A Descriptive Analysis of Antonymy in the Igbo Language

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Abstract
Antonymy is a lexical sense relation that focuses on opposite in meaning of lexical items. Antonymy is a phenomenon of Universal Grammar because it is obvious in all natural languages. Different scholars have embarked on research on antonymy in different languages but much has not been done on the Igbo language, hence, this research work. This study is poised to highlight the concept of antonymy and its different kinds, then, investigate the existence of the concept in the Igbo language. Data were collected through unstructured observation of native speakers' natural speech events, and the descriptive method of data analysis was used in analyzing the data. The findings are that the Igbo language has different kinds of antonyms such as: gradable and non-gradable antonyms, reverse and converse terms, then taxonomy sisters. In conclusion, it is obvious that antonymy manifests in the Igbo language. The research work will benefit lexicographers, linguists and scholars.

1.0 Introduction
Antonymy is a concept in lexical semantics used in describing oppositeness of meaning, and words that are opposite in their

meanings are called antonyms. In other words, an antonym is a word having a meaning opposite to that of another word. An 'antonym' is the antonym of synonym. Antonymy is one of the regular features of natural languages. As an introductory note on antonymy, Fromkin, Rodman and Hyams (2006) declare that as a rule, man is a fool, when it is hot, he wants it cool; when it is cool, he wants it hot. Always wanting what is not.

The meaning of a word may be partially defined by saying what is *not.* Male means *not* female. Dead means *not* alive. Words that are opposite in meaning are often called antonyms. More about antonymy is contained in subsequent discussions. The research work appears in sections. The first section is the general introduction, followed by the review of Literature under which the concept of antonymy, kinds of antonymy and the importance of antonymy are discussed. The second section is the application of antonymy to the Igbo language, followed by the findings and conclusion.

2.0 Review of Related Literature

Different scholars have written extensively on antonymy discussing the concept and its kind, thus;

2.1 Concept of Antonymy

Antonymy is the sense relation that exists between words which are opposite in meaning. Antonymy etymologically is a Greek word meaning "counter name". (Antonymywww.umiacs.umd.edu/-saif/wedDocs/antonymy-SKD, 2014). According to Finegan (2004), the word antonymy derives from the Greek root anti-(opposite) and denotes opposite in meaning. In contrast to synonymy and hyponymy, antonymy is a binary relationship that

can characterize a relationship between only two words at a time. Terms 'A' and 'B' are antonyms, if when 'A' describes a referent, 'B' cannot describe the same referent, and vice versa. Palmer (1981) states that the term antonymy is used for 'oppositeness of meaning'; words that are opposite are antonyms. Antonymy is often thought of as the opposite of synonymy, but the status of the two are very different. Unlike synonymy, antonymy is a regular and very natural feature of language and can be defined fairly precisely. Crystal (1987:105) writes that "antonymy is the 'oppositeness of meaning'. Antonyms are often thought of in the same breath as synonyms, but they are in fact very different."

Bussman (1996) says that antonymy is a relation of semantic opposite. In contrast to the general relation of incompatibility, antonymy is restricted to gradable expressions that usually correlate with opposite members of a scale: example, good versus bad. The various positions on the scale cannot be determined absolutely but rather depend upon the context. For example, a large mouse is smaller than a small elephant. Saeed (2003) notes that in traditional terminology, antonyms are words which are opposite in meaning. There are a number of relations which seem to involve words which are at the same time related in meaning yet incompatible or contrasting.

Ettlinger, (2014) states that antonymy holds a place in society which other sense relations simply do not occupy. Whether or not there exists a general human tendency to categorize experience in terms of dichotomous contrast. Quoting Lyons (1977) Ettlinger avers that antonymy is not easily gauged, but, either way, our exposure to antonymy is immeasurable: we memorize 'opposite' in childhood, encounter them throughout our daily lives. And possibly and even use antonymy as a cognitive device to organize human experience.

