Systematic Polysemy in Gĩkũyũ

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Abstract

Polysemy is a phenomenon whereby words have multiple distinct yet related senses. These senses are related in a systematic way and form systematic patterns. This paper explores the different systematic patterns of polysemy exhibited by Gĩkũyũ nouns, where these nouns have sets of senses that are related in similar ways. These senses cut across different semantic fields such as plants, animal, people, body parts, and objects, types of food and beverages, events. Some of the senses invoke metaphoric relations.

Keywords: Polysemy, Systematic Patterns, Senses, Gĩkũyũ Nouns

INTRODUCTION

Apresjan (1974) classifies polysemy into two types. The first type is systematic polysemy which he refers to as regular polysemy whereby the same relation holds for a series of lexical items. Here the polysemy of a word A with the meaning, a_i and a_j is regarded as being regular if, in the given language, there exists at least one word B with the meanings b_i and b_j which differ from each other in exactly the same way as a_i and a_j. The second type is nonsystematic (irregular) polysemy where the relation is particular to a single word.

Systematic polysemy has been given various names by linguists including semantic rules Kilgarif (1990, 1995), Lexical implication rules (Ostler and Atkins 1992) semantic transfer rules (Leech 1974, 1990), transfer of meaning (Nunberg 1996, 2004), sense extensions (Copestake and Briscop 1992, 1996) and conversion (Gillon 199).

Patterns of Systematic Polysemy

Several linguists among them Yamanashi (1987), Lakoff and Johnson (1980), Lehrer (1990), Apresjan (1974), Nunberg (1999), Murphy (1979), Klein and Murphy (2001), Kovesces and Radden (1998, 1999), Dirven and Porings (2002), Fauconnier and Turner (2002), Taylor (2002) have distinguished various systematic patterns. These are

- Animal for food/meat

- Tree for wood
- Tree for fruit
- Kind for amount of matter
- Container for content
- Produces for product
- Animal for fur
- Physical object for information content
- Event for information
- Object for substance
- Publisher for publication
- Agent for action
- Institution for place
- Institution for process
- Institution for physical object
- Possessor for possession

Systematic Patterns of Polysemy in Gĩkũyũ

In Gĩkũyũ various systematic patterns of polysemy have been observed. These patterns are:

1. Animal for meat derived from the animal (Ng'ombe 'cow', mbũri 'goat', ngũrwe 'pig')

Some nouns denote animals or meat derived from these animals.

According to Greenberg (1983), the Niger-Congo languages of West and Southern Africa collapse the meanings animal and meat from the animals into a single word. Gĩkũyũ being a Niger – Congo Bantu language spoken in Kenya also has this characteristic as indicated in the examples below:

a. Mbũri   ĩrĩa   nĩ   norũ.

   Goat   that   is   fat

   That   goat   is   fat

b. Tũkũrĩa   mbũri   ũmũthĩ

     We are going to eat goat   today

In 1a, mbũri exemplifies the animal sense whereas in 1b, it refers to the meat but not the whole animal.

2. Tree for wood from the tree (Mũtĩ 'tree', mũthitĩ 'camphor, mũtarakwa 'cedar')

a. Handa   mũtĩ

   Plant   tree

   Plant a tree

b. Ũgwaka   na   mũtĩ   ũrĩkũ

   You will build with wood which?

You will build with which tree?

c. Tema   mūthitĩ   ũcio

Cut   camphor   that

Cut   that   camphor

d. Metha   yakwa yakĩtwo   na   mūthitĩ

Table   mine   is made   of   camphor

My table is made of camphor

In 1a and c, the noun mūtĩ which is a count refers to the tree sense whle in 1b and d,mūtĩ is used as a mass noun and it has the wood sense.

3. Container for contents of the container (cuba 'bottle', nyũngũ 'pot', kĩbũyũ 'thermos flask')

a. He   cuba

Give me   bottle

Give me a bottle

b. Anywa   cuba   njiũru

He/she drank   bottle full

He/she drank a full bottle.

In 3a, 'cuba' is used as a count noun and it has the container sense while in 3b it is used as a mass noun and it has the contents sense.

4. Objects for substance derived from the object

According to Klein and Murphy (2001) the object-substance relation is found when the same word is used to refer to an object and the substance that makes it. In this kind of relationship the object is a count noun whereas the substance is a mass noun. They further state that these forms of polysemy are highly productive and they are used quite easily when new words enter the lexicon. In Gĩkũyũ the following nouns depict this kind of relationship:

a. Mūtĩ   ũrĩa   nĩ   mũraihu

Tree   that   is   tall

That tree is tall

b. Mūtĩ   ũyũ   ti   mwega   wa gwaka

Tree   this   is not good   for   building

This tree is not good for building

c. Ngũrwe   ĩna   twana ikũmi

Pig   has   piglets ten

The pig has ten piglets

d. Karanga   ngũrwe   tũrĩe

   Fry   pig   we eat

Fry the pig we eat

In 4a and c mũtĩ 'tree' which refers to the plant /tree sense and ngũrwe 'pig', the animal sense are objects and they are, count nouns whereas in 4b and d, mũtĩ '' and ngũrwe refer to the wood and the meat respectively which are the substances derived from the objects already referred to . These substances are mass nouns.

