Deixis and opposition

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Abstract
This study looks at the nature of deixis and opposition. It examines Igbo, a West Benue-Congo language and English, an Indo-European language in order to find out what is obtainable. In semantics, opposition involves lexical relations that are related in meaning yet incompatible or contrasting. This paper argues that the relationship which exists between deixis and opposition cuts across languages. It claims that opposition that depicts direction may be specified or unspecified. Specified directions mark spatial deixis while unspecified directions mark person deixis.

1.0 Introduction

This paper examines the relationship which exists between deixis and opposition. This is done using two languages – Igbo, a West Benue-Congo language and English, an Indo-European language. Deixis, according to Crystal (2003), is a term used to subsume those features of language which refer directly to the personal, temporal or locational characteristics of the situation within which an utterance takes place, whose meaning is thus relative to that situation. Löbner (2002), commenting on directional opposites, says they are related to opposite directions on a common axis. He points out different types of directional opposites, the vertical axis, horizontal axis and time axis. Examples that involve the vertical axis are presented below:

(1) a. The bird is on the top of the mountain.
b. The bird is at the bottom of the mountain.
(2) a. This is a high building.
b. That is a low building.
(3) a. Alex is moving upstairs.
b. Ifeanyi is going downstairs.

Examples that involve the horizontal axis are as follows:

(4) a. The lorry is moving forward.
b. The bus is moving backward.

(5) a. Warring soldiers advanced at night.
b. Warring soldiers retreated after several defeats.

Examples illustrating time axis:

(6) The glory of the latter house is greater than that of the former.
(7) a. Nneka came to school early.
b. Ebere came to school late.
(8) a. Ada went home before Eze.
b. Eze went home after Ada.
(9) a. February precedes March.
b. March follows February.

Note that the opposites are underlined.

A further case is provided by the past tense. The past tense indicates a time before 'now'. It is noteworthy that opposites in semantics presuppose distinct markers that differentiate an item from another. However, as a start, it will be useful to take a bird's-eye view of various ideas surrounding sense relations and proposition both in linguistics and logic and an overview of deixis. We shall also look into directional opposites in Igbo and English as instances of opposition.

2.0 Sense relation and proposition in linguistics and logic

In this section of the paper, we shall review the notions – *sense*, *relation* and *proposition* in both linguistics and logic. This is an attempt to determine whether they are viewed in the same way or not.

Sense relation in linguistics is concerned with the meaning relations between words. Agbedo (2000:152) claims that the sense of a word reveals itself through the relations of meaning which the word contracts with other words in the language. Antonymy, which falls under our argument on directional opposites, is a sense relation. Words that are opposite are referred to as *antonyms*. In antonyms, there is always an intermediate term. That is to say that the denial of one term does not imply the assertion of the other. For instance, *hot* and *cold* are antonyms. They are referred to as complementary pairs or binary pairs. But there are intermediate terms – *warm*, *tepid* and *cool*. With these intermediate terms, the relationship between *hot* and *cold* is gradable antonyms. Converses, another sense relation, fall within our argument of directional opposites. The term 'converses' as suggested by Lyons (1963) are referred

to as "relational opposites" by Palmer (1976), and they are a kind of opposite that is found with pairs of words which exhibit the reversal of a relationship between items (or arguments) for example, employer/employee, above/below. "Reverses" is a term used in describing movement for instance, descend/ascend, push/pull, come/go. Other sense relations include synonymy, hyponymy, complementarity, prototype and metonymy, but they will not be discussed in this paper.

Palmer (1976) gives three terms in which relations are characterized by logicians. They are symmetry, transitivity and reflexivity. If a relation holds for arguments in both directions, such a relation is said to be symmetric. Arguments in this sense refer to the related items; though Aghamelu (2001) defines an argument as, 'A discourse in which a set of one or more statements or propositions called premises are presented as evidence for another statement or proposition called the conclusion'. If we have arguments "x" and "y" and a relation "Q", then "x Q y" entails "y Q x". For instance,

(10) Ogu is married to Ngozi entails Ngozi is married to Ogu.
(11) Ada is Obi's cousin entails Obi is Ada's cousin.

A relation is transitive if "a Q y" and "y Q x" entail "a Q x".

Many of the spatial terms are transitive. For example,

(12) If Ogu is in front of Ngozi and Ngozi is in front of Ada, Ogu is also in front of Ada.

