

Old Words, New Meanings: A Survey of Semantic Change Amongst Yoruba-English Bilingual Undergraduates

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Abstract

Language functions best when it serves the communicative intent of its users, even if such is achieved by adding, removing or modifying the existing meanings of words. This development and change of the semantic structure of a word usually brings about qualitative and quantitative development of the vocabulary. The focus of this paper is to review semantic change that has occurred with some Yoruba words, its types and the motivations of such especially amongst undergraduates using Blank Andreas's principles and motive for semantic change as theoretical framework.

The tool used for the study is a self-constructed questionnaire administered to Yoruba-English Bilingual and a corpus of words that have undergone semantic change frequently used by them. The findings reveals that using words that have undergone meaning change is a frequent occurrence amongst Yoruba-English Bilingual undergraduates, a habit motivated by linguistic, psychological, sociocultural and cultural/encyclopedic forces. Also, it was found that the principles similarity, contiguity and contrast. as highlighted by Blank underlie all the types of semantic changes identified.

Keywords: Semantic Change, Extended Meaning, Language, Blank's Theoretical Principles for Semantic Change

Introduction

Creativity in language makes its existence and use versatile, capable of serving use across domains, functions, generations and as a matter of fact, social groups. Language does not in any instance maintain status quo; rather, it metamorphoses graphologically, morphologically, phonologically and semantically. The semantic domain of language change occurs either to accommodate a new meaning or an outright shift in meaning of words. As observed by Thomas and Wareing 1999, 'human

beings use language creatively and make up new words which can nevertheless be understood by others who are familiar with the culture in which the new word was developed'. In the words of Sapir Whorf (1949), as quoted in Weinz (2011) "Nothing is perfectly static. Every word, every grammatical element, every locution, every sound and accent is a slowly changing configuration, moulded by the invisible and impersonal drift that is the life of language." (Sapir 1949: 171).

In other words, the meaning of a word is in a constant process of alteration. The alteration of meaning occurs because words are constantly used and what is intended by speakers is not exactly the same each time. If a different intention for a word is shared by the speech community and becomes established in usage, then a semantic change or extended meaning (used interchangeably in this study) has occurred. Irrespective of the motivations of semantic change, a unifying factor for all semantic change is the intent to make language capture the intended meaning which can be direct or implied. Earlier studies have looked at semantic change classifying them into types, the motivating factors and generating theories for semantic change.

The first major works of modern times are Karl Reisig (1829/1839), Arsène Darmesteter (1887), Michel Bréal (1899), Hermann Paul (1880), Gustaf Stern (1931), Leonard Bloomfield (1933) and Stephen Ullmann (1957 & 1962). Studies beyond the analysis of single words have been started with Jost Trier's word-field analyses (1931), who claimed that every semantic change of a word would also affect all other words in a lexical field, an approach that was later refined by Eugenio Coseriu (1964). Generative semantics has been introduced by Gerd Fritz (1964). More recent works including pragmatic and cognitive theories are those by Beatrice Warren (1992), Geeraerts (1983, 1997), Elizabeth Traugott (e.g. 1990) and Andreas Blank (1997).

The theoretical framework for this study however is Blanks' theory and Motive (1997, 1999a) for semantic change. First is Blanks theory which proposes a metaphorical bridge linking semantic change, according to this theory, there are three basic principles underlining semantic change. These are principles of similarity, contiguity and contrast.

To explain this, the principle of similarity or metaphor means the transfer of the name of one object to another (and different one) based on association of similarity. This can also be referred to as **metaphorisation** - shift in meaning based on an analogy or likeness between things, e.g. 'crane', the name of a bird, has come to mean a piece of device for lifting things. Meanings of words can be changed based on metaphoric similarities as shown below:

Similarity of behaviour: *a fox* (a cunning person).

Similarity of shape: *a head* of a cabbage.

Similarity of function: *the key* to the mystery.

Similarity of position: *foot* of a mountain.

Transfer from the concrete to abstract: *to catch* an idea.

On the principle of contiguity which is derived from metonymy or **metonimisation**. If the transfer is based upon the association of contiguity it is called metonymy. It is a shift of names between things that are known to be in some way or other connected in reality. The transfer may be conditioned by spatial, temporal, causal, symbolic, instrumental, functional and other relations. According to Blank, sometimes this change is as a result of nearness of items. He described it as the semantic process of associating two referents one of which makes part of the other or is closely connected with it in space or time.

Jaw "cheek": "mandible".

Symbol for thing symbolized: *the crown* (monarchy)

Using the material for an article to denote it: *glass, iron, copper*

Horn "animal horn": "musical instrument"

Bar: lawyers, pulpit- priest

On the principle of contrast or antiphrasis, a word or phrase is used in a sense contrary to its normal meaning for ironic or humorous effect. This can also be seen as change based on a contrastive aspect of the concepts, e.g., perfect lady in the sense of "prostitute", as in a mere babe of 40 years.

