AWKA JOURNAL OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERARY STUDIES (AJELLS)

Volume 13 Number 3
September, 2026

Polysemy and Meaning Construction in Contemporary Nigerian Pidgin: A Cognitive-Semantic Investigation

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Abstract

This study investigates polysemy and meaning construction in contemporary Nigerian Pidgin from a cognitive-semantic perspective. It examines how single lexical forms develop and accommodate related senses whose interpretation depends on linguistic context, communicative situation and speakers' conceptual knowledge. The study adopts a descriptive mixed-methods design, combining qualitative cognitive-semantic analysis with quantitative frequency counts. The sample comprises 20 uterances selected from Nigerian social-media discourse, newspaper publications and interactions involving purposively selected physical interactions. The data are analysed according to lexical form, contextual meaning, semantic relatedness and cognitive mechanism of meaning extension. The analysis is anchored in Cognitive Semantics, particularly conceptualisation, prototype structure, radial categories, embodiment, metaphor, metonymy and contextual construal. The findings indicate that Nigerian Pidgin contains recurrent polysemous expressions whose extended senses are systematically related to their central or more concrete meanings. Metonymic, metaphorical, functional and concrete-to-abstract extensions constitute major patterns in the

data. Expressions such as I don tire, the medicine dey work, Carry this bag go house, Use your head and I no wan reason am demonstrate how speakers exploit familiar experiential domains to construct meanings in new contexts. The study argues that polysemy in Nigerian Pidgin is not adequately explained as random deviation from Standard English. Rather, it reflects systematic processes of conceptualisation, categorisation and contextual meaning construction. The study contributes to the growing linguistic description of Nigerian Pidgin as a dynamic language with an organised and productive lexical-semantic system.

Keywords: Nigerian Pidgin, polysemy, cognitive semantics, meaning construction, semantic extension

Introduction

Language does not merely label objects, people and experiences; it provides speakers with resources for constructing, negotiating and interpreting meaning in different social and communicative contexts. One important manifestation of this flexibility is polysemy, whereby a single lexical form is associated with two or more related senses. Unlike homonymy, where identical forms have unrelated meanings, polysemous senses are connected through semantic, conceptual, functional or experiential relationships. Contemporary lexical-semantic approaches therefore recognise that meaning is dynamic and context-sensitive rather than fixed.

Cognitive Semantics provides a useful framework for explaining this flexibility. Langacker (1987) argues that linguistic meaning is grounded in conceptualisation and the ways speakers mentally construe experience. Lakoff (1987) proposes that categories may be organised as radial networks, with central or prototypical senses connected to peripheral or extended meanings. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) further demonstrate that metaphor is fundamental to everyday conceptualisation. Other cognitive mechanisms,

including metonymy, embodiment and construal, also explain how familiar linguistic forms acquire related abstract or context-specific meanings. Polysemy can therefore be understood as the interaction of linguistic forms, conceptual structures, cultural knowledge and communicative experience.

Nigerian Pidgin provides a productive environment for examining these processes. As an English-lexified contact language that developed within Nigeria's multilingual environment, it has acquired distinctive lexical, morphological, syntactic and pragmatic features. Faraclas (2004) demonstrates the systematic nature of its grammatical structure, while Balogun (2013) argues that Nigerian Pidgin should not be regarded simply as defective or simplified English. Its widespread use in interpersonal communication, commerce, entertainment, popular culture and public interaction further demonstrates its dynamism.

The semantic flexibility of Nigerian Pidgin is particularly evident in everyday expressions. For example, 'I don tire' may denote physical exhaustion but can extend to emotional or psychological depletion depending on context. In 'The medicine dey work,' work refers not to employment but to the effectiveness or successful functioning of the medicine. 'Use your head' may refer literally to the human head but can also mean to think carefully or exercise good judgement. Similarly, 'I no wan reason am' may communicate a refusal to consider, discuss or become involved with an issue. These expressions demonstrate how familiar lexical forms acquire related meanings through conceptual and contextual processes.

