

SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF VERBS OF HARVEST IN TIV

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Abstract

This study investigates the semantic structure of harvest verbs in Tiv, aiming to map the lexical relations, selectional restrictions, and co-occurrence patterns among them. Sùndâ functions as the superordinate term for “harvest,” subsuming crop-specific activities. Twenty-five speakers from Gboko, Ushongo, and Vandeikya LGAs named the verbs they use for harvesting crops; elicited forms include: gbídyɔ ‘threshing’, tìme ‘digging’, zôr ‘plucking’, wuhe ‘uprooting’, sange ‘picking’, among others. Framed within Trier’s Semantic Field Theory, the analysis shows that each verb is a co-hyponym of sùndâ, linked by hyponymic inclusion; substitution across crop types yields ungrammaticality, confirming strict selectional restrictions. The findings reveal a rich, crop-specific hyponymic network in Tiv harvest vocabulary, underscoring the language’s precision in encoding agricultural practices and cautioning against semantic misapplication.

Keywords: Tiv Language, Verbs, Harvest Verbs, Selectional Restriction, Collocation

Introduction

Language is an indispensable tool for human communication, which relies heavily on words. Every utterance depends on words as its building blocks, and the flexible nature of language provides the language user with the choice to select words that express exactly the intended message or idea. Every native speaker of a language has a mental store of millions of words of that language, which he/she use for communication. Knowledge of words includes knowing their pronunciation, meaning and appropriateness to social context. This knowledge is very important for effective communication. These words, which are in the minds of speakers of a language, form the psychological architecture. This means, as soon as a speaker of a language

hears or sees a word in that language, the semantic properties of the word come to his/her mind. That is why, despite the numerous names for harvest verbs, every Tiv native speaker knows the exact harvest word for a particular crop.

The Tiv Language

The word 'Tiv' has basically three meanings: Tiv refers to the ancestor of an ethnic group whose father was known as *Tákūrúkū Anyām Azéngā*. It also refers to the people and the language. The Tiv language, according to Yina (2011), is one of the Bantoid sub-family languages of the Niger-Congo phylum. Although the Tiv language is one of the indigenous languages in Benue, Taraba, Nasarawa and Plateau States of Nigeria, it is spoken in all the thirty-six states of Nigeria, the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja and Cameroon. It has an estimated over six (6) million speakers. According to Udu (2009), the Tiv language is put to many uses; it is the language used for interpersonal communication, trade, and religious worship. Udu further reveals that the Tiv language is one of the nine network languages in Nigeria. It is a language of trade, worship, and education in the first three years of primary education.

The Tiv people are a homogenous people with one language and one culture. They constitute approximately 2.4% of Nigeria's total population, with over six (6) million speakers throughout Nigeria and Cameroon. Culturally, the Tiv people still maintain a remarkable homogeneity in terms of their traditions, customs, festivals and cosmology, emphasising their shared heritage and belief in a common patriarch. Yina (2011) opines that despite minor lexical and phonological variations influenced by contact with other languages, the Tiv language remains mutually intelligible across its speakers.

The main occupation of the Tiv people is farming. They are into farming of various crops such as yams, rice, benniseed, cassava, maize, guinea-corn, millet, potato, soya beans and beans. These crops are both subsistence and cash crops, which are exported to neighbouring states and even other countries of the world. They are also the single largest growers of tree crops such as mango, guava, oranges, pear and cashew in Nigeria. They also grow vegetables such as tomatoes, peppers, and onions in commercial quantities.

Conceptual Review

The Verb

According to Lyons (1968:109), traditionally, “a verb is a word which denotes an action or state of being”. Hence, verbs are used to designate the execution of an intention. Ndimele (2008:99) defines a verb as, “the part of speech without case-inflexions, admitting inflexions of tense, person, and signifying an activity; examples (come, eat, write, play and so on. Ndimele (2008:99) puts it that “a verb is a class of words that expresses action or state of affairs”. This means that verbs inform one of events that have taken place, are taking place or will take place, or the present condition of things.