To illustrate the theoretical process of meaning change in simple terms, Blank uses the metaphor bridge. Starting on the left hand side there is the motivation for the concrete innovation. The bridge itself is constituted

by the associative principles. This is according to Blank the cognitive psychological basis of the corresponding type of semantic change. However the associative principle is both the force triggering a certain type of semantic change and it is its necessary basis. On the right-hand side then comes finally the concrete type of semantic change. Underlying this whole process are the general communicative principles of success and efficiency.

In order to clarify this theoretical framework, we will take a look at the examples *torpedo* and *ose*

Originally it meant only 'electric ray' but then also gained the additional meaning 'underwater weapon system'. If we look at the left-hand side of the bridge, we will see that the motivation in this concrete case was the 'need for a new name'. This was the force, which made the speaker use metaphor as the type of semantic change with similarity as the underlying associative principle. The general motivation was efficient and successful communication. In our example, the scientists considered the presentation of the underwater weapon system as an electric ray; whose contact can lead to death, as especially successful and efficient. Afterwards the lexicalization of *torpedo* bears this consideration out. (cf. Blank 1997: 347;374).

A Yoruba example will be the word *ose* which originally meant soap. At the left side of the bridge is the social motivation which in the concrete sense is 'need for a characteristic meaning or based on an analogy'. This force made speakers use the word in the metaphorical sense. In this example, the undergraduates use the word *ose* in the sense of the slippery intrusive characteristic of soap and hence the new meanings insult or implicate. In other words, the motivation was linguistic, underlined by the principle of metarphorisation and the innovation is a semantic extension of the word.

Secondly, Blank (1997, 1999a) has tried to set up a complete list of motives of semantic change. This list has been revised and slightly enlarged by Grzegą (2004). They can be summarized as:

- linguistic forces

- psychological forces
- sociocultural forces
- cultural/encyclopedic forces

It is premised upon this theory and motives for semantic change that this study springboards. This study hopes to answer the following research questions:

1. Is semantic change a common phenomenon amongst Yoruba-English Bilingual undergraduates?
2. What is the frequency of the use of words with extended meanings?
3. What are the motivations/ rationale for such semantic change?
4. What types of semantic change frequently occur amongst them?

Language, its characteristics and Semantic Change

Shall we begin by taking an overview of the raw material on which this study is based? According to Algeo and Pyles (2004), language is “a system of conventional vocal signs by means of which human beings communicate.” Hence language is conventional, is a system, is habitual, is a vocal behaviour and language is a means of communication. A basic tool of communication therefore is the language by which communication takes place. Effective communication also is reinforced when communicators or better still, language users have a shared meaning which as Whorf established, transcends the literal meaning of words. Language, or more specifically words, can then be adjusted to incorporate extra linguistic features in order to enhance its communicative effectiveness. This sometimes leads to a change in the meaning of the word. Keller (1994) reinforces this with his definition of natural languages as a product of social interaction created through a series of invisible processes whose main purpose is to get something. Before we go on, we shall have a quick overview at some of the characteristics of language in an attempt to relate it to how it both accommodates and encourages meaning change.

Language is Arbitrary: Language is arbitrary in the sense that there is no inherent relation between the words of a language and their meanings or the ideas conveyed by them. The choice of a word selected to mean

a particular thing or idea is purely arbitrary but once a word is selected for a particular referent, it comes to stay as such. An arbitrary allocation of a new meaning to an old word may also occur without questionings on the direct relationship the new meaning has with the word as long as it conveys the intended idea.

Language is Social: Language is a set of conventional communicative signals used by humans for communication. In this sense it is a possession of a social group, comprising an indispensable set of rules which permits its members to relate to each other, to interact with one another. These signs allocated to the signified may in this wise change to bear a social resemblance to a new, social or cultural reality of the community in which Language exists. Semantic change in this wise achieves two things: it strengthens the language and as it enlarges its vocabulary. Also, it makes communication more effective within the community of use.

Language is Symbolic: Language consists of various sound symbols and their graphological counterparts that are employed to denote some objects, occurrences or meaning. These symbols are arbitrarily chosen and conventionally accepted and employed. Words in a language are not mere signs or figures, but a symbol of meaning whose intelligibility depends on a correct interpretation of these symbols. Change in meaning could develop from symbolic occurrences which once mutually intelligible become conventionally accepted and employed.