5. Plant for food (irio 'food crops, mboga 'cabbage', mbembe 'maize')

a.   Irio   mĩgũnda-inĩ   itinakũra   wega   kĩmera   gĩkĩ

     Food crops   farms in   have not grown good   season   this

     The food crops have not grown well in the farms this season

b)   Irio   ici   ti   nduge   wega

      Food   this   is not cooked   well

       This food is not cooked well

c)   Handa   mboga

     Plant   cabbage

     Plant the cabbage

d.) Karanga   mboga

      Fry   cabbage

      Fry the cabbage.

In 5a and c, the noun irio and mboga refer to the plants sense while in 5b and d, the two nouns refer to the food sense.

6. Plants for product/beverage (caai 'tea bushes', kahũwa 'coffee')

 a   Thiĩ   ũgatue   caai

        Go   you pick   tea

         You go and pick tea

 b   He gĩkombe   gĩa   caai

        Give me   cup   of   tea

        Give me a cup of tea

 c   Kahũwa nĩ   keru?

        Coffee   is   ripe

         Is the coffee ripe

d   Nĩnyendete kũnywa   kahũwa

   I like   drinking   coffee.

In 6a and c, the nouns caai and kahũa have the plant sense while in 6b and d they have the beverage sense.

 The physical object for institution/people responsible

In this relationship, the same word is used to refer to the object and the institution that owns/runs the object and to the people who works in/for that institution as in following examples:

a.   Horia   kameme   kaũ.

     Switch off   radio   that.

Switch off that radio.

b. Kameme   nĩkarabutire aruti wĩra   ako

    Radio   fired   employees   its

The radio fired its employees

c. Kameme   nĩgokĩĩte   gũkũ gũthuthuria ũhoro ũyũ

Radio has come   here   to investigate news   this

Has the radio come here to investigate this news?

In the above examples, (a) kameme refers to the physical object/electronic device whereas in b and it refers to the institution and in c to the people responsible who in this case are the journalists employed by the radio station.

7. Building for institution (nyũmba 'house')

a. Nĩarakire   nyũmba

   He has built   house

   He has built a house

b. Nĩaragĩire   nyũmba

    He has got   house

    He has got a house

c. Nyũmba   itũ   nĩracemania ũmũthĩ

   House   our   is meeting   today

   Our house is meeting today

d. Nyũmba   ya   Mũmbi   nĩyarũĩire   wĩyathi

   House   of   Mũmbi   fought for   freedom

   The house of Mũmbi fought for freedom.

In the above examples, nyũmba in a refers to the building, whereas in b– nyũmba is used to metaphorically refer to the institution of marriage and family, the clan and to the whole ethnic group respectively.

8. Building for physical object/device

a. Rugĩra   riiko

  Cook   kitchen

  Cook in the kitchen

b. Riiko   rĩao   nĩ   rĩa   mahiga   matatũ.

  Fireplace   their   is   of   stones   three

  Their fireplace is made up of three stones.

c. Nĩaragũrire   riiko   rĩerũ

  He/she has bought   cooker   new

  He/she has bought a new cooker

In a, riiko designates a building where food is cooked and kept, whereas in b , it refers to the traditional Gĩkũyũ three stones fireplace. With technological innovations, new devices for cooking and heating food came. Since these devices play the same role as the traditional three stones fireplace and they are also placed in the kitchen, there are also given the name 'riiko' as indicated in c.

10. Animal for personality (ng'ombe 'cow', ngũrwe 'pig')

a. i.)   Ng'ombe   nĩ   ĩrarĩa nyeki

      Cow   is   eating grass

    The cow is eating grass.

ii.)   Mũndũ   ũcio   nĩ   ng'ombe

    Person   that   is   cow

    That person is foolish

b. i.)   Ngũrwe   ĩna   twana ikũmi

      Pig   has   piglets ten

      The pig has ten piglets

ii.)   Maina   nĩ   ngũrwe

    Maina   is   pig

    Maina is a pig

    Maina is greedy

In 10 ai and bi, the animal senses are referred to whereas in 10 aii and bii, metaphorical relations are invoked where the names of the animals are used to refer to human beings who have the characteristics which are portrayed by these animals.

