84) defines homonymy as a lexical meaning relation holding between lexemes that have the same phonetic features but have two or more different meanings. Homonymy, according to Lyons (1977:550), is a type of lexical ambiguity whereby the different senses of a lexeme are not obviously related to each other in any way. The lexeme 'bank', for example, is homonymous because it can be interpreted as 'bank as source of a river', or as 'a financial institution for the custody of money'. Hurford and Heasley (1983:123) see cases of homonymy as mere co-incidence because the meanings are in no way related. Palmer (1996:102) also notes that if identical forms have different origins, they are treated as homonyms and form separate entries. For example, 'ear' (the organ of hearing) and 'ear' (part of cereal plants such as wheat and barley) are treated as homonyms by virtue of the etymological criterion. Lyons (1981:43) also draws a distinction between the two kinds of homonymy. They are homography and homophony. Homography, according to Ejele

(1997:124), is a term used to describe a situation where a set of lexemes have the same spelling, but different meanings and different pronunciation, while homophony refers to lexemes that have the same pronunciation, but different meanings (cf. Crystal 1997a; Fromkin and Rodman 1998).

Lyons (1981:43) sees the traditional definition of homonymy as different words with the same form as defective because most words have not one but several forms. He improves on the definition by substituting lexeme for word and also by taking into account the syntactic equivalence of identical forms which he says is important in order to determine whether and to what degree homonymy results in ambiguity. Lyons further draws a distinction between absolute homonymy (e.g. 'bank$_1$' 'bank$_2$' or 'sole$_1$' 'sole$_2$') and various kinds of partial homonymy (examples, find and found) and concludes that homonymy (whether absolute or partial) is a relation that holds between two or more lexemes.

2.2 Presentation and analysis of homonyms in Owere Igbo

Homonymy was illustrated earlier by means of the examples bank1 'financial institution', and bank2 'riverside'. These examples show that a homonymous lexeme has two or more entirely distinct meanings. In other words, there is obviously no conceptual or referential connection between the two different meanings of the lexeme, bank. Examples of homonymous lexemes in Owere Igbo are presented in Table 1 below:

Table I: Homonyms and their different and unrelated meanings

S/No.	Homonymous lexeme	Gloss (different and unrelated meanings)
1	Àgwà(N)	'character' (N) 'beans' (N)
2	aḫụḫụ(N)	'suffering' (N) 'insect' (N), 'maggot' (N), 'ant' (N)
3	che(V)	'preserve' (V), 'store' (V), 'reserve' (V) 'wait' (V)
4	Àkwà(N)	'bed' (N) 'bridge' (N)
5	Akwa(N)	'tears' (N), 'lamentation' (N) 'quest for' (N)
6	ọkwa(N)	'status' (N), 'position' (N) 'saucer' (N)
7	akwụkwọ(N)	'book' (N), 'sheet of paper' (N) 'vegetable' (N), 'leaf' (N)
8	anwụ̀(N)	'sun' (N), 'sunlight' (N) 'mosquito' (N)
9	arụ̀(N)	'bite' (N) 'heaviness' (N)

10	avụ̀$_{(N)}$	'armpit' $_{(N)}$ 'hymn' $_{(N)}$, 'psalm' $_{(N)}$, 'song' $_{N)}$
11	chi$_{(N)}$	'god (deity)' $_{(N)}$ 'day' $_{(N)}$, 'daylight' $_{(N)}$, 'daytime' $_{(N)}$
12	ilu$_{(N)}$	'bitterness'/ 'bitter taste' $_{(N)}$ 'proverb' $_{(N)}$, 'wise saying' $_{(N)}$
13	mkpu$_{(N)}$	'termite'/ 'ant hill' $_{(N)}$ 'alarm' $_{(N)}$, 'uproar' $_{(N)}$
14	ọdhụ̀$_{(N)}$	'tail' $_{(N)}$ 'advice' $_{(N)}$
15	ọ̀kụ̀$_{(N)}$	'pipe' $_{(N)}$, 'smoking pipe' $_{(N)}$ 'earthen ware' $_{(N)}$, 'bowl' $_{(N)}$
16	ugwhù$_{(N)}$	'half' $_{(N)}$ 'circumcision' $_{(N)}$
17	ùju$_{(N)}$	'abundance' $_{(N)}$ 'mourning' $_{(N)}$
18	ùkwe$_{(N)}$	'song' $_{(N)}$ 'fitting' $_{(N)}$