Language is Systematic: Although language is symbolic, yet its symbols are arranged in a particular system. All languages have their system of arrangements. Every language is a system of systems. All languages have phonological and grammatical systems, and within a system there are several sub-systems. For example, within the grammatical system we have morphological and syntactic systems, and within these two sub-systems we have systems such as those of plural, of mood, of aspect, of tense, etc. Semantic change may occur either in alignment with an existing language system or outrightly assume another system in language.

Language is Vocal: Language is primarily made up of vocal sounds only produced by a physiological articulatory mechanism in the human body. In the beginning, it appeared as vocal sounds only. Writing came much later, as an intelligent attempt to represent vocal sounds. Writing is only the graphic representation of the sounds of the language. So the linguists say that speech is primary. Once there is a change in the meaning of a word in it becomes a vocal symbol which in due time with conventional use and acceptance becomes a writing code.

Language is Productive and Creative: This characteristic of language is very pertinent to this study. Language has creativity and productivity. The structural elements of human language can be combined to produce new utterances, which neither the speaker nor his hearers may ever have made or heard before any, listener, yet which both sides understand without difficulty. Language changes according to the needs of society. From the foregoing, we see that language change and society forms the two sides of the same coin. Research has proven that as long as language is being used by the members of a particular community, change in such language is eminent. At this point let's review what exactly the phenomenon of Semantic change mean.

Semantic Change and Types

Changes in meaning are common and they can be internally or externally motivated. In semantics, the word field in which words and their meanings stand in a network of relationships. The alteration of meaning occurs because words are constantly used and what is intended by speakers is not exactly the same each time. If a different intention for a word is shared by the speech community and becomes established in usage then a semantic change has occurred. At first, semantic change starts as a semantic innovation in the discourse of a single speaker or a small group of speakers. If this innovation is adopted by other speakers, maybe because he expects a communicative profit or he likes it for personal reasons, the new meaning can be lexicalised. As a further development the new meaning can lose its restrictions to a certain "speech situation" and reach the unmarked common level of a language so that every speaker will adopt it to his vocabulary. (Blank 2001).

Werth (1974) defined semantic change as A lexical item *a* hitherto associated with a semantic A, comes to be associated with the new but related configuration A' which may co-exist with or replace A. Simply put, semantic change is said to have occurred when a word which stands for a particular item comes to be associated with a new meaning in which case the new meaning may be used alternately with the old or out rightly replace it. Blank (1997) refers to the first phenomenon as “innovative semantic change” or “semantic innovation” and to the latter one as “reductive semantic change”.

An instance is the Yoruba word *isu* (Yam). *Isu*, which means a kind of meal popular amongst the Yoruba speaking people, popular for its use at various traditional ceremonies both as symbolic gifts and for preparation of different delicacies, has come to be associated with a new meaning sex/money. Hence the expression *Je isu* which hitherto meant eat yam, now means “make love” or “money”. This will be a case of innovative semantic change.

A more elaborate definition is one by Bloomfield (1933) and Campbell (1998). They defined semantic change as a change in the concepts that were associated with a term and the innovations that change the meaning of words. With regard to the innovations that change the meaning of words, Campbell (1998) and Crowley (1997) have the following classifications With regard to the types of semantic change: First, widening or broadening refers to the increase of the meaning of words (Campbell, 1998) and a change in meaning which could result in a word processing additional meanings while retaining the original meaning (Crowley, 1997). For example, the English word ‘dog’ had a specific meaning of ‘a powerful breed of dog’ which has a broader meaning that includes ‘all breeds of dog’. Second, narrowing involves the change of meaning that decreases its range of reference into a fewer context (Campbell, 1998) and occurs when a word refers to only part of the original meaning (Crowley, 1997). For instance, the word ‘starve’ (i.e. to suffer or perish from hunger) came from the Old English word ‘steorfan’ (i.e. to die).

Third, metaphor is a type of semantic change that involves one kind of thing in relation to another kind of thing that is somehow similar to the previous thing (Campbell, 1997). For example, the Cebuano word 'higante' which is similar to the concept 'big' is used in describing a great writer. Fourth, litotes is another type of semantic change that refers to exaggeration through understatement (Campbell, 1998). For instance, the phrase 'of no small importance' is mentioned that would mean 'something that is too important'.

Other types of semantic change that were identified by Campbell (1998) are metonymy, synecdoche, degeneration or pejoration, and elevation or amelioration. Metonymy occurs when there is a change of meaning of a word which includes other senses that are not originally present but are closely associated with the word's previous meaning. An example of metonymy is the Spanish word 'plata' (i.e. silver) that has been elaborated to mean 'money'.