A relation is reflexive if it relates an argument to itself, that is "a Q a". Examples are equal or resemble – two equals two,

(13) Eze resembles himself.

In logic, propositions refer to declarative, indicative, or assertive statements. They can be analyzed assertions about classes, affirming or denying that one class is included in another either wholly or partially (Aghamelu 2001).

3.0 Definition and types of deixis

The origin of deixis is *deiknymi* (from the Greek language) meaning 'to show, to point out' which reflects the core function of deixis. Since the Greek period, deixis has been a subject in philosophy. In recent years, many studies on deixis have been

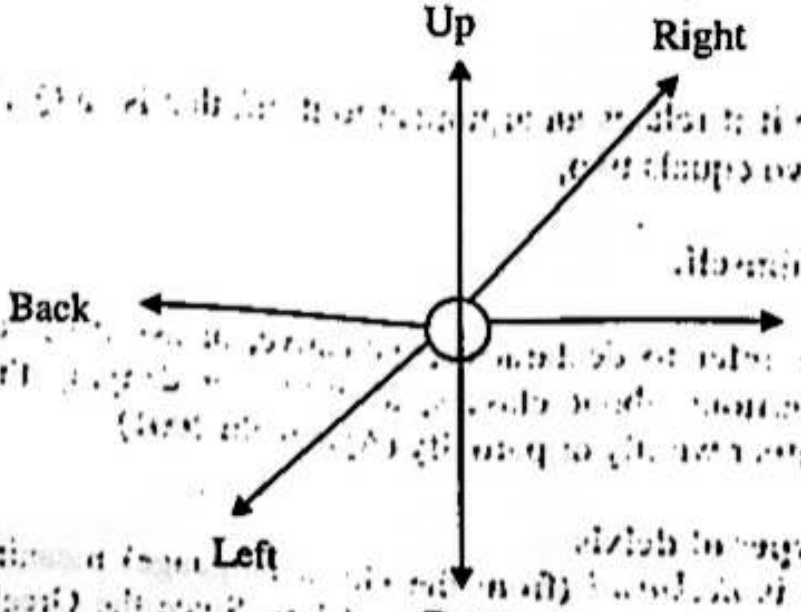
conducted from the linguistic point of view (Fillmore 1971; 1975; Lyons 1968; 1977; among others).

In the literature, there have been three categories of deixis based on three axes namely spatial, socio, temporal axes (cf. Fillmore 1982; Javella and Klein 1982 cited in Imai 2003). Instances of spatial deixis are: this; that, here and there. Personal deixis are: I and you. Examples of temporal deixis include: now, today, and yesterday. Levinson (1983) adds to them, social deixis. That is, honorific or discourse (or text) deixis. He further argues that visibility (i.e. visible or invisible) should also be considered another deictic category. A clear explication of the categories of deixis is presented in Saeed (2003). He discusses the subtypes of deixis; distinguished on the basis of space (location), participants of a conversation and social identities or relationships of the participants. These he treated under spatial, person and social deixis respectively.

Palmer (1976) observes that when talking of person and deixis, first person relates to the speaker, second person to the hearer, and third person to those who are non-participants in the conversation or written correspondence.

4.0 Directional opposites as aspects of deixis

In this section, we shall discuss directional opposites as aspects of deixis. Our focus here is to look into the types of opposition that involve direction as it pertains to Igbo and English. Smith 2007 illustrates directional opposites thus:



4.1 Antonyms

Antonyms are direct opposites of each other. Below are examples in Igbo and English:

Igbo	English
rigo/rịda	ascend/descend
baa/pụta	go in/come out
bịa/gaa	come/go

In the above, there are no intermediate terms.