Oppositeness has an important role in structuring the vocabulary of English. This is especially so in the adjective word class, where a good many words occur in antonymous pairs: example, Long-short, wide-narrow, old-new, rough-smooth, light-dark, straight-crooked, deep-shallow, fast-slow. While antonymy is typically found among adjectives it is not restricted to this word class: bring-take (verbs), death-life (nouns), noisily-quietly (adverbs), above-below (prepositions), after-before (conjunctions or prepositions). In concurring with the above, Finegan (2004) posits that the prototypical antonyms are pairs of adjectives that describe opposite notions: large and small, wide and narrow, hot and cold, married and single, alive and dead.

Antonymy is not restricted to adjectives, however, the nouns 'man' and 'woman' are also antonyms because an individual cannot be described by both terms at once. 'Always' and 'never' form an antonymous pairs of adverbs: they have mutually exclusive referents. The verbs 'love' and 'hate' can also be viewed as antonyms because they refer to mutually exclusive emotions. Antonymy is thus a binary relationship between terms with complementary meanings Antonymywww.umiacs.umd.edu/-saif/wed Docs/antonymy-SKD, 2014) writes that antonyms often indicate the discourse relation of contrast. They are also useful for detecting humor, as satire and jokes tend to have contradictions and oxymorons. Antonyms can play a crucial role in multi-document summarization, especially that of opinions.

In a nutshell, antonymy is a semantic phenomenon that discusses opposite in meaning of words showing that if a word does not connote one thing it must connote the other. This does not concern only adjectival words but cuts across words in other word classes.

2.2 Kinds of Antonyms

Antonyms are group into different kinds depending on their collocation and implications. Crystal (1987), asserts that there may be no true synonyms but there are several kinds of antonyms. Some of the most important types are:

2.2.1 Non gradable antonyms (also called complementary terms) which do not permit degrees of contrast, such as single/married, male/female; it is not possible to talk of a 'very male', 'quite married', etc. except in jest. Saeed (2003) calls it non gradable antonyms or 'simple antonyms'. According to him this is a relation between words such that the negative of one implies the positive of the other. The pairs are also sometimes called complementary pairs or binary pairs. In effect, the words form a two-term classification. Examples would include, dead/alive (of animals), pass/fail (a test), hit/miss (a target). So, using these words literally, *dead* implies *not alive*, etc. which explains the semantic oddness of sentences like: * My pet python is dead but luckily it's still alive. Denham and Lobeck (2013) note that complementary antonyms are another subtype of antonym: if you are one, you cannot be the other; these are 'absolute' opposites. That is if you are dead you cannot also be alive; if you are asleep, you are not awake, as so on. Similar pairs of this sort include legal/illegal and beginning/end. Another kind of antonym is.

2.2.2 Gradable antonyms- This is a relationship between opposites where the positive of one term does not necessarily imply the negative of the other, example, rich/poor, fast/slow, young/old, beautiful/ugly. The relation is typically associated with adjectives and has three major identifying characteristics; first, there are usually intermediate terms so that between the gradable antonyms

'hot' and 'cold' there is hot (warm, tepid, cool) cold. This means that something may be neither hot nor cold. Secondly, the terms are usually, relative, so a *thick* pencil is likely to be thinner than a thin girl. A third characteristics is that in some pairs one term is more basic and common, so for example, of the pair long/short, it is more natural to ask of something: 'How long is it?' than 'how short is it?' and 'how cold is it?' are equally naturally depending on the context. Other examples of gradable antonyms are: tall/short, clever/stupid, near/far, interesting/boring.

Writing on this kind of antonyms, Palmer (1981), notes that there are different kinds of 'oppositeness'. English abounds in pairs of words such as wide/narrow, old/young, big/small, etc. All of them are adjectives and have in common the fact that they may be seen in terms of degrees of the quality involved. Palmer quotes Sapir (1944[1949]) as arguing that these words should be handled in terms of grading. The comparative forms of the adjectives (those ending in –er or occurring with more) are explicitly graded, since to say that one road is wider than another, one boy is older than another or one book is bigger than another is to place them in a gradable scale for comparison. They are thus implicitly graded antonyms. Since antonyms are graded, there are often intermediate terms.

