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An Analysis of Urhobo Language Meronyms

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Abstract

This study on Urhobo language meronym discovers the meronymic concepts attached to the lexical items of the language. Meronymic relations are usually understood to express strict partial ordering relations. Strict partial ordering relationships are transitive, irreflexive, and antisymmetrical (Moore, 1967). In obtaining the analyzed working data of the study observation method is used. The theoretical framework employed in analyzing the Urhobo meronyms is Mereology Theory of Lesniewski (1910). One of the findings of the paper reveals the portions that come up together and form a single Urhobo meronym. Another finding shows the part-whole relationship that exists among the Urhobo meronyms together with their functional integration. The other finding highlights the mereological principles of the Urhobo meronyms in line with their reflexive and transitive connections.

1.0 Introduction

This paper concentrates on the semantic analysis of Urhobo meronyms. Urhobo is a language with rising and falling tones that constitute number of meronyms. These meronyms fall under the nym class of concepts category. An important and interesting type of semantic relation, expressed in language, 'is the relation between the parts of things and the wholes which they comprise (Winston et. al. 1987).

The Urhobo people live in the Mid-west region of Nigeria (Acquaye, 1974:525). They are found mainly in the Delta State of Nigeria where they constitute the largest ethnic group (Aweto and Igben, 2003:11). They are spread over nine Local Government Areas in Delta State of Nigeria. These Include: Ethipe West, Ethipe East, Ugheli South, Ugheli North, Okpe, Sapele, Udu, Uvwie and part of Warri South. These Local Government Areas are part of the twenty five Local Government Areas which make up Delta State.



The Urhobo live mainly in nucleated settlements. Some of these are large urban centres like Warri, Effurun, Sapele and Ugheli which are of considerable commercial, industrial, educational and administrative importance (Otite, 2003:23). There are also a number of medium-sized industrial towns such as Jesse, Oghara, Okpara, Eku, Avwra (Abraka) among others. The latter at Delta State University is rapidly growing. Some of these settlements are situated in towns and villages along the main motor roads. The population of Urhobo people is estimated to be over 2 million (Akpomuvie, 2009). Furthermore, the Urhobo are united not only by ties of ethnicity and culture but also by the salient geographical features of the territory they occupy as their homeland (Aweto and Igben, 2003). Urhobo are surrounded by other neighbors such as the Isoko to the South-East, the Itsekiri to the West, the Bini to the North, the Ijaw to the South and the Ndokwa to the North-East and that the geographical characteristics and natural resources played an important role in the migration history of the Urhobo (Otite, 2003:23).

1.1 Meronym

One of the fundamental types of semantic hierarchical relations in the lexical system of the language is the meronymic or Part-Whole relation (Goddard, 2001). In addition, meronyms are of utter importance for typological semantic research into the lexical systems of languages of different structure (Bower, 2017).

This study on Urhobo meronyms reviews the concept meanings based on scholarly perspectives. And in the first instance, meronym is seen as a concept that falls under the nym lexical relations which describes a part-whole relationship between lexical items (Saed, 2003). Meronym is a semantic relation between an object corresponding to a “part” and to its corresponding “whole” (Girju et al. 2006). The meronymic relation can be expressed by the semantic formula X is a part of Y, for example: Germ. Ohr ‘ear’, Engl. ear; Germ. Teil ‘part’, Stück ‘piece’, Engl. part, piece. Traditionally remaining in the spotlight of formal logic, mathematics and philosophy, it had been of no interest and irrelevant to linguistics for a fairly long time. The axiomatic characteristics of this type of logical and philosophic relations were introduced by Plato and Aristotle (Aristotle, 2009; Platon, 1987). Therefore, meronym is a lexical device that stands as a single concept which shows relationship with the parts that form it conceptually.

2.0 Methodology and Theoretical Framework

This part discusses the methodology followed in obtaining the study working data and the theoretical framework used in the analysis of the Urhobo Language meronyms.

