

TEACHING HOMOGRAPHY AND HOMOPHONY TO ANAAN LEARNERS OF ENGLISH IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS .

Dr. Vero- Ekpris Gladstone Urujian

Abstract

This paper explores the semantic concept; homophony and homography in English and Anaan with focus on the challenges and prospects of teaching them to Anaan learners of English. Basic knowledge of these concepts is required for meaningful communication in any language to be possible. The theoretical linguistic tool adopted was generative semantic model of grammatical analysis. To achieve the purpose of the study, data on English and Anaan semantic structures at lexical and sentential levels were obtained from respondents through questionnaire and Essay text. Data collected were analyzed. The study revealed that both languages are rich in homographs but category “B” homographs and homophones were not found in Anaan language. This therefore presents learning challenges to Anaan learners /users of English. Based on the findings of this research, it was suggested that the semantic structures should be taught in early primary schools and these differences should be made known to teachers/learners early. Other suggestions were made for the improvement of learner’s performance in this direction.

Language is a human possession and a universal phenomenon. In other words, “wherever humans exist, language exists” (Fromkin and Rodman 1993:25). There are many extant and vital languages in the world today; of these many languages, English which belongs to

“the family of Indo-European languages” has come to assume a special and unique place in the comity of languages in the world (West 1975:44).

By sheer accident of history, the English language has come to be “the world’s most widely used language” (Greenbaum and Quirk 1990:1). According to Akindede and Adegbite (1999:57), “...over many centuries there has been a progressive expansion of ‘the speech community of speech fellowship’ of the English language”. Initially spoken in England, English spread to the entire Great Britain, including North America, Australia, New Zealand parts of Asia and parts of Africa. In fact, attesting to the monumental and unique spread of English, Quirk (1985:3) say inter alia: if we restrict the first criterion to native speaker of the language, the number of speakers of english are more than 300 million, and english ranks well below Chinese (which has over three times that number of speakers)...but the spread of english over most of the world as an international language is a unique phenomenon in the world’s history: about 1500 million-over, a third of the world’s population-live in countries where english has some official status or is one of the native languages, if not the dominant language.

From the foregoing, one of the facts that is evident here is: English is earned and used by native speakers as a first language or a mother tongue, and by nonnative speakers as a second or official language or both to them. As it

stands the importance of having a solid foundation in the English Language cannot be over-emphasied. Teachers at all levels of Education ought not be only contented with lecturing students and administering tests and examinations, they and even the recipients of the lessons (students) should be interested in finding out what contributes or causes learning challenges. It is against this backdrop that this paper examines homographs and homophones in Anaan and English, problematic concepts in semantics and why the challenges.

Homography/ Homophony-Definition of Concepts

Homography and homophony are semantic structures at lexical level. Homography has been identified by Ndimele (1999,p.58) as one of the two phenomena which are related to homonymy. According to him, homographs are words which are spelled in the same way but which differ both in pronunciation and meaning. Ejele (1996,p.124) calls it homography. Eyoh (1999,p.81), see homography as another group of words which users of English may watch out for as they are spelt alike ,pronounced differently and with different meanings. Udondata (2002,p.143) identifies two categories of homographs: those marked by stress as found in words such as increase, record, produce, project, refuse, protest against homographs which are not marked by stress as in bow, row, tars, gill, sow, wind, wound, read. Another way of defining homographs according to Lyons (1977,p.559) is the definition which ties the notion to the traditional notion of homonymy and this is to define it as relations between lexemes. He concludes by viewing homography and homophony as two kinds of partial homonymy, which he says is in accord with traditional practice. It is obvious that, just as homonymy can be absolute or partial, so too can homography. Partial homography is also quite common in English. Lyons gives examples of partial

homography as “put” and “put”. This he says that their formal identity in the graphic medium is only partial. Homography contributes to lexically ambiguous sentences in written language. Absolute homography may not exist at all in languages that are conventionally represented in the written medium by means of an alphabetic or syllabic system of writing. Palmer (1996,p.101) identifies some complications in the fact that it is difficult to make some distinction in writing and speech where homographic words like lead (metal) and lead (dog’s head) are involved. This he says is because homographic words are spelt in the same way, but pronounced differently.

Homophony according to Ejele (2003,p.78) is a kind of partial homonymy. According to this source there are two types of partial homonymy. These are: (i) homophony where the identity is at the spoken level (dealing with the same sound). (ii) homophony where the identity is at the written medium (same orthography (spelling)). The following are given as examples of homophones: lead/ bare/ bear, flour/ flower, meat/ meet, sea/ pier/ peer, peel/ peal, great/ grate, seen/ scene, tail/ tale, plain/ plane, sew/ so/ sow, red/ read, buy/ by.