Another type of semantic change is synecdoche (i.e. a part-to-whole relationship). For instance, the word 'tongue' means 'language'. In addition, degeneration or pejoration takes place when the sense of the word has a negative assessment in the minds of the users. For instance, the word 'spinster' has a negative connotation of an unmarried older woman. Traugott, Elizabeth Closs and Richard B. Dasher (2002) identified the simplest type of semantic change is a shift. For instance the Latin verb *arrivare* derives ultimately from *ad ripam* 'at the shore' but has long lost this meaning. But even such an innocuous case can be classified.

A closer look at all changes in meaning shows that alterations in meaning can be classified according to type. There are four basic types of semantic change which on the one hand refer to the range of a word's meaning and on the other, to the way the meaning is evaluated by speakers.

SEMANTIC EXPANSION: Here a word increases its range of meaning over time. For instance in Middle English *bridde* was a term for 'small bird', later the term *bird* came to be used in a general sense and the word *fowl*, formally the more general word was restricted to the sense of 'farmyard birds bred especially for consumption', cf. German 'Geflügel'.

Another case is *horn* ‘a bone-like protrusion on the heads of certain animals’, then ‘musical instrument’, then ‘drinking vessel’ of similar shape.

SEMANTIC RESTRICTION: This is the opposite to expansion. Already to be seen with *fowl* but also with many other words, such as *meat* which derives from Middle English *mete* with the general meaning of ‘food’ and now restricted to processed animal flesh. In turn the word *flesh* was narrowed in its range to ‘human flesh’.

Borrowing from another language may be involved here. For instance Old English *snipan* (German *schneiden*) was replaced by Old Norse *cut* as the general term and the second Old English word *ceorfan* was restricted in meaning to ‘carve’.

SEMANTIC DETERIORATION: This is disapproving in the meaning of a word. The term *knave* meant originally (Old English) ‘male servant’ from ‘boy’ (cf. German *Knabe*) but deteriorated to the meaning of ‘base or coarse person’, having more or less died out and been replaced by *boy*. *Villain* developed from ‘inhabitant of a village’ to ‘scoundrel’. The word *peasant* is used now for someone who shows bad behaviour as the word *farmer* has become the normal term. In official contexts, however, the term ‘peasant’ is found for small and/or poor farmers.

SEMANTIC AMELIORATION: An improvement in the meaning of a word. The term *nice* derives from Latin *nescius* ‘ignorant’ and came at the time of its borrowing from Old French to mean ‘silly, simple’ then ‘foolish, stupid’, later developing a more positive meaning as ‘pleasing, agreeable’.

Although the categorization of Blank (1998) has gained increasing acceptance he considers it problematic, though, to include amelioration and pejoration of meaning as well as strengthening and weakening of meaning. It should however be noted that this study accommodates the two types of semantic change.

Working on Semantic Change of the Selected Cebuano Words, Rowanne (2008) study revealed that in the written text, metaphor was

frequently used while broadening was the predominant type of semantic change in the spoken language. Metaphor was predominantly used by the Cebuano writers to clearly express the ideas, let the readers clearly understand their points, and raise the readers' thinking into a higher level of meaning. Numerous phenomena, such as metaphor, metonymy, hyperbole or synecdoche, which had previously been associated only with the literary and stylistic analyses of poetic and figurative language, have been proved to be cognitively-grounded mechanisms of meaning construction and change (e.g. Sweetser 1990).

Causes and Motivations of Semantic Changes

The causes of semantic changes may be grouped under two main headings, linguistic and extralinguistic ones. Linguistic causes deal with changes due to the constant interdependence of vocabulary units in language and speech, such as differentiation between synonyms, changes taking place in connection with ellipsis and with fixed contexts, changes resulting from ambiguity in certain contexts, and some other cases.

Semantic change due to the differentiation of synonyms is a gradual change observed in the course of language history, sometimes, but not necessarily, involving the semantic assimilation of loan words. Consider, for example, the words *time* and *tide*. *Initially* synonyms, then *tide* took on its more limited application to the periodically shifting waters, and *time* alone is used in the general sense. Fixed context may be regarded as another linguistic factor in semantic change. Both factors are at work in the case of *token*. When brought into competition with the loan word *sign*, it became restricted in use to a number of set expressions such as *love token*, *token of respect* and so became specialized in meaning. (www.referat.com/catalog/db/4420.doc. Retrieved 4/07/2013)

The extralinguistic causes are determined by the social nature of the language: they are observed in changes of meaning resulting from the development of the notion expressed and the thing named and by the appearance of new notions and things. In other words, extralinguistic causes of semantic change are connected with the development of the human mind as it moulds reality to conform to its needs.

Languages are powerfully affected by social, political, economic, cul-tural and technical change. It shows that social factors can influence even structural features of linguistic units, terms of science, for instance, have a number of specific features as compared to words used in other spheres of human activity.