19	umērē$_{(N)}$	'behaviour' $_{(N)}$, 'manner' $_{(N)}$ 'breathe' $_{(N)}$, 'strength' $_{(N)}$
20	urù$_{(N)}$	'profit' $_{(N)}$, 'usefulness' $_{(N)}$ 'flesh of animal' $_{(N)}$
21	ụkà$_{(N)}$	'conservation' $_{(N)}$ 'case' $_{(N)}$, 'problem' $_{(N)}$
22	ụtụ$_{(N)}$	'levy' $_{(N)}$ 'weevil' $_{(N)}$

Examples of homonyms above show that the various meanings of a homonymous lexeme are in no way related. It is also clear from the data that the homonyms are mainly nouns. This does not mean that it is only nouns that are homonymous in Owere Igbo. There are also verbs. Homonymous verbs deserve special attention because some Igbo verbs are semantically hollow in isolation unless when used with certain nominals. For example, the verb gba in isolation is meaningless without an accompanying nominal as in (23):

23. Emeka gbàrà mgba 'Emeka wrestled'

Gbàrà and mgba'wrestle' in the above sentence are inseparable elements. In the literature, the term Inherent Complement (IC) is used to describe the function of the NP mgba, while the term Bound Verb Complement (BVC) 'refers to cognate forms of the type agba,as in (24) below:

24. Emeka gbàrà mgba agba. 'Emeka really wrestled'

'Agba' in the above sentence also has no independent meaning outside its association with the main verb (see Emenanjo et al. 1990).Another example is the lexeme ma'wash'/'measure'/'tie'/'hang 'which In isolation (i.e. without any of the associated nominals) is not only semantically hollow, but also homonymous (or ambiguous). The ambiguity, however, disappears when

ma is used with any of its associated nominals as indicated by the following environments:

25. Ma_1 ńjà! 'Tie wrapper!'.

26. Ma_2 àgwà! 'Measure beans!'.

27. Ma_3 uwé! 'Wash clothes!'.

28. Ma_4 ụdọ! 'Hang yourself!'.

It is clear from the illustrations above; that when ma is used with its accompanying nominals, the homonymous clash is clarified. Other examples of such Inherent Complement Taking Verbs which without their associated nominals are homonymous include the following verbs presented in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Homonymous Owere Igbo verbs and their associated nominals

S/no.	Homonymous verb	Matrix/frame (with associated nominals)	Gloss.
29	bọ (v)	(a) bọ chi (b) bọ ọbọ (c) bọ ịshī (d) bọ anụ } bọ(v) cluster	'wake up in the morning' 'be in enmity' 'comb hair' 'dissect an animal'
30	cha (v)	(a) cha ọcha (b) cha acha (c) cha ọkhụ } cha(v) cluster	'be white/ 'fair complexioned' 'ripen' 'illuminate'

31	chè (v)	(a) chè echiche	$che_{(v)}$ cluster	'think'
		(b) chè nkụ		'break wood'
		(c) chè oyĭ		'protect from cold'
		(d) chè nchē		'keep watch'
32	dụ (v)	(a) dù ọdhù	$dụ_{(v)}$ cluster	'advise'
		(b) dụ ishī		'swear'
		(c) dụ oshishi		'pierce with stick'
33	kpe (v)	(a) kpe ekpere	$kpe_{(v)}$ cluster	'say prayers'
		(b) kpe ikpe		'judge'
35	gba (v)	(a)gba mgba	$gba_{(v)}$ cluster	'wrestle'
		(a)gba avù		'dance'
		(c)gba àshiri		'gossip'
		(d)gba egbè		'shoot gun'
		(e)gba ọnū		'starve'
		(f)gba nkwū		'carry wine'
36	kpa (v)	(a)kpa okè	$kpa_{(v)}$ cluster	'discriminate'
		(b)kpa nri		'fend'
		(c)kpa nkhū		'fetch firewood'
37	ka (v)	(a)ka nkā	$ka_{(v)}$ cluster	'get old'
		(b)ka mmā		'surpass in beauty'
		(c)ka aka		'mature'