Harvest Verbs

The term harvest primarily refers to the process or activity of gathering crops or other agricultural produce from the field at the time of ripeness. In agriculture, harvest involves the collection of plants, animals, or fish for food. Harvest verbs, therefore, refer to the action of gathering crops or yields. It specifically describes the process of collecting mature plants, fruits, or vegetables from fields or gardens.

Collocation

Crystal (1985) defines collocation as “a term used in lexicology to refer to the habitual co-occurrence of individual lexical items”. This indicates that it is a word mainly used in the study of the relationship between one word and another in a string of utterance, indicating the grammaticality of such co-occurrence.

Selectional Restriction

Ndimele (2007:99) defines selectional restriction as “a phenomenon which specifies the constraints on the possible combinations of lexical items within a given grammatical context”. This means that selectional restriction is a constraint placed on the co-occurrence of words in a syntactic construction.

Research Methodology

For this study, the researcher adopts a descriptive research design to find answers to the study problem. The data were elicited from thirty (30) native speakers in Gboko, Ushongo and Vandeikya Local Government Areas, in Benue State. Each local

government area had ten (10) participants consisting of elderly men and women from fifty (50) years and above who are fluent in the language. The data were collected using oral interviews where a list of names of different crops was presented to the participants in the areas of study to provide the harvest name. This was combined with observation and the intuitive knowledge of the researchers.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopts the Semantic Field Theory propounded by Jost Trier in 1930 as its theoretical framework. The central assumption of the theory is that the meaning of a word is largely determined by its relationships with other words within a specific conceptual domain or field. The theory posits that words do not exist in isolation; instead, their meanings are shaped by their connections to other words that share similar or contrasting semantic properties. This theory is an approach to the determination of meaning. The idea of semantic (lexical) field theory is that words in any given language are grouped into fields and each field comprises a set of lexical items whose meanings have something in common. According to this theory, given sets of lexical items whose meanings share appreciable similarities constitute semantic field. In other words, a lexical field is a structured group of words with related meanings that perhaps has some sort of distinctive life of its own. Agbedo (2000), in support of this theory opines that colour and kinship terms, for instance, constitute different lexical fields. Green, blue, yellow, red, black, orange, brown, all constitute a lexical field given their similar semantic import, that is, colour description. Another set of lexical items: father, mother, brother, sister, son, daughter, uncle, aunt, nephew, niece, cousin etc are kinship terms that constitute a semantic field. The theory recognises the fact that lexical fields are constituted according to the structure of any given language.

Empirical Review

Several studies have been carried out on verb restriction as it relates to harvest, cooking, and the lighting of wood fire, among others. These studies are carried out using different methodological and linguistic approaches.

Onwukwe (2015) investigates verbs of cooking in Igbo using hyponymy as a tool of description of the subject matter. The study identifies nine verbs of cooking in Igbo, which are co-hyponyms with *isi* (to cook) as the generic superordinate term. It also exemplifies the verbs of cooking as follows: *Isi*- 'to cook' superordinate term. *Iwu* - to cook solid food like yams, beans, rice, etc. *itē*, *igbū*, *ighā*, *ikērē*, *ighē*- to cook liquid form food such as soup, pepper soup, medicinal soup, etc. *idā*, *itē*- to cook porridge food form such as porridge yams, porridge plantains, etc. *imē*, *ighē*, *igbā*-to prepare sauce often used in eating solid food items, usually tubers (yams), and (rice, in which case it is called stew). According to Onwukwe (2015), the picture that emerges above shows that '*isi*', 'to cook', is a generic super-ordinate term in the Igbo language. And there are verbs of cooking a variety of items, which have the superordinate term '*isi*' in Igbo.