The word being a linguistic realization of notion, it changes with the progress of human consciousness. This process is reflected in the develop-ment of lexical meaning. As the human mind achieves an ever more exact understanding of the world of reality and the objective relation-ships that characterize it, the notions become more and more exact reflec-tions of real things. The history of the social, economic and political life of people, the progress of culture and science bring about changes in notions and things influencing the semantic aspect of language. e.g. *space* from the meanings of 'extension' or 'intervening distance' came to mean 'the limitless expanse in which everything exists' and more recently came to be used especially in the meaning of 'outer space'. (www.referat.com/catalog/db/4420.doc. Retrieved 4/07/2013)

The changes of notions and things named go hand-in -and. As they are conditioned by changes in the economic, social, political and cultu-ral history of the people, the extralinguistic causes of semantic change might be conveniently subdivided in accordance with these. Social rela-tionships are at work in the cases of elevation and pejoration of meaning where the attitude of a particular social class determines the strengthening of the semantic components of the word.

Economic causes are also at work in the semantic development. The word *wealth* first meant 'well-being', 'happiness' from *weal* from OE *wela* whence *well*. This original meaning is preserved in the compounds *commonwealth* and *commonweal*. The present meaning became possible due to the role played by money both in feudal and bourgeois society. Coseriu(1958) argues that language is, rather a product, a process that exist virtually in the speakers mind as a mere potentiality and finds reality only in concrete utterances. While communicating, we refer to what is in our minds and thereby reinvent language every time we speak. According to him, the general motivation for semantic change is the expressive and communicative purpose of the speakers.

Blank (1997, 1999) Identified three motivations for semantic change.

1. Speaker Expressivity and Efficiency

This motivation for semantic change is summed up by George K Zipf (1949) “man talks in order to get something”. According to blank semantic change is a mere side effect of speaker’s pragmatic goals. This view of language implies that speakers want to communicate successfully and that they produce innovations anytime they judge it to be the most successful strategy. These innovations can be produced to reflect linguistic, historical or social change. He opines that language change is not inherent in language itself although it occurs at any time. Geeraets (1997) sees expressivity at work when speakers verbalise newly introduced or differently perceived concepts or give a new stylistic use to an already existing word.

2. General Conditions for Semantic Change

The general motivations for semantic change can be summarised as linguistic - language-internal, e.g. grammaticalisation, historical - changes in material culture and social - new meaning for a word which could arise because: its use by a particular social group, or a word used in a specific sense by some social group becomes widely used with extended meaning; or trends in social change: secularization of religious terminology. For instance, cell ‘monk’s living space’ now a prison space.

3. Specific Motivations for Concrete Motivations

This is the need for a new name in a concrete situation where the initiator’s wish is to give it a somewhat suggestive and successful name. Besides these classification, Picymbalista and Kleparsk (2007) premised on the statement by Blank(2001) that concepts are neither universal nor are they really language-specific: they rather are culture-specific and thus extralinguistic identified language-external mechanisms that is traditional extra linguistic motivation such as: politics and war; social-economic reality (including legal systems, social taboos etc.); technological and civilizational progress; culture (material and non-material) and religion; lastly, there are psychological factors (including taboo, euphemism, hyperbola, litotes, synaesthesia).

Although these studies dealt with the semantic aspects of language, none of them focused on the semantic change of words. Thus, this study on the semantic change of Yoruba words is conducted to fill this gap. This paper attempted to determine and analyse the semantic change of the selected Yoruba words. Also, this paper aimed at determining the types of semantic change undertaken by words from the Yoruba- English bilingual undergraduates' spoken data.

Methodology

Sample

The study area for this research covers the two university campuses within the Ibadan metropolis of Oyo state Nigeria, University of Ibadan and Lead City University respectively. This rationale for this is because undergraduates are most affected by culture, psychological, communicative necessity, and religious motivations which could give rise to semantic change. Semantic change amongst undergraduates adolescence is generally seen as a social locus for various types of linguistic innovation and change. Kotsinas (1997).

Neuland (1994) observed that the influence of adolescent speech on the entire speech community is highest with regard to the lexicons which eventually bring dramatic change to the meanings the entire community ascribe to such words.

Research Tool

A self-constructed questionnaire named *Questionnaire on Semantic Change and Word Use by Yoruba- English Bilingual Undergraduates (QSCWUYBU)* was administered to a crop of 100 Yoruba-English bilingual undergraduates drawn from the two universities. Sections A and B of the questionnaire elicited information on department, age, familiarity, frequency of use of abbreviation words with extended meanings. Sections C elicited response to questions bordering on rationale/ motivations for semantic change. The last section requested respondents to write out some words with extended meaning they use when conversing. A descriptive statistics of frequency counts and simple percentage was used for the data analysis. In analysing the types of

semantic change, the data was reviewed with the Blank's principles of similarity, contiguity and contrast for change to determine the type and metaphorical bridge to identify the motivation vis-a- vis the types identified.