Recent studies support this perspective. Kosecki (2023) shows that metonymy contributes to lexical innovation in Nigerian Pidgin, while Odiegwu (2023) demonstrates that reduplicative constructions can generate context-sensitive meanings organised through radial semantic categories. Odiegwu and Romero-Trillo

(2023) further identify pragmatic functions of reduplication, including intensification, emphasis and attenuation. Despite these contributions, comparatively limited attention has been given to polysemy as a central mechanism through which individual lexical forms maintain conceptual continuity while developing different contextual senses in contemporary Nigerian Pidgin.

The present study addresses this gap by examining recurrent polysemous lexical forms, their contextual meanings, the relationships among their senses, and the cognitive mechanisms responsible for meaning extension, particularly metaphor, metonymy, functional association, embodiment and construal. The study contributes to the lexical-semantic description of Nigerian Pidgin, demonstrates the applicability of Cognitive Semantics to an African contact language, and highlights the creativity, systematicity and communicative effectiveness of its speakers. It ultimately shows that polysemy is an important resource through which Nigerian Pidgin speakers construct and interpret meaning in contemporary communication.

Literature Review

The Concept of Polysemy

Polysemy refers to the association of one lexical form with multiple related senses. The concept of relatedness distinguishes polysemy from homonymy, in which identical linguistic forms have unrelated meanings. Lyons (1977) treats the semantic relationship between senses as central to this distinction, while Cruse (1986) views lexical meaning as involving complex relationships among related senses.

Cognitive Linguistics extends this understanding by proposing that lexical categories are not necessarily organised as rigid sets of independent meanings. Lakoff (1987) argues that categories may be structured around prototypes and extended through motivated relationships. A lexical item may therefore have a central or

prototypical sense from which other related interpretations develop. The different senses of a lexical item can consequently be understood as members of a semantic network rather than as completely independent dictionary entries.

Tyler and Evans (2003), through the Principled Polysemy approach, provide a systematic basis for identifying and explaining relationships among different senses of a lexical item. Their approach seeks to determine the primary meaning of a lexical form and explain how other senses develop through recurring conceptual structures. Evans (2005) further emphasises the relationship between lexical representation, conceptual structure and contextual interpretation.

These approaches are particularly useful for examining Nigerian Pidgin because speakers frequently extend familiar lexical forms to accommodate new communicative needs. A form that has a relatively concrete or conventional meaning may acquire an abstract, figurative or context-specific interpretation while retaining a conceptual connection to its central sense. Polysemy can therefore be viewed as an important aspect of lexical creativity and semantic development.

Meaning Construction in Cognitive Semantics

Cognitive Semantics views meaning as closely related to conceptualisation and the ways in which speakers perceive, organise, and interpret their experiences. Rather than treating meaning as a fixed property of linguistic expressions, the approach considers meaning as dynamic and dependent on cognitive processes, contextual knowledge, and human experience. Langacker (1987) argues that semantic structures are characterised relative to cognitive domains and shaped by how speakers construe conceptual content. Thus, the same linguistic expression may evoke different interpretations depending on the speaker's

perspective, the situation in which it occurs, and the knowledge available to the interlocutors.

Evans and Green (2006) further adopt an encyclopaedic view of meaning, arguing that linguistic expressions are associated with broader networks of knowledge rather than isolated dictionary definitions. Such knowledge may include cultural beliefs, physical experiences, social practices, emotions, and contextual information. This perspective is particularly relevant to Nigerian Pidgin, whose vocabulary has developed through sustained contact among English, indigenous Nigerian languages, and diverse sociocultural practices. English-derived lexical items may therefore acquire new or extended meanings as speakers adapt them to local communicative needs and experiences.