Thus, there is not just hot/cold, but hot/warm/cool/cold, with the intermediate warm and cool forming a pair of antonyms themselves. Bussmann (1996) remarks that in contrast to the general relation of incompatibility, antonymy is restricted to gradable expressions that usually correlate with opposite members of a scale: example, good versus bad. The various positions on the scale cannot be determined absolutely but rather depend upon the context, example, a large mouse is smaller than a small elephant. Gradable complementaries is a class of complementary expression

because they are both scalar and gradable, example, clean versus dirty. In contrast to antonymous expressions, gradable complementaries divide the conceptual domain into two mutually exclusive segments. In order to understand gradable complementaries, one must generally make value judgment about the degree to which a characteristic is undesirable, example safe versus dangerous, sober versus drunk. The sense in which words such as hot and cold are 'opposites' is not just that they are incompatible in meaning.

Many words are semantically incompatible in the sense that they cannot both be true of something at the same time. For instance, the words 'cat' and 'dog' are semantically incompatible (they cannot both be truly applied to the same thing at the same time), nevertheless, they are not 'opposites' in the sense of being antonyms. The examples small/huge, cold/hot are antonyms essentially because there is a scale containing the 'opposites' at either end, with a midpoint (or mid interval) between them. Thus, the words 'hot' and 'cold' can be said to be antonyms (opposites) since they define the extremities of a scale (of temperature, in this case) that has a mid-interval between them (in this case, represented by the word lukewarm, a word that can be used to refer to things that are neither hot nor cold).

The words 'hot' and 'cold' are antonyms that describe physical temperature. With pairs of antonyms, if one member undergoes a metaphorical extension, the other tends to change in a parallel fashion. Thus, just as hot and cold are opposites in describing temperature, so they are also opposites in their metaphorical extension in phrases such as hot news (news that is just breaking) versus cold news (news that is old) (Lehrer 1974). In like manner, Jackson and Ze Amvela (2000) declare that gradable antonyms include pairs like the following: beautiful-ugly,

expensive-cheap, fast-slow, hot-cold, increase-decrease, long-short, love-hate, rich-poor, sweet-sour, wide-narrow. These pairs are called gradable antonyms because they do not represent an either- or relation but rather a more-less relation. The words can be viewed as terms at the end-points of a continuum or gradient. The more/less relation is evident in a number of ways: the terms allow comparison, example, 'My arm is longer/shorter than yours', 'I love a good book more than a good meal'; the adjectives can be modified by 'intensifying' adverbs, example, very long, extremely hot, extraordinary beautiful.

Fromkin, et al (2006) concur with Palmer (1981) above that there are several kinds of antonymy. They claim that there are complementary or non-gradable and gradable pairs of antonyms and add that words themselves do not provide an absolute scale. Thus, it is obvious know that 'a small elephant' is much bigger than 'a large mouse'. *Fast* is faster when applied to an airplane than a car. With gradable pairs, the negative of one word is not synonymous with the other. For example, someone who is *not happy* is not necessarily sad. It is also true of gradable antonyms that more of one is less of another. More bigness is less smallness; wider is less narrow, taller is less short. Gradable antonyms are often found among sets of words that partition a continuum: tiny-small-medium-large-huge-gargantuan. Euphoric-elated-happy-so-so-sad, gloomy-despondent.

2.2.3 'Reverses' is another type of antonym observed by Saeed (2003). The characteristic reverse relation is between terms describing movement, which one term describes movement in one direction, and the other same movement in the opposite direction, for example, the terms *push* and *pull*on a swing door, which tells one in which direction to apply force. Other such pairs are

come/go, go/return, ascend/descend. When describing motion, the following can be called reverses: (go) up/down, (go) in/out, (turn) right/left. By extension, the term is also applied to any process which can be reversed: so other reverses are inflated/deflated, expand/contract, full/empty.

2.2.4 'Converses' is also a kind of antonym which Saeed (2003) describes as a relation between two entities from alternate viewpoints, as in the pairs: own/belong to, above/below, employer/employee. Thus, if it happens that Ngozi owns a car, one automatically knows that the car belongs to Ngozi or if Chioma is Ifeoma's employer, one knows that Ifeoma is Chioma's employee, also if a fanis 'above' a bulb, it means that the bulb is 'below' the fan. Finegan (2004) writes that another important relationship involves the notion of oppositeness. Consider the relationship between wife and husband. If 'A' is the husband of 'B', then 'B' is the wife of 'A'. Thus, wife is the converse of husband, and vice versa.