To validate the questionnaire, the questionnaire was given to an expert in Sociolinguistics to assess its suitability. A trial administration was also done on 25 respondents that were not part of the sample. An SPSS analysis was thereafter done on the responses which yielded an 81.2 cronbach alpha.

Findings and Discussion

96 questionnaire copies were retrieved with respondents comprising 57 females and 39 males, 20% of which were from the sciences while 14% and 62% were from the faculties of Arts and Social-Sciences respectively. The age range of the respondents fell at 35%43% and 33% for ages 15-25 yrs., 21-25yrs and 26 -35 yrs. respectively. All the respondents are from the Yoruba language speaking tribes s this was a prerequisite for filling the questionnaire.

Answering the Research Questions

Research Question 1: Is semantic change a common phenomenon amongst Yoruba- English Bilingual undergraduates?

Attempting to answer research question 1, respondents were asked two questions using a Yes or No scale if they were familiar that some words are used with extended meaning over their original meanings and second, if they think undergraduates favour the use of words with extended meaning when they converse.

Charts 1&2: Quantitative representation of the respondent's assessments rate of familiarity with semantic change and undergraduate's use of words with extended meaning

As shown in chart 1, 97% of the respondents affirmed that they are familiar with semantic change. This shows that semantic change is arguably not a strange concept amongst undergraduates as only 3% responded in the negative. Reinforcing this, the respondents were also asked if they affirm or refute that undergraduates favour the use of words with extended meanings.

84% of the respondents affirmed that during conversations, undergraduates favour the use of words with extended meaning while 16% answered in the negative. The findings here reveal that language is not static (Weinz, 2011), making creativity in language a common as well as normal occurrence helping to build the linguistic capacity of such a language (Thomas & Wareing, 1999). Furthermore, this finding shows that semantic change is prevalent and accommodated amongst the social group of the society under study-the undergraduates as the respondents were not only familiar with the concepts but also agree to the use of words that have undergone some form of semantic change accommodating the new meaning during their conversations.

Research Question 2: What is the frequency of the use of words with extended meanings?

Having established that the respondents were both familiar with and favour the use of words that have undergone some form of semantic change, to answer this question, respondents were asked how often they witness the use of words that have undergone some form of semantic change when they converse with fellow students and how often they use such words too when they converse with others.

Chart 3, Table 1: Quantitative representation of the respondent's assessments of frequency of contact with words with extended meanings

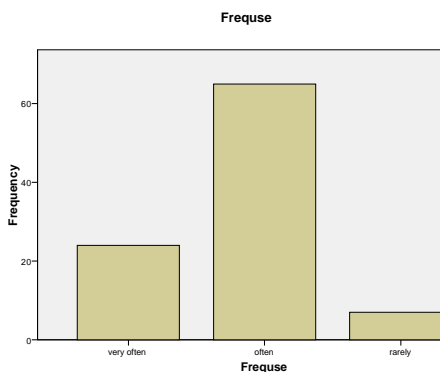


Table 1 Frequency of use of words with extended meanings

Scale	Frequency	Percentage
Very Often	24	25%
Often	65	68%
Rarely	7	7.3%
Total	96	100.0

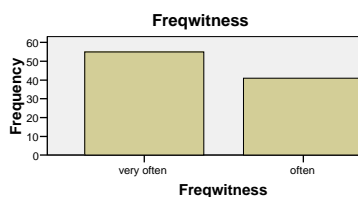


Table 2 Frequency of contact with words with extended meanings

Scale	Frequency	Percentage
Very Often	55	57.3%
Often	41	42.7%
Total	96	100.0

Chart 4, Table 2: Quantitative representation of the respondent's assessments of frequency of contact with words with extended meanings

Tables 2 and 3 above analyse the response to the frequency of use words with extended meanings by respondents and the frequency of occurrence/contact of words with extended meaning during conversations with others. 89(93%) of the respondents affirmed that they use words with extended meanings very often or often when they converse while 7(7%) responded otherwise. When asked how often other undergraduates make use of words that have undergone semantic change when conversing with others, all 96 respondents (100%) very often and often. We can therefore safely infer from the foregoing that all undergraduates make use of words with extended meaning when conversing.

Furthermore, the findings also infer that the reality and frequency of use of words with semantic change shows that it must be borne of communicative necessity hence the motivations and types of such words must be diverse based on the principle highlighted in Blank's metaphorical bridge, which has on one side a motivation (communicative necessity) and on the other, a creative innovation (semantic change).