Cognitive Semantics also provides a useful explanation of polysemy by viewing related meanings as forming interconnected semantic networks rather than as completely separate lexical entries. A central or prototypical sense may provide a basis for the development of extended senses through mechanisms such as metaphor, metonymy, and contextual association. Consequently, the interpretation of a polysemous expression depends significantly on context, which helps speakers identify the intended sense during communication. This framework therefore provides an appropriate basis for examining how polysemous meanings are constructed, related, and interpreted in contemporary Nigerian Pidgin.

Metaphor, Metonymy and Semantic Extension

Metaphor and metonymy are important cognitive mechanisms through which speakers extend and develop meanings. Metaphor involves understanding one concept in terms of another by mapping knowledge from a familiar or concrete domain onto a less familiar or abstract one. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that metaphor is fundamental to human thought and everyday

communication. Metonymy, in contrast, involves using one concept to refer to another closely associated within the same conceptual domain. While metaphor is based on cross-domain mapping, metonymy relies on contiguity or association.

Semantic extension occurs when an existing lexical item develops additional meanings while retaining a relationship with its central meaning. This process contributes to polysemy, where one lexical form has two or more related senses, unlike homonymy, where identical forms have unrelated meanings. In Nigerian Pidgin, semantic extension is particularly productive because speakers creatively adapt familiar lexical resources to express new experiences and communicative purposes.

Nigerian Pidgin is a dynamic and systematic language variety influenced by English and indigenous Nigerian languages. Faraclas (2004) and Balogun (2013) show that it has distinct grammatical, lexical, and communicative patterns. Kosecki (2023) further demonstrates that metonymy contributes to lexical innovation in Nigerian Pidgin. Building on these perspectives, this study examines how contemporary Nigerian Pidgin lexical forms develop related senses through metaphor, metonymy, and contextual construal.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Cognitive Semantics, drawing on Lakoff (1987), Langacker (1987), Tyler and Evans (2003), and Evans (2005). Cognitive Semantics views meaning as a product of conceptualisation, bodily experience, cultural knowledge, and contextual interpretation rather than as a fixed property of linguistic forms. This perspective is particularly relevant to Nigerian Pidgin, where lexical items frequently develop related meanings through everyday communicative practices and contextual use.

Lakoff's (1987) theory of radial categories explains polysemy as a network of related senses organised around a central or prototypical meaning. Extended senses are connected to the central sense through conceptual mechanisms such as metaphor, metonymy, and experiential association. Langacker's (1987) notion of construal complements this view by explaining how speakers may conceptualise and profile different aspects of the same experience, thereby allowing a lexical form to acquire different interpretations across contexts.

Tyler and Evans (2003) Principled Polysemy approach provides a systematic basis for distinguishing related lexical senses from mere contextual variation. It emphasises the identification of a primary sense and the principled relationships connecting it to other conventionalised senses. Evans (2005) further highlights the encyclopaedic nature of lexical meaning, arguing that lexical expressions activate broader conceptual knowledge associated with particular domains of experience.

Together, these principles provide an appropriate framework for analysing Nigerian Pidgin polysemy. They enable the study to identify central and extended meanings, establish the conceptual relationships connecting them, and explain the cognitive mechanisms underlying semantic extension. The framework therefore facilitates analysis of how Nigerian Pidgin speakers construct, interpret, and conventionalise related meanings through metaphor, metonymy, construal, and contextual experience.

Empirical Studies

Recent scholarship continues to demonstrate that Nigerian Pidgin is a dynamic linguistic system in which meaning is shaped by context, discourse, conceptual association and patterns of usage. Kosecki (2023), for instance, demonstrates that metonymy motivates lexical innovation in Nigerian Pidgin by enabling speakers to establish conceptual relationships between an existing

lexical item and a new referent or experience. The study is particularly relevant to the present research because metonymic extension provides a cognitively motivated explanation for the emergence of related lexical senses. Rather than treating new meanings as arbitrary additions to the lexicon, Kosecki shows that speakers draw on associations within familiar conceptual domains. This supports the Cognitive-Semantic assumption that lexical meaning is structured through speakers' knowledge and experience.