Converseness characterizes a reciprocal semantic relationship between pairs of words. Other examples of converse pairs include terms denoting many other kinship relations such as grandchild and grandparent or child and parent; terms describing professional relationship such as doctor and patient; and terms denoting relative positions in space or time, such as, north of and south of, or before and after. This kind of 'oppositeness' involves pairs like give/receive, buy/sell, teacher/pupil. They are called relational opposites, and they display symmetry in their meaning. If X gives Y to Z, then Z receives Y from X. if X is Y's teacher, then Y is X's pupil. Comparative forms of gradable pairs of adjectives often form relational pairs. Thus, Chioke is taller than Chieze, then Chieze is shorter than Chioke. If 'akpu' is more

expensive than 'garri', then, 'garri' is cheaper than 'akpu'. This is in line with what Saeed (2003) tags converses. Collinge (1990) agrees that converses are sometimes called relational opposites. They all express relationship between two (or more) people or things. Take, for instance, buy and sell: 'Brian sold the car to Michael and Michael bought the car from Brian' both indicate that a particular transaction has taken place. But the first sentence highlights Brian's role in the proceedings, while the second focuses on Michael.

2.2.5 Taxonomic Sisters- Saeed (2003) groups another kind of antonyms 'Taxonomic sisters'. Taxonomies are classification systems, for example, the colour adjectives in English, as in selection below: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple, brown. One can say that the word red and blue are sister-members of the same taxonomy and therefore incompatible with each other. Hence, one can say: 'His house is not green, it is purple'. Other taxonomies might include the days of the week: Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday, or any of the taxonomies used to describe the natural world, like types of bird like parrot, owl, fowl, pigeon, kite, etc.

Some taxonomies are closed like days of the week because one cannot easily add another day, without changing the whole system, others are open like detergent or condiments. Some can come up with a new brand of detergent or condiment and extend the taxonomy.If meaning of words were indissoluble wholes, there would be no way to make the interpretations we do. We know that big and red are not opposite because they have few semantic properties in common. They are both adjectives but big has a semantic property about size whereas red has a semantic property 'about color'. On the other hand, buy and sell are relational

opposites because both contain the semantic property 'transfer of goods and services and they differ only in one property, 'direction of transfer'. Relationships between certain semantic features can reveal knowledge about antonyms. Consider: A word that is [+married] is [-single]. A word that is [+single] is [-married]. These show that any word that bears the semantic property 'single' such as bachelor will not have the property 'married'.

The kinds of antonymys are briefly summarized by McArthur (1992) as he writes that linguists identify three types of antonymys: (1) Gradable antonyms which operate on a continuum: (very) big (very) small. Such pairs often occur in binomial phrases with *and*: (blow) hot and cold, (search) high and low. (2) Complementary antonyms also known as non-gradable antonym which express an either/or relationship: dead or alive, male or female. (3) Converse or relational antonyms, expressing reciprocity: borrow or lend, buy or sell, wife or husband.

3.0 Antonyms in the Igbo Language

Antonyms in the Igbo language can be grouped into gradable, non-gradable (or complementary/ binary) antonyms, relational opposite/converse and reverse opposite.

3.1 Gradable antonyms are those opposites that can be scaled. The sets of words below are gradable antonyms in the language and can be tested with the addition of 'ezigbo' or 'tụ' or 'tụrụ' (which are measuring indicators) or by finding their intermediate words. The third line of each set is the application of the mid-interval words or scaling indicators, for instance,