Language use amongst undergraduates has therefore undergone a re-adjustment, incorporating extra-linguistics features to increase the communicative effectiveness. It is therefore a product of social interaction which has undergone a process of semantic change to accommodate and encourage meaning change Keller, (1994). The social and creative characteristics of language are thereby reinforced.

Research question 3: What are the motivations/ rationale for such semantic change?

Table 3: Quantitative representation of the respondent's assessments of the motivations/ rationale for semantic change

Reason Given	Agreed	Disagreed	Total
The use of words with extended meaning is favoured by undergraduates because it is socially acceptable norm	94(98%)	2(2.1%)	96
The use of words with extended meaning has become a communicative necessity to recapture new meanings	96(100%)	0(0%)	96
The use of words with extended meaning is favoured by undergraduates because it trendier or in vogue.	27(28 %)	69(72%)	96
The educational background of speakers also influences the new meaning given to words.	74(77.1%)	22(22.9%)	96
The socio-cultural background of speakers also influences the new meaning given to words	93(96.9%)	3(3.12%)	96
Speakers always decode meanings of extended words by colleagues	96(100%)	0(0%)	96
Extended meanings better communicates			

intended meaning	88(91.7%)	8(8.3)	96
Extended meanings makes words covert and less direct	94(98%)	2(2.1%)	96
Total	662(86%)	106(14%)	100%

Table 3 shows the quantitative representation of the respondent's assessments of the motivations/ rationale for semantic change. 98% of the responded agreed that words with extended meaning are favoured by undergraduates because it's socially accepted and has come to be a norm occurring frequently in language. All the respondents (100%) agreed that the use of words with extended meaning has become a communicative necessity to recapture new meanings. 26% of the responded agreed to the fact that they use words with extended meanings because it a trendy vogue amongst undergraduates while a larger number, 72% disagreed with this reason as a motivating factor for using words that have undergone semantic change. Most of the respondents (77%, & 97%) also agreed that educational backgrounds and the socio-cultural background of the speakers influence the new meanings given to words while only 23% & 3% respectively disagreed. All the respondents (100%) agreed that speakers always understand the new meanings given to words and most (92%), agree that extended meaning communicates the intended meaning more efficiently than the old meanings.

Research question 3 reviews the motivations/ rationale for semantic change and use amongst the respondents. To answer this we shall use Blank's (1997, 1999a) list of motives of semantic change where he identified the linguistic, psychological, sociocultural and cultural/ encyclopedic forces.

The findings here have shown that a linguistic force is a motive for using words with extended meaning amongst undergraduates. 72% agreed that use of words with extended meaning is borne out of a communicative necessity to recapture new meanings or a new phenomenon and 92% of the respondents also agreed that when conversing, words that have undergone semantic change better communicates intended meaning. Semantic change therefore is used to achieve what Blank describes as speakers expressivity and efficiency, a situation whereby speakers "talk in order to get something done and

verbalise newly introduced or differently perceived concepts or give a new stylistic use to an already existing word Geeraets (1997).

Next is sociocultural motivation for semantic change which Blank also refers to as the general motivations of semantic change. The important element here is the social group of the users which could influence the extended meaning given and widely used or the trends in social change. The study group here, that is the undergraduates form a social group related by social class and educational background. The findings here attest to this as 77% and 97% of the respondents attest to the fact that the educational and the socio-cultural background of speakers respectively influences to a very large extent the new meanings given to word. The sociocultural factors which group by Blank as general conditions for semantic change also accommodates new trends in living, historical or material culture of the undergraduates which reflects could hamper how the old meaning fails to communicate the sociocultural world view.

Blank also mentions that psychology plays a huge role in motivating semantic change. The findings of this study attest to this as the respondents agreed use of words with different meanings to accommodate the social and linguistic change of speakers has gained acceptance because it is socially acceptable norm(98%) frequently used(97%) by undergraduates.

They however disagreed that it is done because it's a vogue or trendy (72%) reinforcing that it is both borne more out of linguistic necessity, psychological attachment to a social group rather than a fashionable activity or aesthetics.

Lastly, blank identified the cultural or encyclopaedic motivation also referred to as specific motivations for concrete innovations for semantic change. Here, meaning is changed to accommodate the new or modified view of the world which could be a change in perspective, belief system religion, education etc. The respondents attest (97%) that semantic change enables them to speak more discreetly and modestly in other

words, euphemistically and metaphorically while still communicating intended meaning easily understood by other undergraduates (96%).

Research Question 4: What types of semantic change frequently occur amongst them?