2.1 Methodology

The methodology followed in sourcing the research working data is observation. And Observation is a technique of data collection in which the researcher made a personal visit to the field or respondents and



collects relevant data (Haruna, 2008:95). Observation is a device used to obtain direct information about an individual behaviour, object or situation” (Osuala, 2007:203). On the process of gathering the study data, Urhobo to English dictionary was used, read and observed.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

Theory of mereology is developed by Lesniewski in the year (1910). It's a formal theory that studies part-whole relationships, exploring how parts relate to wholes and each other. Mereology (from the Greek *meroV*, 'part') is the theory of parthood relations: of the relations of part to whole and the relations of part to part within a whole. Its roots can be traced back to the early days of philosophy, beginning with the Presocratic atomists and continuing throughout the writings of Plato (especially the *Parmenides* and the *Thaetetus*), Aristotle (especially the *Metaphysics*, but also the *Physics*, the *Topics*, and *De partibus animalium*), and Boethius (especially *In Ciceronis Topica*). Mereology has also occupied a prominent role in the writings of medieval ontologists and scholastic philosophers such as Garland the Computist, Peter Abelard, Thomas Aquinas, Raymond Lull, and Albert of Saxony, as well as in Jungius's *Logica Hamburgensis* (1638), Leibniz's *Dissertatio de arte combinatoria* (1666) and *Monadology* (1714), and Kant's early writings (the

Gedanken of 1747 and the *Monadologia physica* of 1756). As a formal theory of parthood relations, however, mereology made its way into modern philosophy mainly through the work of Franz Brentano and of his pupils, especially Husserl's third *Logical Investigation* (1901). A preliminary caveat is in order. It concerns the very notion of parthood that mereology is about. The word 'part' has many different meanings in ordinary language, not all of which correspond to the same relation.

3.0 Data Presentation and Analysis

This segment comes up with the mereological analysis of different Urhobo meronyms. The study uses mereology theory developed by Lesniewski in the year (1910). The analysis of every data is carried out clearly based on the principles or assumptions of the adopted framework.

3.1 Ékru 'family' Meronym

Ékru 'family' is a group of individuals related by birth, marriage, or adoption, often living together or maintaining close ties. The concept ékru 'family' is considered the meronym. Based on the mereological analysis of the concept, we have the following:

1. **Whole:** Ékru 'family' itself
2. **Parts:** the individual family members include:
 - a. *Inenode* 'grandmother'
 - b. *Ono* 'mother'



- c. *Oniaruakpo* 'stepmother'
- d. *Oniovo* 'brother/sister'
- e. *Oghwere* 'baby'

The part-Whole Relationships of *Ékru* 'family'

In showing the part-whole relationship among the members of the family, let's consider the following:

1. **Membership:** each family member is part of the family
2. **Parthood:** each family member contributes to the family's structure and function.

Mereological Principles of *Ékru* 'family'

Under this concept we have the following:

- a. **Reflexivity:** the *ékru* 'family' is part of itself.
- b. **Transitivity:** if *oghwere* 'baby' is part of nuclear family and the nuclear family is part of an extended family, and then the *oghwere* 'baby' is part of the extended family.

The above analysis demonstrates how mereology theory is applied in analyzing *ékru* 'family' in understanding the complex social relationship.

3.2 *Orhe* 'body' Meronym

Orhe 'body' refers to the physical structure of a living being, particularly a human or animal. Body of human being consists of different

organs which the parts can be seen as follow:

1. **Whole:** *Orhe* 'body' meronym is the highest itself
2. **Parts:** the parts can be revealed as:
 - a. *Ero* 'eye'
 - b. *Eto* 'hair'
 - c. *Igbero* 'eyebrow'
 - d. *Etoégba* 'beard'
 - e. *Órhó* 'ear'
 - f. *Igbogbo* 'arm'
 - g. *Ugbunu* 'mouth'
 - h. *Úrhióbo* 'finger'
 - i. *Úrhiowo* 'toe'
 - j. *Igabó* 'shoulder'

Part-Whole Relationships of *Orhe* 'body' Meronym

When talk about part-whole relation concerning *Orhe* 'body', the elements to ponder about are:

- a. **Parts:** *Úrhióbo* 'finger', *úrhiowo* 'toe', *orhó* 'ear', *ero* 'eye' and *eto* 'hair' are all parts of human body.
- b. **Functional integration:** the parts work together to maintain the whole body function.

Mereological Principles of *Orhe* 'body' Meronym

The mereological principles under this concept are:

1. **Reflexivity:** the *Orhe* 'body' is a part of itself
2. **Transitivity:** here we can say if the eye is a part of a head, and the head is part of the body, then *ero* 'eye' is part of the body.



The analysis highlights the merology's value in comprehending complex biological or physical parts of the human body. The analysis also reveals how different body parts interact with one another to function normally without any hindrance.