38	kọ (v)	(a)kọ akụkọ (b)kọ ụkọ (c)kọ nkọ	kọ(v) cluster	'tell story' 'be scarce' 'guess'
39	la (v)	(a)la ishi (b)la ụyọ	la(v) cluster	'shave hair' 'go home'
40	kpọ (v)	(a)kpọ asḥị (b)kpọ anwụ̄rụ (c)kpọ nkhụ	kpọ(v) cluster	'hate' 'smoke tobacco' 'get dried'
41	ma (v)	(a)ma ḥe (b)mạ ọnya (c)ma aka	ma(v) cluster	'know something' 'be trapped' 'compete'
42	mụ (v)	(a)mụ akwụkwọ (b)mụ nwa (c)mụ ọkhụ	mụ(v) cluster	'study' 'give birth' 'put on the fire'
43	mị (v)	(a) mị mḭrl (b)mi mkpụrụ (c)mị ego	mi(v) cluster	'drain water' 'bear fruit' 'sap money'
44	re (v)	(a)re ụre (b)re aḥia	re(v) cluster	'go bad/ decay' 'sell goods'

45	za (v)	(a)za ụyọ	$za_{(v)}$	'sweep house'
		(b)za aza	cluster	'swell'
		(c)za ajụjụ		'answer question'
46	ti(v)	(a)ti aki	$ti_{(v)}$	'crack palm nut'
		(b)ti mkpu	cluster	'shout or yell'
47	pị (v)	(a)pị uwe		'fold clothes'
		(b)pị apipị a	$pị_{(v)}$	'sharpen cane'
		(c)pị oshishi	cluster	'carve wood'
		(d)pị ego		'account/reconcile'
48	rụ (v)	(a)rụ aka	$rụ_{(v)}$	'point at'
		(b)rụ ọrụ	cluster	'do work'
		(c)rụ ụkwụ		'limp'

Our data, thus, prove that certain Igbo verbs have no complete meaning or are homonymous without their associated nominals.

The nominals provide different meanings of the homonymous verb. The various meanings of these verbs and their nominals are unrelated as can be seen from the data above Examples include the following:.

It should be noted also that some idioms are homonymous in Owere Igbo.

Table 3: Homonymous idioms in Owere Igbo

S/no.	Homonymous idiom	Gloss (unrelated meanings)
49	aka ikhē	(a) 'stinginess', 'miserly' (b) 'strong hands', 'rough hands'
50	ahụ ọmā	(a) 'healthy' (body that functions well) (b) 'pregnancy'
51	ishi ọmā	(a) 'good textured hair' (b) 'respectfulness'
52	aka àbụò	(a) 'stealing' (b) 'opposite side of a thing'
53	aka èkpè	(a) 'left hand' (b) 'outcast'

The examples above also show that the different senses of the homonymous lexemes (idioms) are not related. For example,onye aka èkpè refers to someone who uses more of the left hand in doing things or writing. This meaning is in no way related to its other meaning, i.e. outcast.

3.2 Grammatical differentiation of homonyms

One step towards the explication of the concept of homonymy, as we noted, is by showing that differences exist between the different senses of a homonymous lexeme. Homonyms, it should be emphasized, are different lexemes because their meanings are far apart and not related to each other in any way. In what follows, contexts are provided to disambiguate homonymous lexemes in Owere Igbo:

Table 4: Grammatical contexts disambiguating homonyms in Owere Igbo

	Homonymous lexemes	Gloss(unrelated senses)	Matrix (sentence frame)	English equivalent
54	ọdhụ(N)	(a) 'tail'(N) (b)'advice'(N)	Nkitā nwèrè ọdhụ Nnē m dụrùm ọdhụ	'A dog has a tail' 'My mother gave me a piece of 'advice'