1a Nnukwu- obere
Big- small
Unere ya dị*tụ* obere

His banana is somehow small
1b Unere ya bu*tụrụ* ibu
His banana is somehow big
2a Mma- njọ
Beautiful-ugly
Nwunye Obi mara *ezigbo* mma
Obi's wife is very beautiful
2b Nwunye Obi ma*tụrụ* mma
Obi's wife is somehow beautiful
3a Ogologo-mkpụmkpụ
Tall-short
Nwata ahụ toro *ezigbo* ogologo
That child is very tall
3b Nwata ahụ to*tụrụ* ogologo
That child is somehow tall
4a Ọcha-oji
Fair-black
4b Ọ dị*tụ* ọcha/oji. Ọ dị *ezigbo* ọcha/oji
She is somehow fair/dark. She is very fair/dark
5a Nwata-okenye
Young-old
Nkechi emeela *ezigbo* okenye
Nkechi is very old
5b Nkechi eme*tụ*la okenye
Nkechi is somehow old
6a Warawara - obosara
Narrow-wide
Okporo ụzọ ahụ dị *ezigbo* warawara
The road is very narrow
6b Okporo ụzọ ahụ dị*tụ* warawara
The road is somehow narrow

7a Ogbenye - ọgaranya
Poor-rich
Nna m nwere *ezigbo* ego
My father is very rich
7b Nna m nwe*tụrụ* ego
My father is somehow rich
8a Nso-anya
Near-far
Obodo ahụ dị *ezigbo* nso
That town is very near
8b Obodo ahụ dị*tụ* nso
That town is somehow near
9a Uju-ụkọ

Plenty-lack
Anyị nọ n'*ezigbo* uju nri
We are in the season when foods are very plenty
10a Iwe-aṅụrị
Annoy-happy
Ụmụakana-enwe *ezigbo* aṅụrị
The children are very happy
10b Ụmụaka nwe*tụrụ* aṅụrị
The children are somehow happy
11a Ọsọọsọ-nwayọ nwayọ
Quickly-slowly
11b Di ya na-eme*tụ* nwayọ nwayọ
Her husband is somehow quiet
12a Ịhụnaanya-akpọmasị
Love-hatred
12b Ifeọma hụ*tụrụ* nwoke ahụ n'anya

Ifeoma has some elements of love for that man

13a Ilo-enyi
Enemy-friend

13b Ha bụ *ezigbo* ndị ilo
They are arch enemies

14a Ọkụ-oyi
Hot-cold

14b Mmiri ahụ dị *ɲiara ɲiara*(Ọdịghị ọkụ nke o ji adị oyi)
The water is lukewarm (It is neither hot nor cold)

15a Isi - ọdụ
Head–tail

15b Chieze abụghị isi nke o ji abụ ọdụ kama ọ nọ n'*etiti*
Chieze is neither the head nor the tail but he is the middle

16a Mbido-njedewe
Beginning-end

16b Ha bịara n'*etiti* mmemme makana ha anọghị na mbido
They came at the middle of the event because they were not at the beginning

The above are gradable antonyms because they have intermediates and can also be scaled.

3.2 Non-Gradable antonyms are binary pairs. They are absolute antonyms and are complementary to each other because if it is not this, it must be that. The presence of one means automatic absence of the other. For instance,

- Nwoke - nwaanyị
  Man-woman
- Oke-nwunye
  Male- female

- Ọnwụ - ndụ
  Dead- alive
- Ihiụra - Ịmụanya
  Asleep – alive

The sets of words cannot be scaled and cannot have intermediate words because one cannot say, 'Nna ya bụtụ nwoke' (meaning, 'His father is in small quantity a man). The same with other words listed under the non-gradable antonyms.

3.3 Converse Terms describe a relation between two entities from alternate viewpoints, example,

Onyenkuzi - nwaakwụkwọ
Teacher-student
If Eze is Ugo's teacher (onyenkuzi) automatically Ugo is Eze's student (nwaakwụkwọ)

- Nne-nnwa
  Mother-child

If Chinenye is Ngozi's child (nnwa), it means that Ngozi is Chinenye's mother (nne)

- Okwuu - ọnụụ
  Speaker- hearer

If Chiazọ speaks (okwuu) to Nọnye, conversely Nọnye is Chiazọ'shearer)ọnụụ

- Ọgụegwu- ọnụegwu/ọgbaegwu
  Singer- hearer/dancer

When a singer (ọgụegwu) sings the person around is either the hearer (ọnụegwu) or a dancer (ọgbaegwu)

- Di-nwunye
  Husband-wife

This set is an antonym because if Nḍụka is Mmeso's husband (di) conversely Mmeso is Nḍụka's wife (nwunye)

- Mgbago- mgbada
  North-south
- Akanri-akaekpe
  Right hand- left-hand
- Ọdịda-nkwali
  Fall- rise

The antonyms in examples 21 to 28 are converse terms in the sense that when one is applied, the other is automatically assume the opposite side.