Each set of the words above has the same pronunciation but different spellings and different meanings. They sound alike so their spoken form is the same but they are distinguished in their written forms. The similarity provides room for ambiguity. Where ever there is ambiguity between homonyms, the conflict is called a homonymic clash, this source concludes.

Ndimele (1999,p 58) sees homophony. And homography as the two phenomena which are related to homonymy. Homophones are words which have the same pronunciation but different meanings and different spellings. The examples given by this source are write/rite/right, sight /cite/site, sea/see,

threw/through, meat/meet, tail/tale etc. Lyons (1977 ,p 562) opines that we could just as well look up homophony and homography as independent, but compatible, notions He acknowledges the tendency of homophony to be absolute or partial. An Example of absolute homophony is given as sew and sow (base on the assumption that they are syntactically equivalent). Partial homophony (of various kinds)is found in many languages. Here are some in English: read vs red, great vs grate. This source stresses that it is a fact that most of the source opines that lexemes which are traditionally described as homophones in English are only partital homophones.

On the whole, homophone is generally defined as words with identity of sound i.e. having the same sound. So Eyoh (1999, p 35) sees homophones as word that have the same sound but have different meanings and different spellings. Example in English according to this source are sea/see, fare/far, be/bee, wheel/will, fool/full, gone/gun, farther/father, lead/led, might/mite, Knight/night, read/red, meet/meat etc.

Akpan (2007 ,p 36) while discussing common errors and common causes of common errors in grammar identifies ambiguity as a cause of common errors and one of the reasons for ambiguity according to this source is confused words such as polysemy and homophones. If homophones are taken out of context, ambiguity may result, he concludes. Also udondata (2000, p 140) agrees with others that homophones are words which have the same sound and are different in meaning, origin and spelling as in toad, towed, flower, flour blue, blew, weight, wait, soul, sole, etc. Lyons while discussing the priority of spoken language asserts that, for historical reasons (usually as a result of sound – change or of borrowing from other languages with different orthographic conventions) certain words may be distinguished in their written, but not their spoken form; such words according to

Lyons are traditionally called homophones. Instances in English are great and grate, meat and meet, seen and scene etc. This source states that the longer the period during which a language has been committed to writing (and used for literature and administration) the greater will be the discrepancy between spelling and pronunciation, unless of course, this discrepancy has been corrected periodically by – spelling reforms.

Kulke and Blanken (2001) are of the opinion that homophones are ambiguous spoken words. A common assumption is that these words share one word form but have two grammatically representations. While an opposing view postulates two separate form entries for homophones. Kulke and Blanken (2001) maintains that homophones are words that sound the same but with two or more different meanings. Examples Cricket (the animal) and Cricket (the game). Homophones. according to this source can be heterogrophic e.g flower and flour or homographic e.g ball (the game)and ball (the dance).

A Review of Homographs in Anaan and English

Lexemes that have the same spelling but are different in meanings and pronunciations are said to be homographs. Two categories were identified for English language. Data available from this research also reveal that while English has category A and B types of homographs; Anaan languages has only one category. This is the category marked by tone marks, (category A). From the foregoing, the following Anaan words are said to be homographs when the tone marks are properly written and observed during articulation.

Examples of homographs in Anaan

Anaan Homographic Lexemes	Matrix or Frame	Meaning	Gloss
Seme (v) Seme(v)	Seme no Awasi Afo Seme daka ke itiem	Lament Acting stupidly	Lament to your God Act stupidly and leave This place.
Deme Deme Deme	Ka Kedeme mkpo afele. Kuboro, deme Deme ijak no nto uka	Buy (plural v) Ignore (singular v) Share (v)	Go and buy food stuff. Ignore him Share Fish for your sister/brothers.
Dabba Dabba	Eno adabba Ndap Dabba edia ade nno	'Dream'v Remove that roaster Yam from the fire	Eno is dreaming. Remove the roasted yam from the fire.

Categories of homograph: category A and category B were identified in English. Category A are homographs marked by stress as found in words like “increase /'inkri:s/and increase /in 'kri:s/produce /pradju:s/ and produce/prə'dju:s/and category B were those not marked by stress as in gill /dʒi:l/and gill /gi:l/. The table below shows the performance of our respondent in these two categories of homographs.

Performance of Respondents in Homographs

Types of homographs	No not able out of 256	No able out of 256	%Not able	%Able
Category A and B	151	105	59%	41%
Category A	11	100	4%	39%
Category B	140	05	55%	2%

The respondent were given a passage to read to see if they could differentiate between gill/gil/and gill/dʒi:l,tear/tie/and tear/te /but majority could not. The problem with the articulation of the second category could be traced to the informant’s unfamiliarity with this category ‘B’ kind of homographs. Moreover, the informant’s exposure to the orthography of Anaan could have some influence on them. The table above reveals that the informants had

difficulty articulating and giving meaning to homographs in category B.