4.2 Converses

Here, the semantic opposition involves contrasts of direction. Again, it exhibits the reversal of a relationship between items (or arguments). For example:

Igbo	English
di/nwunye	husband/wife
nne/nna	mother/father
nne/ada	mother/daughter
nna/ọkpara	father/son
onye nkụzi/nwata akwụkwọ	teacher/student

A few terms referring to spatial position also belong here such as:

Igbo	English
elu/ala	above/below
n'ihu/n'azụ	in front of/behind
aka nri/aka ekpe	right/left

4.3 Cyclic relationship

This relationship exists between terms that rotate cyclically or circularly among themselves. For instance:

a. The Igbo market days: Eke, Orie, Afọ, Nkwọ.
b. Months of the calendar year in Igbo and English:

Igbo	English	Igbo	English
1. Mgbeọkọchị	January	2. Mbidoubi	February
3. Mgbenkọ	March	4. Aba	March
5. Mgbeụkọ	May	6. Nsonụkọ	June
7. Mgbemmiri	July	8. Ogejiọhụ	August
9. Ujunri	September	10. Nsonujunri	October
11. Mgbenkwado	November	12. Mgbenkwarị	December

Igbo Calendar is adapted from Kọdịnafọ (2008)

Numerals – otu one
abụọ two
ato three
ano four
ise five

4.4 Polar opposites

Leech (1974) sees polar opposites as semantic oppositions that, "are best envisaged in terms of a scale running between two poles or extremes". Such as:

Igbo	English
ugwu/ndịda	north/south
ọwụwa anyanwụ/ọdịda anyanwụ	east/west

4.5 Locational/place adverbs

A locational adverb refers to a demarcated region. As in:

Igbo	English
ebe a/ebe ahụ	here/there

4.6 Pronominals in Igbo and English

In Indo European languages like French, Spanish, and German, there is the distinction between 'familiar' and 'polite' pronouns. These languages will rather use the second person plural pronoun to show politeness while the second person singular pronoun shows familiarity. This is illustrated below:

	Second person singular Familiarity	Second person plural Politeness
French	tu	vous
Spanish	tu	usted
German	du	sie

In Italian, the third person singular is used instead of the second to show politeness. That is, 'lei' for 'tu'. This is not the case in Igbo. That is, Igbo does not use 'gị' (the second person singular pronoun) for familiarity nor 'unu' (the second person plural pronoun) for politeness. The former is solely used for singular while the latter is basically plural.

The universality of deixis and opposition is demonstrated here. The first person singular pronoun 'I' and 'mụ' in English and Igbo respectively; and the second person singular pronoun 'you' and 'gị' in English and Igbo respectively are instances of directional opposites, though their positions are unspecified. It is assumed that if two people are involved in a conversation, they assume two different positions. So, when 'mụ' meaning 'I' is situated in one direction, 'gị' meaning 'you' is also situated in another direction. Their directions are unspecified because 'mụ' may be either in front or up while 'gị' may be either behind or down. Ejele (2006) studies pronouns as indices of deixis or anaphora and points out that the primary function of personal pronouns in Esan is predominantly deictic.

5.0 On the relationship between deixis and directional opposites

We have noted that the subtypes of deixis include spatial, person, social and temporal. From our discussion so far, it is observed that the various directional opposites in Igbo are associated with various deictic categories. For instance, antonyms such as:

Igbo	English
rigo/ṛida	ascend/descend
baa/pụta	go in/come out
bịa/gaa	come/go,

converses such as:

Igbo	English
elu/ala	above/below or up/down
n'ihu/n'azụ	in front of/behind, and

Polar opposites such as:

Igbo	English
ugwu/ndịda	north/south
ọwụwa anyanwụ/ọdịda anyanwụ	east/west

instantiate spatial deixis. While *elu* and *ala* are instances of elevation under spatial axis, *rigo* and *rịda* are examples of movement under spatial axis. A locational adverb refers to a demarcated region. Therefore, locational adverbs in Igbo –*ebe a* and *ebe ahụ*– are also instances of spatial deixis. Hence, the primary function of spatial deixis is to demarcate the space surrounding the speaker. The pronouns 'I', *mụ* and 'you', *gị* are examples of person deixis. 'Thro' and 'fro' are deictic elements. For example, source (from Aba) and path (through Onitsha).

6.0 Conclusion

Having attempted a survey of deixis and opposition in Igbo and English, we have come up with the conclusion that the relationship between deixis and opposition is universal. Basically, opposition has been discussed using directional opposites; and it has been discovered that this opposition may or may be specified. Pronominal notions in Igbo and English are instances of unspecified directions. The directional opposites pointed out illustrate spatial deixis. Pronouns are examples of person deixis.

Finally, we note that elements that express deixis in languages are usually in opposition. Again, a large percentage of semantic opposition in Igbo and English depicts various directions, hence items that are involved are described here as directional opposites.

Note

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