3.4 Reverse Term is a relationship between terms describing movement where one term describes movement in one direction and the other same movement in the opposite direction, examples,

- Bịa- gaa
  Come- go
- Gaa-lọọ
  Go- return
- Ime-mpụta
  In- out
- Gbago-gbada
  Up- down
- Zụ- re
  Buy- sell
- Nye-nara
  Give- receive
- Ihu- azụ
  Front- back

- Binye- biri
  Lend- borrow

3.5 'Taxonomy Sisters' is a term used for the classification of items that belong to one group. For instance,

- Market days: Eke, Orie, Afọ, Nkwọ

Here, if today is Eke it can never be Orie or Afọ at the same time. It is not as if Eke is opposite of Orie but the presence one means absence of others. This particular group of antonym is closed because new market days cannot be added.

- Colours: edoedo (yellow), akwụkwọndụakwụkwọndụ (green), ọbaraọbara/uhieuhie (red), urukpuurukpu (blue), ajaaja / ncharanchara (brown), oji (black), ọcha (white), awọawọ (grey), etc. In the taxonomy of colours, a shoe that is brown in colour means that it not blue.

- Birds: ọkụkụ (fowl), ọkwa, ọgazị (guinea fowl), ichoku (parrot), nza, obu, ikwikwii (owl), ọkịrị, torotoro (turkey) etc. The sets are antonyms because a woman that bought fowls implies that she did not buy guinea fowl or any other bird in the taxonomy

- Vegetables: onugbu (bitter-leaf), ugu (pumpkin), nchaanwụ (scent-leaf), akwụkwọaṅara (garden-egg leaf), ahịhaa, eriamịọnụ, etc. A soup that was cooked with bitter-leaf means that it was not cooked with scent-leaf unless if there were mixture of vegetables in the soup.

4.0 Formation of Antonyms- Fromkin, et al (2006) postulate that in English there are a number of ways to form antonyms. One can add the prefix 'un-': likely/unlikely, able/unable,

fortunate/unfortunate, or you can add 'non-': entity/nonentity, conformist/nonconformist, or you can add 'in-': tolerant/intolerant, discreet/indiscreet,etc.

4.1. In the Igbo language, antonyms can be formed by suffixing the negative marker '-ghị' to the verb root or '-la' to imperatives, for instance,

- ga-gaghị
  go- did not go
- si-sighị
  cook- did not cook
- de-deghị
  write-did not write
- chọ - chọghị
  want- did not want
- ma- maghị
  know- did not know
- te-teghị
  rub- did not rub

Where '-la' is suffixed to imperatives to make the expressions negative imperatives, the suffix is prefixed by 'a/e' because 'la' alone cannot form the negative. The examples are as follows:

- pụọ-apụla
  leave- do not leave
- rie- erila
  eat- do not eat
- sie- esila
  cook- do not cook
- taa- atala
  chew- do not chew
- chọọ - achọla

want- do not want

- jee- ejela
  go- do not go

These are antonyms because each set is opposite of the other. One cannot be engaged in two of them at the same time in a speech event.

5.0 Findings and Conclusion

It is confirmed that antonymy manifests in the Igbo language like in every other natural language. Antonymy can be said to be a language universal since no language is devoid of it. Antonyms in the Igbo language can be categorized into gradable and non-gradable antonyms, converse and reverse terms, and taxonomy sisters. It is also observed that many scholars have not given this area of study much needed attention. On this premises, the researchers therefore, advise that more attention be given to this vital area of study as it is very crucial in the day to day activities of mankind. The study on this note concludes with these words of Ettlinger (2014):

> Antonymy is a key feature of everyday life. Should further evidence be required, try visiting a public lavatory without checking which is the 'gents'and which is the 'ladies'. On your way out, ignore the instructions which tell you whether to 'push or pull' the door. And outside, pay no attention to whether the traffic lights are telling you to 'stop' or to 'go', at best , you will end up looking very foolish; at worst you will end up dead.

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