Similarities/ Differences Between Anaan and English Homographs:

Category “A” kind of homographs occurs in both Anaan and English: Thus tone marks and stress marks are used to demarcate lexemes in Anaan and English-respectively. These tone marks in Anaan and stress marks in English can signal a meaning difference in otherwise similar sentences. Tone marks in Anaan are made to perform the same function that stress performs in English. Thus the use of stress marks to indicate the change in meaning between lexemes like project /'prodʃkt/ and project /pr'dzekt / is not strange in an Anaan learner of English since he is familiar with the use of tone to differentiate between (count) bad/bad (dirty). The use of stress in English and tone marks in Anaan in these instances is similar thus capable of facilitating communication in English as a second language. In the data collected by this researcher, no Anaan word was identified to belong to category ‘B’ kind of homographs. Only category ‘A’ type of homographs were found in Anaan language. Thus, the performance was poor in the identification of category ‘B’ kind of homograph.

The study revealed that differences exist between homographs in Anaan and English. For example Anaan has only the category ‘A’ homographs which are homographs marked by either stress or (tone marks) but does not have these homographs which can be grouped into category ‘B’ i.e. homographs which are not marked by either stress or tone marks. But English has these two categories. Another major difference between Anaan and English homographs is that in Anaan the pairs of homographic words do not share a common meaning. The homographic words belong to the same word class in Anaan

but different word class in English. In English the homographic words in category 'A' may have something in common in terms of meaning while those in category 'B' may not be related. For instance, the English homographs increase /inkri:s/ and increase/in'kri:s/ are related. The two suggest abundance, while wound /wu:nd/ wound /waund/ are not related. More so, the different meanings of the homographic words may, or may not belong to the same word class in English language as demonstrated below:

Tear /te/ - cut into pieces (V), tear /tie/ -water from the eye (N)

Refuse /refju:s/ -waste material that has been thrown away (N)

Refuse /ri'fju:z/ -rejection (V)

The problem with the identification of category B homographs may be traced to the absence of this category of homograph in Anaan.

Homophones in English and Anaan

Homophone is a relation where words that are spelt differently are pronounced alike but they have different meanings. Examples in English are toad/towed, flower/flour blue/blew, weight/wait, soul/sole, sew/sow bye/by/buy, toe/tow, see/sea, key

quay, fowl/fowl, deer/dear, waste/waist, son/sun, rod e/road, meet/meat, way/weigh, witch/which, new/knew, no/know, rite/write/right, sheer/shear, wore/whore, flew/flu/flue, coup/coo, two/too, cite/site/sight

This research study shows that the semantic configuration termed homophony is hard to come by in Anaan. The problem encountered by the Anaan learners of English as a second language with regard to homophones in English is quite enormous. Its absence in Anaan language poses a serious problem to the Anaan learners of English as a second language. This answers the question why the Anaans who responded to the questionnaire could not spell and pronounce nor quickly assign meanings to homophonous lexemes such as sheer/shear,

flew/flu/flue, coup/coo, and waste/waist. Eighty percent (80%) of our respondents could not tick the sentences correctly. Homophones are alien to Anaan learners of English. This area of differences needs to be noticed by the Anaan/English bilinguals and language instructors. The absence of homophones in Anaan language agrees with Lyons (1978) as he states "And yet one soon come to realize in learning a foreign language, that there are distinctions of meaning made in one language that are not made in another, that learning the vocabulary of another language is not simply a matter of acquiring a fresh set of labels to attach to familiar meanings". This source concludes that every language has its own semantic structure. It is difficult to think that the meaning of one language can be brought into one-to-one correspondence with those of another that is that two languages can be semantically isomorphic (have the same semantic structure). The degree of semantic isomorphism between different languages varies considerably.

The structure of the vocabulary of a particular language will reflect the distinctions and equivalences which are of importance in the culture of the society in which the language operates. The degree of semantic isomorphism between any two languages will therefore depend very largely upon the amount the overlap there is in the culture of the two societies using those languages. Whether there are or could be two languages whose vocabularies are to no degree whatsoever isomorphic with one another is a question or are all the meanings recognized by a given language unique to the language and have no validity or relevance outside it? The above questions answers the question of the marked difference between Anaan and English semantic structures especially in a situation where homophones and even category 'B' homographs are missing in Anaan language

completely. And the other fact is that there is no one-to-one correspondence between some Anaan and English lexical sentence relations.

Summary of findings

The purpose of this study had been to analyze and highlight homophony and homography in English and Anaan in order to expose what are in them that make the task of teaching/learning them difficult to Anaan learners of English in tertiary institution. The study had also intended to evaluate the usefulness of semantic configurations to meaning interpretation and also to recommend ways of improving the performance of Anaan learners of English with regards to semantic configurations. The study had also intended to unveil some of the problems that Anaan/English bilinguals face that are traceable to semantic structures (configurations).