55	urù(N)	(a)'flesh'(N) (b)'gain/profit'(N)	Anụ ọ zụrụ wụ urù Urù nù ahia akwà	'The meat she bought is flesh' 'There is gain in selling clothes'
56	ilu[N]	(a)bitterness(N) 'proverb'(N)	Olugbù kụ ilu Nde okìi jè àtụ ilu	'Bitter leaf is bitter 'The elders use Proverbs'
57	ọrụ(N)	(a) 'work'(N) (b) 'farm'(N)	O jè àrụ ọrụ ụyọ ọgwụ Anyị nwèrè ọrụ	'He works in a hospital' 'We have farmland'
58	Okhe(N)	(a)'maleness'(N) (b)'very'(adv)	Ọ wụ ọkhe ehi Mīrị gī rị okhe ọkhụ	'It is a male cow' 'Your water is very hot'
59	Igwè(N)	(a)'bicycle'(N) (b)'iron'(N)	Amadi nwèrè igwe Ọ kụrụ m igwè	'Amadi has a bicycle' 'He hit me with 'iron'
60	arụ(N)	(a)'bite'(N) (b)'heaviness'(N)	Ada tàrà m arụ Akpà gị rị arụ	'Ada gave me a 'bite' 'Your bag is 'heavy'
61	àgwà(N)	(a)beans(N) (b)behaviour (N)	A zụrụ m agwa Agwa gī rī mmā	I bought some beans Your behaviour is good
62	mpi(N)	(a)cup(N) (b)horn(N)	Anyi nwèrè mpi abụọ Ewu nwèrè mpi	We have two cups A goat has horns
63	che(v)	(a)'preserve'(v) (b)'wait'(v)	O ji ya che oso A shị m gị che m	'She used it to preserve 'pepper' I asked you to wait for me
64	ùkwe(N)	'song'(n) 'fitting'(N)	Ada kwèrè ukwe Uwē gị ekwele ùkwe	Ada sang a song Your dress has fitting
65	umerē(N)	(a)'behaviour' (N) (b) 'breath'(N)	Umerē ya jòrò njọ Ò mere umerē ùgbù?	'His behaviour is bad' 'Did he breathe now?'

In matrix form, we can see clearly that the various meanings of the above homonymous lexemes, as far as meaning is concerned, have nothing in common. The only thing they share is the same phonetic or phonological form. We also observed that the different meanings of a homonymous lexeme may or may not belong to the same word: class. For instance, in (58), the different meanings of the lexeme okhe 'maleness' and 'very' are noun and adverb respectively.

4.1 Sources of homonymy in Owere Igbo

Homonymy may arise in the following ways: phonetic convergence, semantic divergence, dialectal differences, euphemisms and omission of some prosodic features on the part of writers.

4.2 Phonetic convergence

The commonest cause of homonymy, according to Ullmann (1962:176), is converging sound development. Two or more lexemes which have different and unrelated meanings may coincide in the spoken language, and sometimes in the written language, thus, giving rise to homonymy in the language. This means that homonymy can arise when two or more distinct lexemes coincidentally or accidentally have the same form or phonetic shape.

In Owere Igbo, there are many lexemes that have different and unrelated meanings, but whose surface phonetic forms are the same. For example, onụ 'mouth'/'expensiveness' is a case of homonymy because the different meanings are not related. In other words, we have two different lexemes that accidentally have the same phonetic form and pronunciation. This observation confirms Hurford and Heasley's (1983:123) assertion that "cases of homonymy seem very definitely to be matters of mere accident or coincidence".