Odiegwu (2023) examined reduplication in Nigerian Pidgin and showed that reduplicated forms may develop different context-sensitive interpretations organised around prototypes and radial categories. This finding is important because it demonstrates that semantic variation in Nigerian Pidgin can be systematically structured around a central meaning from which related meanings extend. Odiegwu and Romero-Trillo (2023) further established that reduplication performs pragmatic functions such as intensification, emphasis and attenuation. Their findings reinforce the argument that interpretation cannot be separated from discourse context and communicative intention.

Manfredi and Čéplö (2023) examined the Nigerian Pidgin discourse marker o and found that its grammatical and pragmatic functions vary according to syntactic and discourse environments. Their findings provide evidence for the multifunctionality of Nigerian Pidgin forms and demonstrate that contextual construal plays an important role in determining interpretation. Similarly, Marchal, Scholman and Demberg (2021) identified systematic discourse-semantic patterns in Nigerian Pidgin, showing that recurring linguistic and contextual relationships contribute to interpretation. Unuabonah, Oyebola and Gut (2021) also demonstrated that pragmatic markers such as abeg, sef and na acquire different discourse functions depending on the contexts in which they occur. Adelani, Doğruöz, Shode and Aremu (2024)

examined Nigerian Pidgin in relation to multilingual language technologies and highlighted the linguistic distinctiveness of Naija from other West African Pidgin varieties.

Their study shows that Nigerian Pidgin has substantial lexical and structural characteristics that cannot simply be represented through English or other Pidgin varieties. This observation is important for the present study because it cautions against assuming that the meanings of Nigerian Pidgin lexical items are identical to those of their English etymological sources. Nigerian Pidgin may preserve an English-derived form while developing a locally conventionalised meaning. Callies (2024) examined Nigerian Pidgin proverbs and their influence on idiomatic phraseology in Nigerian English. Using a collection of Nigerian Pidgin proverbs and corpus evidence from Nairaland, the study identified recurring lexical and lexico-grammatical patterns that may represent early stages of idiom formation. This finding is particularly relevant to the present study because it illustrates how repeated contextual associations can contribute to the development and conventionalisation of new meanings. It also demonstrates that Nigerian Pidgin provides lexical and phraseological resources that can influence meaning construction beyond the immediate Pidgin context.

Akinbo (2025) investigated grammatical tonal polarity and reduplication in Nigerian Pidgin and showed that reduplication can iconically express iteration, while tonal differences may further specify the manner in which an event is distributed. Although the study focuses on grammatical and phonological structure rather than lexical polysemy, it provides additional evidence that Nigerian Pidgin uses formal linguistic resources systematically to construct distinctions in meaning. This reinforces the broader argument that meaning construction in Nigerian Pidgin is patterned and motivated rather than arbitrary.

Scholman, Marchal, Brown and Demberg (2025) developed DiscoNaija, a discourse-annotated parallel Nigerian Pidgin-English corpus designed to capture discourse relations in Nigerian Pidgin. The corpus provides substantial empirical resources for examining how linguistic expressions operate within discourse and how relationships between utterances contribute to interpretation. Its development is particularly significant for the present study because it strengthens the empirical basis for investigating meaning construction using naturally occurring Nigerian Pidgin data rather than relying exclusively on isolated examples or introspective judgments.

Okeke (2025) examined reduplication in Naijà and found that reduplication can perform functions including intensification, iteration, habituality, plurality, emphasis and sarcasm. The study further argues that these functions are connected to the social and cultural contexts in which Nigerian Pidgin is used. This supports the view that semantic interpretation in Nigerian Pidgin involves an interaction between linguistic structure, pragmatic context and speakers' cultural knowledge.

Existing studies have explored various aspects of Nigerian Pidgin, but limited attention has been given to polysemy as a cognitively structured network of related lexical senses. This study addresses this gap by examining selected polysemous expressions and explaining how metaphor, metonymy, prototype effects, radial categorisation, and contextual construal shape their meanings.