Ejinwa (2019) examines the lexico-semantic relations of verbs of lighting wood fire in Okigwe-Igbo. The study shows the specific lexical or meaning relations that exist among these verbs and their selectional restrictions or co-occurring elements. The research adopts semantic field theory as its theoretical framework. The study, being descriptive, identifies ten verbs of lighting wood fire and sub-categorises them into two, namely, putting on and verbs of putting out wood fire in Okigwe-Igbo. *gù*, *fè-nwù*, *sòkwa*, *nwu* and *mènwù* with *Mùnwu* as the superordinate term, while for putting out fire, they include: *lòshà*, *nyù*, *fè-nyù*, *Kwànyù* and *mènyù* as the superordinate term. The findings of the study revealed that the verbs of lighting wood fire show a hyponymous relation and are co-hyponyms of the superordinate "*mènwù*" (put on) and "*mènyù*" (put out). It also showed that these verbs entail a sense of inclusion and usually co-occur or select the lexical word "*oku*" (fire) as their nominal complement. The study concludes that verbs of lighting wood fire in Igbo are rich in hyponyms.

Ugorji (2020) investigates the verb-noun selectional restriction in Ngwa. The study reveals that verb-noun selectional restriction is a collocational linguistic constraint that exists between the verb and the noun in order to avoid ungrammatical constructions in language. Componential Analysis theory was used in the decomposition of the features of the noun in the object position. The findings of the study reveal that a negligence

of selective compatibility results in ungrammatical constructions, and that knowledge of the verb-noun selectional constraints in Ngwa is part of the linguistic competence of the users of the Ngwa dialect.

Ikwu, Idoko and Ishima (2022) explore a semantic analysis of verbs of harvest in Idoma. The study reveals the various harvest methods and the associated verbs, as well as the selectional restrictions of these verbs concerning the semantic field. The study adopted Semantic Field theory as its theoretical framework. The findings of the research show that there are various methods of harvesting, such as plucking, picking, digging, uprooting and shaking, and there are also various harvest verbs, such as *che*, *he*, *ha*, *bla*, *bu*, *fu*, *wu*, and *dguwo*, and they all belong to a semantic field. It also reveals that verbs of harvest in Idoma are rich in hyponymy as they are crop-specific and that they exhibit selectional restrictions, and violations of these restrictions result in ungrammatical expressions and meanings.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Harvest verbs in the Tiv language have different names for the same action, unlike in the English language, where one simply harvests crops. In the Tiv language, each crop has a specific name used to refer to its harvest. Examples of Tiv words used for harvest include: *'time*, *'gber*, *'sündā*, *'kūrē*, *'kūlūgh*, *'wūhē*, *sev* and *'gbōr*. The data is presented and analysed using simple tables below:

Table 1: *Timē 'dig' as a harvest word*

S/N	Crop	Gloss
i	<i>iyough</i>	yam
ii	<i>ak ô r</i>	yam seedlings
iii	<i>mondu</i>	cocoyam
iv	<i>agbo</i>	water yam

Table 1 above, shows that the harvesting methods of root and tuber crops vary depending on the type of crop but generally involves using tools like hoe, digger, or specialised machinery designed for this purpose. Root and tuber crops are harvested by

digging primarily due to the nature of their edible parts. The edible portions of these crops grow deep inside the ground, making it necessary to dig them out to access the crop. Therefore, in Tiv language, the term '*time*' is used. Unlike leafy vegetables that can be easily picked or cut from the plant, root crops require physical removal from the soil to harvest them. For example:

A za time agbo u ngo na nyen

3sg dig- v-pst cassava his mother yesterday

He/she went to dig his mother's water yam yesterday

Table 2 '*Gber*' '*cut*' as a harvest word

S/N	Crop	Gloss
I	<i>akor</i>	yam seedlings
ii	like	Sugarcane
iii	<i>ayaba</i>	banana

In Table 2 above, the harvest verb '*gber*' could be used polysemously, that is, it has multiple meanings that are related to each other. Hence, it could be used for cutting, harvesting and planting of crops respectively. In this case, farm implements such as a hoe, a cutlass and a knife are used. For example, before planting yams, the seedlings are divided into smaller pieces using a knife. The right verb used here is '*bur*', which is 'cut'; however, when it is planted in the soil, the verb '*lôô*', meaning 'to plant' is used. Therefore, the verb '*gber*' is a superordinate term of the verb '*bur*' and '*lôô*' respectively.