3.3 *Edidjana* 'week' Meronym

Edidjana 'week' is a unit of time, typically consisting of seven days. *Edidjana* 'week' is another meronym in Urhobo language. In pointing out the parts relationship that exists within the meronym, let's consider the below items.

- a. **Whole:** *edidjana* 'week' is the whole itself
- b. **Parts:** the parts to be point out here are:
 - i. *ediruorésósuó* 'Monday',
 - ii. *ediruorivé* 'Tuesday',
 - iii. *ediruorérhá* 'Wednesday',
 - iv. *ediruoréné* 'Thursday',
 - v. *ediruoríyorin* 'Friday',
 - vi. *edidjanarotete* 'Saturday' and
 - vii. *edidjanarode* 'Sunday'

Part-Whole Relationships of *Edidjana* 'week' Meronym

What to consider in this part are the componential parts and the sequential structure.

- a. **Component parts:** here each day is part of a week

- b. **Sequential structure:** days of a week are ordered in a specific sequence.

Mereological Principles of *Edidjana* 'week' Meronym

In discovering the mereological assumptions of the concept *edidjana* 'week', let's figure out the following:

1. **Reflexivity:** the *edidjana* 'week' is part of itself
2. **Transitivity:** here let's say if Monday is part of the week, and the week is part of a month, then Monday is part of the month.

Based on the above analysis, we understand the relationship that exists between the meronym *edidjana* 'week' and the parts it carries.

3.4 *Ikichini* 'kitchen' Meronym

Ikichini 'kitchen' is a room or area in a home or establishment where food is prepared, cooked, and stored. *Ikichini* 'kitchen' is one of the house components which items are kept for food preparation. The items found in the *ikichini* 'kitchen' can be seen below:

- a. **Whole:** the *ikichini* 'kitchen' is the whole itself
- b. **Parts:** the parts to be found under this concept are:
 - i. *Uko* 'cup'
 - ii. *Ugeji* 'spoon'



- iii. *Obode* 'plate'
- iv. *Ipoti* 'pot'
- v. *Agbara* 'chair'
- vi. *Agbuna* 'matches'
- vii. *Ibi* 'charcoal'

Part-Whole Relationships of *Ikichini* 'kitchen' Meronym

- i. **Component parts:** the parts here are the *ugeji* 'spoon', *ipoti* 'pot', *agbuna* 'matches', *ibi* 'charcoal', *uko* 'cup'
- ii. **Functional integration:** these parts work together to enable food preparation and cooking.

Mereological Principles of *Ikichini* 'kitchen' Meronym

- a. **Reflexivity:** the *ikichini* 'kitchen' is part of itself
- b. **Transitivity:** if the *obode* 'plate' is part of the kitchen utensils and the kitchen is part of the house, then the *obode* 'plate' is part of the house.

3.5 Ewe 'goat' Meronym

Ewe 'goat' is a domesticated mammal that belongs to the family Bovidae. The concept *ewe* 'goat' belongs to the category animal. In this concept, we can discover its elements as:

- 1. **Whole:** the *ewe* 'goat' itself
- 2. **Parts:** what we can locate attached to the *ewe* 'goat' are:
 - a. *Owon* 'leg'
 - b. *Elo* 'eye'
 - c. *Inwe* 'nose'
 - d. *Uyovwi* 'head'

Part-Whole Relationships of *Ewe* 'goat' Meronym

We can see the relationship that exists between the *ewe* 'goat' and its parts below:

- a. **Parts:** *owon* 'leg', *elo* 'eye', *inwe* 'nose', *uyovwi* 'head'
- b. **Functional integration:** these parts of the *ewe* 'goat' work together to maintain life and enable the concept to perform different actions.

Mereological Principles of *Ewe* 'goat' Meronym

The reflexivity and transitivity of the notion *ewe* 'goat' are as follows:

- a. **Reflexivity:** the *ewe* 'goat' itself
- b. **Transitivity:** if the *elo* 'eye' is part of *uyovwi* 'head', and *uyovwi* 'head' is part of *ewe* 'goat', then the *elo* 'eye' is part of *ewe* 'goat'.

The above analysis explains the mereology's value in comprehending complex goat systems.