Methodology

The study adopts a descriptive mixed-methods research design, combining qualitative cognitive-semantic analysis with quantitative frequency counts and percentages. The mixed-methods approach is considered appropriate because the study seeks not only to identify and describe polysemous expressions in contemporary Nigerian Pidgin but also to establish the frequency

and distribution of the different meaning patterns identified in the data. The qualitative component provides an in-depth interpretation of how meanings are related and constructed through cognitive mechanisms such as metaphor, metonymy, contextual extension, construal, and radial categorisation, while the quantitative component provides empirical support for the observed patterns.

The sample size is 20 sentences. The sample comprises 20 Nigerian Pidgin sentences containing potentially polysemous lexical items and expressions. The sentences are drawn from three major sources: social media, Nigerian newspapers, and naturally occurring market interactions. These sources are selected because they represent different communicative contexts in which Nigerian Pidgin is actively used in contemporary Nigeria. Social-media data provide informal and spontaneous instances of Nigerian Pidgin among users, while newspaper materials capture its use in public discourse and mediated communication. Market interactions provide interpersonal data reflecting the everyday communicative practices of speakers.

For the social-media and newspaper components, materials are randomly selected from a defined sampling frame covering relevant Nigerian social-media posts and newspaper publications within the period selected for the study. Random selection helps to minimise researcher bias and ensures that the examples are not chosen solely because they support predetermined analytical assumptions. The market-interaction data, however, are purposively selected because markets constitute communicative environments where Nigerian Pidgin is extensively employed for bargaining, persuasion, clarification, negotiation, social interaction, and commercial transactions. Utterances are included where they contain lexical items whose meanings vary across contexts but remain semantically or conceptually related.

The analysis proceeds in two stages. First, the selected sentences are examined qualitatively using principles of Cognitive Semantics to identify the central and extended senses of the relevant lexical items and to establish the conceptual relationships linking them. Particular attention is given to metaphorical extension, metonymic association, contextual construal, prototype effects, and radial-category relationships. Second, the identified patterns are quantified through frequency counts and percentages to show the relative occurrence of the different types of polysemous meaning extensions. The combination of qualitative interpretation and quantitative evidence enables the study to provide a systematic account of how Nigerian Pidgin speakers construct, extend, and interpret related meanings in contemporary communication.

Data presentation and Analysis

Examples of some Selected Polysemous Expressions

I don tire / This wahala don tire me

Literal meaning: Physical exhaustion

Extended meaning: Emotional or psychological depletion

The verb tire has a central meaning associated with physical exhaustion. In I don tire, the expression may simply indicate that the speaker is physically tired. However, in This wahala don tire me, tire extends to emotional or psychological depletion caused by a difficult situation. The extension is motivated by the experiential similarity between physical fatigue and emotional exhaustion. Thus, the same lexical item describes both bodily and psychological states.

The medicine dey work

Literal meaning: Perform an activity or function Be effective

Extended meaning: produce the expected result

The central meaning of work involves performing an activity or functioning. In The medicine dey work, however, work does not refer to ordinary physical activity. It means that the medicine is effective and producing the

expected result. This represents functional or resultative semantic extension, where successful functioning is understood as effectiveness.

This problem dey carry me go somewhere

Literal meaning: Physically transport or move something

Extended meaning: Direct or propel someone towards an outcome

This problem dey carry me go somewhere"

The verb carry conventionally denotes physical transportation or movement from one location to another. In this expression, however, the movement is abstract: the problem is understood as directing or propelling the speaker towards a particular outcome or consequence. The expression therefore involves metaphorical extension, in which physical movement provides a conceptual basis for understanding the progression of a situation.

"Use your head"

Literal meaning: Part of the body

Extended meaning: Intelligence, reasoning, or mental ability

The noun head primarily refers to a part of the human body. In Use your head, its meaning is extended to intelligence, reasoning, or mental ability. The expression reflects a metonymic relationship between the physical organ associated with thinking and the cognitive ability itself. The head consequently serves as a conceptual representation of intelligence.