Here exposition will be done on words that have undergone some form of semantic change which the respondents gave

Table 4: Analysis of words with extended meaning

Word/ expression	Old meaning	New Meaning	Motivation	Principle	Type
Isu	Yam	sex/money	Cultural/encyclopedic	Contrast	Expansion
Jabo	Fall off	Highlight/ talk active/boastful	Sociocultural	Metaphor	Expansion
Alata	Pepper seller	Illiterate/ Lousy	Sociocultural	Metaphor	Deterioration
Fo je	Crack open	Disappoint	Sociocultural	Contrast	Expansion
Onimoto	Transporter	Hooligan	Sociocultural	Metaphor	Deterioration
Koboko	Whip	Sex	Contrast	Contrast	Expansion
Gboju	Look away	Pardon/ignore	Linguistic	Metonymy	Expansion
Oloso	Wizard	Prostitute	psychological	contrast	Deterioration
Jasi	Fall in	Sociable	Linguistic	Metonymy	Expansion
Pako	Plank	Uncultured	Linguistic	Metaphor	Expansion
Omo nla	Fat	Extremist	Cultural/encyclopedic	Metonymy	Expansion
Wole	Enter	Impregnate	Cultural/encyclopedic	Contrast	Expansion
Fatai	Male name	Failure	Linguistic	Metonymy	Deterioration
Solo	Male name	Fool	Cultural/encyclopedic	Contrast	Deterioration
Igbira	Yoruba tribe	Numskull	Cultural/encyclopedic	Metonymy	Deterioration
Gobe	Unwise	Trouble	Linguistic	Contrast	Expansion
Igboro	Town	popular	Cultural/encyclopaedic	Contrast	
Omo ita	Hooligan	Prostitute	Sociocultural/linguistic	Contrast	Expansion
Ojo	Day	Police	Linguistic	Contrast	Expansion
Awo	Leather	Sex	Cultural/encyclopedic	Metaphor	Expansion
Elebolo	Vegetable seller	Sex worker	Sociocultural	Contrast	Expansion
Egun	Masquerade	Cheat	Sociocultural	Metaphor	Expansion
Omo	Baby	Pretty Lady	Psychological	Metaphor	Amelioration

From table 4, we see that change in the meaning of the Yoruba words are motivated by linguistic, sociocultural, psychological and cultural/encyclopedic forces underlined by the principles of metaphorization, metonymization and contrast.

The words *isu*, *koboko* and *awo* (yam, whip, and leather) have their semantic change motivated by sociocultural factors. The reason for this

is because sex is regarded as a social unmentionable hence a semantic extension of already existing words that are 'neutral' or in contrast to mean sex/love-making amongst undergraduates who consider it a little inappropriate to act directly using the original word *do*. The motivational force here is sociocultural underlined by the principle of contrast.

Other examples under this category are the words *elebolo*, *omo ita*, and *oloso* (vegetable seller, hooligan and wizard). The meanings of these words are changed to mean prostitute. The reason for this is because it is not particularly fancy to be referred to, identified with or described as a prostitute being social taboo. Also, the expressing the meaning of the word impregnate, (*fun loyun*), the undergraduates extends the meaning of the word *enter* (*wole*) to accommodate this meaning as well. The undergraduate therefore employ the use other euphemistic approach to referring to prostitutes without string up the undesirable reaction of saying the word prostitute or impregnate by subjecting other words to semantic change.

Meanings were also changed underlined by the principle of metaphorization. Here the physical and social characteristics of a word are used in changing its meaning. For instance, words like *alata* and *onimoto* (pepper seller, transporter) are used in the sense of the behavioural characteristics and the social class attached to such trade who usually are the illiterate, uncultured members of the lower class who exhibits habits of lousiness and toggery. This forms the motivating force hence anyone who exhibits such mannerism if male is referred to as *onimoto*, and if female, *alata*.

The expression *gboju* (look away) and *jasi* (fall in) are examples of words whose meanings were changed based on the principle metonymization. Meaning is extended here based on the relatedness of the old meanings to the new meaning it is made to accommodate (ignore, sociable).

Conclusion

This study has revealed that semantic change is common phenomenon amongst Yoruba-English bilingual undergraduates and enjoys wide

acceptance. Borne more out of a communicative necessity than aesthetic reasons, it helps in broadening of the vocabulary by giving new meanings to old words. The new meaning however could expand deteriorate, ameliorate or restrict the old meanings.

The findings also reinforce Blank's principles of contiguity, similarity and contrast as a major determining factor which underline semantic change of the words. Semantic change is also found to be motivated by linguistic, psychological, sociocultural and encyclopedic forces.

Also, semantic change is influenced more by extralinguistic causes like education, sociocultural background, economic and social factors rather than the linguistic factors. However, the new meaning eventually takes its place in the linguistic use of other members of the society.

It is safe to infer therefore that semantic change is motivated by speaker's sociocultural background, linguistic needs, and crave for more expressivity and efficiency, underlined by the principles of contiguity, similarity and contrast leading to a linguistic innovation.

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