Table 3 '*sunda*' '*cut*' as a harvest word

S/N	Crop	Gloss
i	<i>wua</i>	guinea corn
ii	<i>amine</i>	millet
iii	<i>agase</i>	wheat
iv	<i>chinkafa</i>	rice

In the Tiv language, crops such as guinea corn, millet, wheat, grass, rice, oats, etc, which are cultivated for their edible grains, may be harvested using reaping tools such as a sickle, scythe,

or even bare hands etc. In harvesting these crops, they are usually plucked from their stalk. Therefore, the verb ‘*sunda*’, which means to cut, is used. A sickle is a traditional hand tool with a curved blade, ideal for cutting down leguminous plants. It allows for precise harvesting, especially when dealing with large-seeded legumes. Consider the following examples:

Mba sundan amine sha ityev

3pl reap- v prog millet from the farm

They are harvesting millet from the farm

Table 4: *ikulugh* (dig up) as a harvest word

S/N	Crop	Gloss
i.	<i>igbough</i>	chick nut/bambara nut
ii	<i>akor</i>	yam seedlings
iii	<i>atsaka</i>	sweet potato
iv	<i>ishoho</i>	tiger nut
v	<i>seta</i>	Ginger

In Table 4 above, the verb ‘*ku’lugh* is simply a form of harvest whereby the crops are not deeply rooted in the ground. A simple hand tool called a hoe is used to carefully loosen the soil around the crop before pulling it out.

Table 5 ‘*Wuhe* (uproot) as a harvest word

S/N	Crop	Gloss
i	<i>abum</i>	Groundnut
ii	<i>logo</i>	Cassava
iii	suwanbin	soya bean

In Table 5 above, the harvest verb *wuhe* means ‘uproot’. This method of harvest involves removing the entire plant from the soil, rather than just cutting or shearing the above-ground parts. Therefore, the crops mentioned in the table above are mostly harvested by pulling up the entire plant from the ground by hand. They could equally be harvested using simple farm tools. For groundnuts, the whole plant is pulled up to ensure that all pods are removed from the soil. In the case of cassava, it also requires pulling upwards to detach the roots from their anchorage in the

soil. Also, the traditional method requires that a farmer dig around the base of the cassava plant using indigenous tools such as hoes, cutlasses, mattocks, etc. This digging loosens the soil surrounding the roots. However, in the case of grasses and soya beans, both the traditional and mechanised methods of harvest could be used. In the traditional method, a handful of grass is grasped and pulled close to the base to dislodge the roots from the ground. For soya beans, while it is possible to harvest by hand without tools, it is easier and faster with pruners and scissors.

Table 6 ‘*Sev*’ *‘pluck’ as a harvest word*

S/N	Crop	Gloss
i	ikyuleke	Maize

In Table 6 above, ‘*sev*’ literally means pluck, particularly from the stalk. It is a traditional method of harvesting maize. This hand-harvesting technique involves pulling the ears from the stalks of the maize without using tools. The harvester uses one hand to grasp an ear of corn firmly and the other to grasp the stalk before twisting it in any direction to break off from its shank.