I no wan reason am

Literal meaning: rational thought

Extended meaning: consider/think about

The verb reason centrally relates to rational thought or the process of using one's mind to reach a conclusion. In this context, reason am extends to mean consider, think about, or deliberate on something. The meaning remains closely connected to the central cognitive sense because consideration involves mental processing. This illustrates a

relatively close form of semantic extension within the cognitive domain.

"E don enter."

Literal meaning: He/she has entered

Extended meaning: He/she has understood the situation or been deceived/trapped, depending on context

The central meaning of enter is physical movement into a place. In Nigerian Pidgin, E don enter can extend to mean that someone has understood a situation, fallen into a trap, or been deceived, depending on context. The extension is metaphorical because physical entry is conceptualized as entering into a state, situation, or condition. In the sense of being deceived, the expression may also suggest that the person has become caught within a problematic situation.

"This thing dey pain me."

Literal meaning: This thing is causing me physical pain.

Extended meaning: The situation is emotionally disturbing or upsetting me.

The central meaning of pain refers to physical discomfort or bodily suffering. Its extended meaning refers to emotional distress, annoyance, or psychological hurt. The expression demonstrates how bodily experience is used to conceptualize emotional experience. The physical sensation of pain therefore provides a conceptual basis for describing an unpleasant emotional state.

"She dey shine."

Literal meaning: She is shining.

Extended meaning: She is looking attractive, doing well, or becoming successful.

The verb shine literally describes the production or reflection of light. In She dey shine, however, the expression may describe a person who is looking attractive, doing well, gaining prominence, or becoming successful. This is a clear metaphorical extension from physical brightness to positive social or personal qualities.

Brightness is conceptualized as a representation of attractiveness, prosperity, or success.

"Dem don carry am go."

Literal meaning: They have carried it away.

Extended meaning: Someone has been arrested, taken away, or has died, depending on context.

The central meaning of carry involves physically taking something or someone from one place to another. In this expression, it can refer to someone being arrested, taken away, or, in some contexts, dying. The physical movement meaning is extended to institutional or experiential removal. Context determines the specific interpretation, demonstrating the important role of contextual construal in Nigerian Pidgin polysemy.

"This matter don hard."

Literal meaning: This matter has become physically hard.

Extended meaning: The situation has become difficult, complicated, or challenging.

The adjective hard literally describes physical firmness or resistance to pressure. In This matter don hard, it refers to a situation that has become difficult, complicated, or challenging. The expression represents a metaphorical extension from physical difficulty to situational difficulty. A physically hard object requires greater effort to manipulate, just as a difficult situation requires greater effort to resolve.

Table 1: Distribution of Data by Source

Source	Number of sentences	Percentage (%)
Social-media discourse	7	35.0
Nigerian newspapers	7	35.0
Physical interactions	6	30.0
Total	20	100.0

Comparative Analysis of Selected Polysemous Expressions

Table 2: Central and Extended Senses

Lexical expression	Central/concrete sense	Extended/ contextual sense	Principal mechanism
I don tire	Become tired	Be exhausted/ experientially depleted	Construal/Concrete-to-abstract extension
The medicine dey work	Perform activity/function	Be effective	Functional extension
Carry this bag go house	Transport physically	Lead/affect towards an outcome	Metaphorical extension
Use your head	Physical body part	Intelligence/reasoning	Metonymic extension
I no wan reason am	Rational thought	Think about/consider	Contextual construal
E don enter.	He/she has entered	Situation or been deceived/trapped, depending on context	Metaphorical extension
This thing dey pain me.	This thing is causing me physical pain.	The situation is emotionally disturbing or upsetting me.	Metaphorical extension
She dey shine	She is shining.	She is looking attractive, doing well, or becoming successful.	Metaphorical extension
Dem don carry am go.	They have carried it away.	Someone has been arrested, taken away, or has died, depending on context.	Metonymic extension
This matter don hard	This matter has become physically hard.	The situation has become difficult, complicated, or challenging.	Metaphorical extension

This demonstrates that Nigerian Pidgin speakers create and interpret polysemous expressions by extending central or concrete meanings into broader, abstract, emotional, and context-dependent meanings. The extensions are not random; rather, they are

motivated by identifiable cognitive-semantic mechanisms such as metaphor, metonymy, functional extension, and contextual construal.