The following are the major findings

1. Anaan language has category 'A' kind of homograph only (i.e. the category marked by stress or tone marks) while English has category 'A' and category 'B' (The category not marked by stress or tone marks).
- 2 Homographic words in Anaan have nothing in common in terms of meanings, and the different meanings of the homographic Anaan words belong to the same word class.
3. In English the homographic words in category 'B' may or may not be related in terms of meaning. But where they are different, the different meanings of homographic English words may or may not belong to the same word class.
4. Homophones were not found in Anaan language but English language was found to be very rich in homophones.

Conclusions

On the basis of the findings of this research the conclusion that some that some challenges encountered in learning English language could be caused by differences in semantic structures was drawn. These semantic structures can also be used to account for the meaning of lexemes in Anaan and English. Communication in English by Anaan speakers is largely affected by differences and similarities that exist between semantic configurations in English and Anaan. differences hinder communication while similarities enhance communication.

Consequently, the Anaan learner of English may find it challenging to differentiate one homographic lexemes from the other, especially when the homograph is category B type like;

Tears /ties/ and Tears /teos/
Wind /waind/ and wind /wi:nd/
Wound/wund/ and Wound/Waund/

This problem is traceable to the absence of this category of homograph in Anaan. Homographic English lexemes equally pose a lot of problems to Anaan speaker of English, since homophones are absent in Anaan language Examples are seen in the following expressions

Don't waist my time (Waste)
Great cassava (grate) smoothly
Altar something (altar)
The sick man is very weak (weak)
The food has a cent (scent)

Recommendations/Prospects

In the light of the observation stated above, the writer proffers the following recommendations. Firstly, parents should ensure that their children have a solid foundation in their mother tongue (MT) before being introduced to English language. Also as

this children start school, teaching in early primary schools should be done in their mother tongue as recommended by the National Policy on Education not in English. Again, ability to read and write in ones MT should be made a pre-condition for admission into tertiary institutions. it is also recommended that government should assist in the development of mother tongue by providing good books for effective teaching of MT in our schools. Since film knowledge of MT can enhance mastery of the target language (English).

Moreover, seminars and symposia should be organized to highlight areas of similarities and differences in MT and English as this will facilitate the teaching and learning of these languages. The teaching of semantic should be introduced at the secondary school level, as this will afford the students longer period of exposure during which errors can be corrected and difficulties overcome. To the curriculum planners it is suggested that they should not overlook the areas specifically spotted as problematic in this research. Thus the used course outline should contain these semantic configurations and vigorous drills on homophones and homographs should include, as this would replace the interference tendency in the students. Writers of textbooks should also review their books periodically and improve on areas of shortcomings. Lastly, it is suggest that their researchers should do more work on Anaan and English semantics.

References

- Akpan, G.F (2007). *Issues in Language Study II*. Ikot Ekpene: Donest Education Publisher
- Akindele, & Adebite, W. (1999). *The Sociology and Politics of English in Nigeria: An Introduction*. Ile ife: Obafemi Awolowo University Press.
- Ejele, p. (1996). *An Introduction Course on Language*. Port Harcourt: University of Port Harcourt press.
- Ejele, p . (2003). *Semantics, Lexical structure and Lexical Relations*. Port Harcourt: Emhai press.
- Eyoh, L. (1999). *Effective Use Of English*. Uyo: Scholarship press. Fromkin, v. and Robert, R. (1998). *An introduction to Language*, 6th edition New York: Port Harcourt Brace College Publisher.
- Greenbaum, S.Quirk, R. (1990). *A student's Grammar of The English Language*. London: Longman.
- Kulke, F. & Blanken, G . (2001). *Phonological and syntactics influences on Semantic misnaming in aphsia*. *Aphsiology* 15, 3-15.
- Lyons. J. (1968). *Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Lyons. J. (1977). *Semantics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University press.
- Ndimele, O. M. (1999). *Semantics and the of frontiers communication*. 2nd edition. Port Harcourt: University of port Harcourt press.
- Palmer, F. R.(1996). *Semantics*. 2nd edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University press.
- Quirk,R. Greebaum S., Leech G., and Svarvik (1985). *A Comprehensive Grammar of English Language*, New York:
- Longman Group Ltd. Udodata, J.p. (2000). *The Structure Pattern of Anaan and English*. Ph.D. Dissertation, the University of Uyo
- West, F (1975). *The way of language: An Introduction* New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanorich Inc.

Dr. Vero- Ekpris Gladstone Urujian
Department of English and Literary Studies,
Akwa Ibom State University,
Obio Akpa.