3.6 *Ko* 'plant' Meronymy

Ko 'plant' is a living organism that belongs to the kingdom plantae. *Ko* 'plant' is another concept that stands on its own as meronym. This concept can be analyzed as follows:

- a. **Whole:** the *ko* 'plant' itself
- b. **Parts:** the parts we can easily locate on the *ko* 'plant' are:
 - i. *Ebe* 'leaf'
 - ii. *Imágoro* 'mango'
 - iii. *Iropsu* 'rice'
 - iv. *Imidaka* 'cassava'
 - v. *Ire* 'beans'
 - vi. *Éto* 'watermelon'
 - vii. *Oné yam*'

Part-Whole Relationships of *Ko* 'plant' Meronym

The parts to be discovered attached to the domain *ko* 'plant' are:

- i. **Parts:** *ebe* 'leaf', *imágoro* 'mango', *éto* 'watermelon', *iropsu* 'rice'
- ii. **Functional integration:** each part here has its own function but the coming together of all make the *ko* 'plant' concept to stand as one entity.

Mereological Principles of *Ko* 'plant' Meronym

The reflexivity and transitivity of the notion *ko* 'plant' can be seen below:

- a. **Reflexivity:** the *ko* 'plant' itself

- b. **Transitivity:** if the *ebe* 'leaf' is part of *éto* 'watermelon', and *éto* 'watermelon' is part of *ko* 'plant', then the *ebe* 'leaf' is part of *ko* 'plant'.

3.7 *Evenwe* 'room' Meronym

Evenwe 'room' is a defined space within a building or structure, typically enclosed by walls, floor, and ceiling. It serves various purposes. This concept *evenwe* 'room' is a part of the domain house. In pointing out the components of *evenwe* 'room', we consider the following:

Whole: *evenwe* 'room' is the whole itself

Parts: what we can notice under this concept, we have:

- i. *Agbala* 'chair'
- ii. *Ukpei* 'bed'
- iii. *Eche* 'door'
- iv. *Igbgeyi* 'wall'

Part-Whole Relationships of *Evenwe* 'room' Meronym

- a. **Component Parts:** *agbala* 'chair', *ukpei* 'bed', *eche* 'door', *igbeyi* 'wall'
- b. **Functional integration:** these segments work together to create a functional space.

Mereological Principles of *Evenwe* 'room' Meronym

1. **Reflexivity:** the *evenwe* 'room' is part of itself
2. **Transitivity:** if the *igbeyi* 'wall' is the portion of the



evenwe ‘room’, and the *evenwe* ‘room’ is part of the house, then the *igbgeyi* ‘wall’ is part of the house.

The above analysis simply indicates the mereology’s utility of in understanding complex spatial structures.

3.8 *Ohwórákpo* ‘human being’ Meronym

Ohwórákpo ‘human being’ is a complex, multifaceted entity that can be understood from various perspectives. *Ohwórákpo* ‘human being’ is regarded as another Urhobo meronym. The lexical item has the parts to be discovered as we can see in the following:

- a. **Whole:** *Ohwórákpo* ‘human being’ is the whole itself
- b. **Parts:** the elements under the meronym are:
 - i. *Ómobóba* ‘baby’
 - ii. *Ómóte* ‘girl’
 - iii. *Ómóshare/ohworhave* ‘man’
 - iv. *Aye* ‘woman’
 - v. *Ghwaghwó* ‘old’

Part-Whole Relationships of *Ohwórákpo* Meronym ‘human being’

- i. **Component parts:** *ómobóba* ‘baby’, *ómóte* ‘girl’, *ómóshare/ohworhave* ‘man’, *aye* ‘woman’
- ii. **Functional integration:** these parts show how the *ohwórákpo* ‘human

being’ life develops and changes from young to an adult.

Mereological Principles of *Ohwórákpo* ‘human being’ Meronym

- a. **Reflexivity:** *ohwórákpo* ‘human being’ is part of itself
- b. **Transitivity:** if *ómobóba* ‘baby’ is part of *aye* ‘woman’ and *aye* ‘woman’ is part of *ohwórákpo* ‘human being’, then *ómobóba* ‘baby’ is part of *ohwórákpo* ‘human being’ also.

In conclusion, this study on Urhobo meronyms highlights and discovers how the meronyms of the language can be analyzed with mereology theory of Lesniewski (1910). One of the findings of the study reveals the parts that come up together and form a single Urhobo meronym. Another important finding indicates the part-whole relationship that exists among the meronyms together with their functional integration. The other finding reveals the mereological principles of the Urhobo meronyms in line with their reflexive and transitive connections.

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