The expression "I don tire" has the central meaning of becoming physically tired. However, in appropriate contexts, it can mean being emotionally exhausted, frustrated, or experientially depleted. This represents construal or concrete-to-abstract extension, in which a physical experience is understood in relation to an abstract psychological state. Similarly, "The medicine dey work" literally describes the functioning or performance of something. Its extended sense, "the medicine is effective," results from functional extension, because successful functioning is associated with achieving a desired effect.

In "Carry this bag go house," the central sense involves physically transporting an object. The expression may acquire an extended interpretation involving movement towards a particular result or outcome. This illustrates metaphorical extension, where physical movement provides a conceptual basis for understanding abstract progression. "Use your head" provides a clear example of metonymic extension. Although head literally refers to a physical body part, it is conventionally associated with intelligence, thought, and reasoning. Thus, the expression means "use your intelligence" rather than merely using the physical head.

The expression "I no wan reason am" similarly demonstrates contextual construal, as reason moves from the basic activity of rational thought to the contextual meaning of considering, discussing, or reflecting on an issue. In "E don enter," the physical concept of entering is extended metaphorically to understanding a situation or becoming trapped or deceived. "This thing dey pain me" extends physical pain to emotional distress, while "She dey shine" extends physical brightness to attractiveness, success, or positive development.

The expression "Dem don carry am go" illustrates metonymic extension, while "This matter don hard" metaphorically maps physical hardness onto difficulty. Overall, the table shows that polysemy in Nigerian Pidgin is strongly shaped by cognitive association, context, and speakers" everyday experiences.

Discussion of Findings

The analysis demonstrates that polysemy is a productive feature of contemporary Nigerian Pidgin. The selected lexical forms exhibit multiple related senses that remain semantically and conceptually connected, supporting the Cognitive-Semantic view of meaning as a network of related categories. Four major findings emerged. First, Nigerian Pidgin contains recurrent polysemous forms shaped by semantic and conceptual relationships. Second, context determines which sense is activated or foregrounded in communication. Third, meaning extension occurs through metaphor, metonymy, functional association, embodiment, concrete-to-abstract extension, and contextual construal. Metaphor maps structures across conceptual domains, while metonymy relies on associations within experiential domains. Fourth, the identified senses can be represented as radial semantic networks, demonstrating the applicability of Cognitive Semantics to Nigerian Pidgin. Overall, the findings show that Nigerian Pidgin polysemy reflects its internal linguistic system, cultural experiences, and communicative practices, confirming it as a systematic, flexible, and productive language.

Conclusion

The study concludes that polysemy is a significant resource for lexical flexibility, semantic productivity, and expressive richness in contemporary Nigerian Pidgin. Speakers creatively extend existing lexical meanings to express new experiences, communicative situations, and pragmatic intentions. These extensions are systematically related to central senses through metaphor, metonymy, functional extension, and construal,

supporting the Cognitive-Semantic view of meaning as a network of related senses. Context, speaker intention, and shared experience significantly influence interpretation. Thus, meaning in Nigerian Pidgin is dynamic, negotiated, and context-sensitive. Polysemy enhances communicative efficiency and demonstrates the adaptability, creativity, and cognitively motivated development of Nigerian Pidgin.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, Nigerian Pidgin should be recognised as a systematic and productive linguistic system in which polysemous meanings arise through metaphor, metonymy, functional extension, and contextual construal. Future research should examine more lexical forms across diverse contexts and investigate how cultural and experiential knowledge influences meaning construction.

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