4.3 Semantic divergence

This occurs when the different meanings of a lexeme have one common etymological source, but in the course of history, their meanings split or diverged to such an extent that there will be no obvious connection between them. Polysemy, in this way, gives way to homonymy. Allan (1986:147) notes that there are many instances of a polysemous lexeme whose meaning has in time split apart to become the property of two homonymous lexemes; but no one has yet succeeded in defining the point of separation between the polysemous lexeme and the homonymous pair derived from it. For example, one of the most commonly cited examples of

a homonymous lexeme is 'bank' which has 'a financial institution' sense and the 'edge of a river' sense. These senses seem clearly unrelated, and the fact that they are associated with the same lexeme seems purely accidental. However, historical linguistic research on Italian, for example, has revealed that at some point in the development of the Italian language, these two senses of 'bank' actually coincided by virtue of the fact that bankers (lenders of money) sat on river banks while doing their business. So going to the financial institution meant going to the edge of the river, hence to the 'bank'. For some speakers, however, this connection between these two senses should presumably not be considered strong enough to establish a relation between them. Some decisions, however, are not always clear-cut because in most cases, speakers' intuitions and historical fact contradict each other. For example, the lexeme 'gay' with two meanings 'lively', 'light-hearted'/bright' and 'homosexual' was thought to be a polysemous lexeme because the latter meanings were derived from the former, but in recent history, the two senses seem like homonyms to some speakers (cf. Akmajian 1990).

Owere Igbo speakers interviewed are of the opinion that the polysemous lexeme òkpọ 'boxing'/ 'blow' on the head is an example of a polysemous lexeme that has through semantic shift led to the establishment of the homonym, 'fish'. This lexeme òkpọ, according to Owere Igbo speakers, was metaphorically extended to mean 'a species of fish' because of the belief that this particular fish inflicts pains that can be compared with the pains received during a boxing-match. The intuition of these Owere Igbo speakers today is that òkpọ meaning 'a species of fish' has split from its earlier senses of 'boxing' and 'a knock on the head'.

Similar examples exist in Owere Igbo, but the problem lies in establishing the link between the different senses or proving that at one time, a particular lexeme was polysemous before diverging to become homonymous. This is because some special information about the history of the lexeme is required and such a survey is beyond the scope of this study. Evidence for establishing total shift, however, is possible only for languages with long tradition of writing, such as English, Italian, and French. Igbo does not have such a history as it is still at the developmental stage.

4.4 Dialectal differences

Homonyms can also arise across different dialects or varieties of a language (Allan 1986:152). For example, the following Owere Igbo lexemes have different and unrelated meanings because such lexemes exist in other dialects (e.g. Onitsha Igbo) with a different meaning.

Table 5: Homonyms arising from dialectal differences

S/no.	Homonymous lexeme	Owere Igbo	Onitsha Igbo
66	ụkà(N)	conversation(N)	church(N)
67.	ùkwe(N)	fitting[metaphorical(N)	song(N)
68	ụmērè(N)	behaviour(N)	breathe(N)
69	ugwù(N)	half(N)	circumcision(N)

We should note that, although one of the meanings belongs to Onitsha Igbo, the different meanings of the lexeme are known to Owere Igbo speakers. The meanings which are different and unrelated belong to two dialects, thus, giving rise to homonymy.

4.5 Euphemisms

Homonyms can arise through euphemisms. For example, the lexeme mkposhi in Owere Igbo, is ambiguous between the 'process of covering' (especially a hole) and the 'process of defecating' or 'passing faeces', the latter being a euphemistic form.

Another example of a euphemistic homonym is the lexeme nkopu meaning 'unhooking' and 'madness', with 'unhooking' as the euphemistic form. In this way, euphemism gives rise to homonymy.

4.6 Omission of some Prosodic Features

Another factor that can give rise to homonymy is error due to omission of the prosodic feature of tone (or some other secondary articulatory features) on the part of writers.

In Igbo, tone (mark) is an integral part of the meaning of lexemes, but it has been observed that as important as tone is, some writers leave off tone marks and some of the secondary articulatory features such as aspiration and nasalization on lexemes where these are distinctive while writing. Consider the popular example of an ambiguous lexeme in Igbo, akwa, written without tones and aspiration in the sentence below.