11. Body parts for object part (kũgũrũ 'leg', gũtũ 'ear', magego 'teeth')

a. i.) Kũgũrũ gwake   nĩ   kũimbũ

    Leg   his/her   is   swollen

    His/her leg is swollen

ii.) Kũgũrũ   kwa   metha ĩno   nĩ   kũnĩku

    Leg   of   table this   is   broken

    This table's leg is broken

b. i.) Ena   gũtũ   kũrwaru

    He/she has   ear   sick

    He/she has a sick ear

ii.) Nyita   gũtũ   gwa   gĩkombe   wega

    Hold   ear   of   cup   well

    Hold the handle of the cup well

c. i.) Magego   makwa   mena   marima

    Teeth   mine   have   holes

    My teeth have cavities

ii.) Magego ma   nyororo   nĩ   maregerũ

    Teeth   of   zip   are   loose

    The teeth of the zip are loose

iii.) Magego   ma   magũgũrũ   ma   ngari yakwa nĩ   manyitu

    Teeth   of   legs   of   car   mine are   tight

    The spokes of the wheels of my car are tight

In 11 ai, bi and ci, the nouns exemplify the body part sense whereas in a (ii), b (ii) and c (ii) – (iii), the sense invokes metaphorical relations where the names of the body parts are used to refer to object parts. Here the metaphoric relations have arisen because of the similarities between the body parts and the object parts.

12. Physical object for information content

According to Klein (1979), these forms of polysemy are highly productive and they are used quite easily when new words enter the lexicon.

Klein gives the example of a book which can be used to refer to both the physical object containing a text and to the information content of the text.

According to him also, the same form is present in recently invented words for new information, for example, storage devices such as video tapes, CDs and DVDs

In Gĩkũyũ, nouns that are used to refer to technological advancements depict this kind of relationship. Examples of these are:

a.) i.) Endagia   mĩkwa

   He/she sells   CDs/DVDs

ii.) Mũkwa   ucio   ũraina   wega

   CD/DVD   that   is singing   well

   That CD/DVD is singing well

b.) i.) Hũra   mbica

    Take me   picture

    Take me a picture/photo

ii.)   Ndĩrona   mbica   ya   wendo

    I am watching picture   of   love

    I am watching a romantic movie

c.) i.) Nĩndĩragurire kameme   kangĩ

    I bought   radio   another

    I bought another radio

Here the sense that is exemplified is that of the information content of the news and other programmes that are broadcast via this electronic device.

13. Process for object/device for measuring the process (gĩthaa 'big watch/clock')

a.) Curia   gĩthaa   kĩu   ruthingo-inĩ

    Hang   big clock   that   wall on the

    Hang that big clock on the wall

b.) Nĩ   gĩthaa kĩega gĩa   gũthiĩ

    It is time   good   for   going

    It is a good time for going

In a, the noun 'gĩthaa' refers to the device whereas in b, it refers to the process. The device is a count noun whereas the process is an abstract noun.

14. Event for the type of food eaten during that event

a.) Tũkũruga   njenga   ũmuthi

    We are going to cook   milled maize today

b.) Ndathiĩ   njenga

    I am going njenga

    I am going for a njenga

    I am going for a party

In 14 a, 'njenga' exemplifies the food sense whereas in 14 b it exemplifies the party/events sense.

Traditionally the Agĩkũyũ people used to eat 'njenga' during important occasions especially wedding. In this case, instead of saying ndathiĩ ũhiki (I am going for a wedding) they always said, ndathiĩ njenga (I am going for njenga). Nowadays, this type of food is no longer eaten, however, the noun is still in common and it has been generalized to mean any party or event where different types of food are eaten.

15. Event/party for the type of beverage that is taken during the event.

a.) Caai   nĩ   ũratherũka

    Tea   is   boiling

     The tea is boiling

b.) Nietĩte   andũ   caai

     She/he has invited   people tea

     She/he has invited people for tea

In a, the beverage sense is exemplified whereas in b the party/event is exemplifies.

Traditionally, the Agĩkũyũ people used to drink tea during important occasions and that why they were referred to as 'caai'. Nowadays, 'caai' has been generalized to mean any party or occasion where people meet, eat, drink and not necessarily tea, make merry and contribute some money as in baby showers, circumcision parties, graduation parties.

16.   Substance for portioning of the substance

a.) Mendagia njohi   njũru

    They sell   beer   bad

    They sell bad beer

    They sell illicit beer

b.) Gũra   njohi   igĩrĩ

    Buy   beer   two

Buy two beers

In a, 'njohi' has the substance sense and it is a mass noun whereas in b, it has the portioning sense and it is a count noun.

CONCLUSION

From the analysis of the data it can be seen that Gĩkũyũ nouns exhibit systematic patterns in which sets of meanings of words are related in similar ways. Some of the senses invoke metaphoric relations as in the body part for object part and animal for personality property patterns. The sense also cut across different semantic fields such as plants, animals, people, and body parts, types of food and beverages, events/parties. The senses

have the count-mass distinction as in the animals for meat; object for substance derived from the object, container for contents patterns. They also have the concrete/abstract distinction as in building for people in that building, building, for institution and animal for personality property.

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