Table 7 ‘*Zôr*’ *‘pluck’ as a harvest word*

S/N	Crop	Gloss
i	<i>alev</i>	Beans
ii	<i>mkem</i>	Pepper
iii	<i>temetu</i>	Tomato
iv	<i>mongor</i>	Mango
v	<i>mngishim</i>	garden egg
vi	<i>alum</i>	Orange
vii	<i>ikyewe</i>	coconut
viii	<i>ityuna</i>	bitter leaf
ix	<i>aleefo</i>	spinach
x	<i>atuur</i>	Okra

In table 7 above, ‘*zôr*’, which literally means ‘pluck’, is a kind of hand-picking method used in harvesting large-seeded legumes, spices and herbs, oilseeds, among others. It is mainly used when referring to the harvest of ripe crops, fruits and vegetables as opposed to unripe ones where *×gbor* is employed. However, when it comes to fruit crops, like mango, guava, oranges, etc., which

are not yet ripe for harvest, the verb '*gbor*' is used. ×*Gbor* is hereby used in a negative way to indicate destruction, meaning that the fruits were harvested when they were not ready to be harvested. They could be plucked with a long stick attached to a sickle-like tool because of the height of the tree-bearing fruit. Otherwise, most fruit-bearing crops on trees, when ripe, are harvested by shaking the tree from its branches. Thus, this method is referred to as '*yoghur*', meaning shake up. In addition, if the fruits fall to the ground by reason of being ripe, the method of harvest used is '*sange*', which means to pick up. Consider the following examples below:

i. Terhile 'zôr 'atuur sha tyev

3sg pluck -v- Pst okra Prep farm
Terhile plucked okra from the farm

Also, Spice crops in Tiv are either plucked or picked. However, the use of any of the harvest methods is dependent on whether the crop is ripe and still on the stalk or whether it is ripe and fallen to the ground. In a case where it is still on its stalk, '*zôr*' is preferred while '*sange*' is used for the ones that are ripe and fallen to the ground. Consider the example below:

ii Se zôr mkem sha ityev laadi u karen la

1pl pluck -v- pst pepper farm last week
We harvested pepper from the farm last week

Table 8 "*gbidye* 'thresh' as a harvest word

S/N	Crop	Gloss
I	<i>Wua</i>	guinea corn
Ii	<i>Chinkafa</i>	Rice
Iii	<i>suwanbin</i>	soya bean
Iv	<i>Abum</i>	groundnut

In table 8 above, the harvest verb ×*gbidye* simply means 'thresh'. This is the process of separating the edible part of the grain from the chaff and husks. The crops in the table above are mainly harvested or cut at their base when they are ripe. This is done using a sickle or sharp knife. The harvested stalks are then gathered into bundles. They are then spread out in the sun to

dry in order to reduce the moisture content, thereby making it easy to thresh with sticks or wooden rods to beat the dried ears against a hard surface, such as wooden platform or the ground. This action loosens the grains from their husks.

Table 9 “*Sange (pick) as a harvest word*”

S/N	Crop	Gloss
i	nune	locust bean
ii	<i>alum</i>	orange
iii	<i>mongor</i>	mango

In Table 9 above, the harvest verb ‘*sange*’ literally means ‘pick’. This is a hand harvesting method where crops or fruits are picked by hand without the use of tools. Unlike the harvest verb ‘*zôr*’, which means ‘pluck’, and which is mainly used for ripe crops, ‘*sange*’ is used when referring to both ripe and unripe crops.

Conclusion

The paper analyses the semantic verbs of harvest in the Tiv language. The paper identifies verbs associated with harvest, such as ‘*time*’, ‘*igber*’, ‘*sunda*’, ‘*ikule*’, ‘*kulugh*’, ‘*wuhe*’, ‘*ase*’, ‘*sev*’, ‘*zôr*’, ‘*gbor*’, ‘*shoo*’, ‘*sange*’, ‘*pav*’, ‘*gbidye*’ and ‘*oov*’.

It shows the various verbs used with regard to harvests and their respective selectional restrictions. It reveals that the use of any semantic field is dependent on the appropriate harvest verb. It also reveals that harvest verbs in Tiv show some selectional restrictions and are rich in hyponymy as they are crop-specific, and that violation of any renders the meaning ungrammatical. The study also found that these verbs of harvest in Tiv show a hyponymous relation and are co-hyponyms of the superordinate ‘*sunda*’ ‘harvest’. The study concluded that verbs of harvest in Tiv are rich in hyponymy.

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