70. Ada nwere akwa.
'Ada' has 'egg'/'cloth'/'bed'/'cry'.

The sentence above is ambiguous because it contains a homonymous lexeme, akwa (tones are omitted). In order to disambiguate the sentence, the lexeme akwa can be tone-marked or added to the secondary articulatory feature of aspiration as follows to derive the following unrelated meanings:

71. akwha (N) HH 'cry'
72. akwà (N) HL 'cloth'
73. àkwha (N) LH 'egg'
74. àkwà (N) LL 'bed'/'bridge'

Although ambiguities are usually resolved from context, to omit tone marks, aspiration or nasalization by error (of ignorance or carelessness), can give rise to homonymy as shown below:

Table 6: Homonyms arising from omission of tones

S/no.	Homonymous lexemes	Tone (if omitted)	Gloss(different meanings)
75	$mvo_{1(N)}$ $vòm_{2(N)}$	HH LH	'finger nail' 'comb'
76	$igwe_{1(N)}$ $Igwē_{2(N)}$ $gwèi_{3(N)}$	HL HS LL	'iron' 'title' of honor/name of sky god' 'multitude', 'crowd'
77	$ivu_{1(N)}$ $ivu_{2(N)}$	HL HH	'fatness'/'bigness' 'load'
78	$ugwhu_{1(N)}$ $ugwhú_{2(N)}$ $gwhùu_{3(N)}$	HH HL LL	'hill' 'half' 'respect'
79	$dọu_{1(N)}$ $dou_{2(N)}$	LL HL	'pulling', 'struggling' 'rope'
80	$tùa_{1(N)}$ $atu_{2(N)}$	LL HL	'reference', "comparison' 'chewing'stick'
81	$ushi_{1(N)}$ $ushí_{2(N)}$	HL LH	'smell' 'report'
82	$ikhe_{1(N)}$	HH	'strength'

	ˋikhe$_{2(N)}$	HL	'bottom'
	ˋkhēi$_{3(N)}$	LL	'bunch'/'bundle
	ikhē$_{4(N)}$	HS	'to tie'
83	ishi$_{1(N)}$	HH	'head'
	ˋshīi$_{2(N)}$	LL	'blindness'
	ishī$_{3(N)}$	HS	'to cook'
84	ọkhu$_{1(N)}$	HH	'fire'
	ˋkhùọ$_{2(N)}$	LL	'type of pot'

The above examples clearly show that without tone marks (i.e. if tone-marks are omitted), the lexemes are homonymous. For example, the lexeme igwe without tone marks is homonymous because it can be interpreted as 'a piece of iron', 'sky', 'multitude', e.t.c., but with tone marks, the homonymic clash is clarified. The presence of tone (marks) can, thus, bring about differences in the meaning of the lexemes.

Armstrong (1967:4-5) notes that the refusal to write the tones deprives the reader one of the principal means to mutual intelligibility. According to Igwe (1999: xii), writing Igbo without tones is stripping it of that which makes it intelligible in speech and this reduces it to a form difficult to read and understand. On the neglect of tones in writing Igbo, Igwe (1999: xii) notes that:

> Although tones play such a fundamental part in Igbo both in lexical and grammatical dimensions, they have been grossly neglected in writing. Reading materials in Igbo do not indicate tones. Those that indicate them do so unsystematically, as is the case in 'BIBLE' NSỌ' and 'EKPERE NÀ ABÙ'.

5.0 Conclusion

In this study, we have described and analyzed homonymy in Owere Igbo. With substantial amount of data from Owere Igbo, we have shown that homonymy is a feature of Owere Igbo verbs and nouns. One of the significant observations made in this study is that the different and unrelated meanings of homonymous lexemes may or may not belong to the same word class. Our analysis of homonymy further provided sentence frames to show that homonyms are really different lexemes that happen to have the same phonological shape. In other words, there is no obvious conceptual connection between the different senses of homonyms. We also observed that certain Igbo verbs have no complete meaning or are

homonymous without their associated nominals. The nominals, we discovered, provide different meanings of the homonymous verb. Our study further proves that homonyms in Owere Igbo can arise in the following ways: phonetic convergence, semantic divergence, dialectal differences, euphemisms and omission of some prosodic features on the part of the writer.

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