A Lexico-Semantic Description of Polysemy in the Hausa Verb BÚGÀ (to hit)

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Abstract

This paper study the lexico-semantic description of polysemy associated with the Hausa verb *bùgà* 'to hit'. Polysemy is a prominent feature of Hausa, whereby a single lexical item may develop several related meanings across different linguistic and contextual environments. The study aims to identify, describe, and analyse the different lexico-semantic senses and interpretations of *bùgà* in Hausa. It adopts a descriptive approach within the framework of lexical semantics. Data were drawn from natural speech, textual sources, Hausa dictionaries, and native-speaker intuition. This study examines the role of verb *bùgà* in Hausa compound formation, particularly in structures involving Verb + Noun. The *bùgà* morpheme is lexicalised, functioning as an integrated lexical unit whose meaning may extend beyond the literal meanings. For example, *bùgà* 'to hit' + *ƙàsà* 'ground' in *bùgà ƙàsà* 'forecast /prophecy'**.** The findings indicate that the semantic productivity of *bùgà* reflects not only morphological processes but also the creative and pragmatic resources through which Hausa accommodates and expresses diverse concepts. Furthermore, the study identifies fourteen major polysemy senses associated with the verb *bùgà* and its related grade 7 form *bùgù*. These senses include the expression of praise or epithet, excessiveness, poisoning, sudden illness, elegance, dilemma, defect or flaw, sudden departure or take-off, darkness, intensity, wise or purposeful inquiry, linguistic efficacy, and damage. Finally, the study found that the polysemy of *bùgà* demonstrates the semantic richness and flexibility of Hausa and provides evidence of the important role of contextual, pragmatic, and lexical processes in the development and interpretation of meaning.

Keywords: Hausa, polysemy, *bùgà,* lexico-semantics, Morpheme and compound formation,

1.0 Introduction

In every language, verbs play a significant role in sentence formation, and it also in conveying meaning. A verb is the core element in sentence structure of some languages like Fulfulde have a serial verb construction where by a sentence can be formed by two or more verbs only and be grammatically correct. Abubakar (1999:4) reveals that in order to describe the structure of Hausa verbs, one could easily appeal to the grade system. He stressed that, in Hausa are inflected in terms of tense, or aspect of meaning based on the verbal grade system. Likewise, language derives some of its nouns and adjectives from certain verbs. The nouns derived from verbs are referred to as verbal nouns, or verbonominals or gerunds.

Language is inherently flexible, and one of the clearest signs of this flexibility is the ability of a single word to express multiple meanings. In Hausa, the verb '*buga'* illustrates this phenomenon well. In its most basic use, '*buga'* means 'to hit, strike, or beat' as in: ya buga ƙofa, 'he hit the door'. However, the verb appears in wide range of other contexts that do not involve physical impact. Speakers use buga in expresions such as in: ya buga sammako, 'he promptly takes up morning" etc.

This spread of meaning raises important questions for linguistic description. How many senses does *buga* actually have? Are these senses related, or should they be treated as separate words that happen to share the same form? The present study addresses these questions through polysemous analysis of *buga*. The paper aims to document the major senses of *buga* as used in contemporary Hausa, and describe the semantic relationships among these senses. The analysis is based on data drawn from natural speech, written texts, and dictionaries, with attention to how context determines interpretation.

2.0 The concept of polysemy

Polysemy is the linguistic term for the situation in which a single word has two or more distinct but related meanings. It is a common feature of natural languages, however, it differs from homonymy, even though in a language homonymy and polysemy may have the same form by coincidence but unrelated meanings. For example, the English word, 'bank' is homonymous when it refers to 'side of a river', and a 'financial institution', because the meanings are not historically or conceptually related. By contrast, the word, mouth is polysemous because its senses- 'part of the face', 'opening of a river',' entrance of a cave' are all related through the idea of an opening.

Verbal polysemy, a phenomenon where a verb exhibits multiple related meanings is a fascinating aspect of language study. In Hausa, a Chadic language, spoken in West Africa, verbs often carry rich semantic loads making them prime candidates for polysemous analysis. This study focuses on the Hausa verb 'buga' (hit**)**, examining its various meanings in the semantic relationship between them. For instance, 'buga' can mean 'to hit someone' or 'to beat drum' or 'to play a musical instrument'. Through a qualitative analysis of 'buga', this research aims to contribute to the understanding of verbal polysemy in Hausa, shedding light on the language structure and usage patterns.

3.0 The Concept of Hausa Verb

Parsons (1960, 1962) devises a system of Hausa verb classification which has become the frame of reference for all Hausa scholars. The system grouped the verbs into seven grades, the grades refer to the pattern of tones and final vowel which the verb carries.

Parsons (1960, 1962) establishes the structure of Hausa regular verb comprising of two morphological fragments, namely, the verb base, and grade element. This morphological analysis

forms the basis of the categorization of the Hausa verb into two types: regular and irregular verb types. Thus, the Hausa regular verb is one which conforms to the bi-morphemic structure advocated by Parsons, i.e. comprising a verb base and a grade element, and also capable of operating one or more of the seven morphologically determined grades of the Hausa verb. An irregular Hausa verb is one which does not confront to the bi-morphemic structure.

The terminal vowel and the tone pattern constitute the *grade,* and there are seven such grades. Thus, a verb stem may select and merge with any of the seven grades. However, the verb bases do not combine with every grade; they are restricted as to what grades they should operate.

4.0 Data Analysis

Verbs in general serve as nucleus of grammatical sentences in our languages. Thus, in Hausa, the verb "búgà" specifically serve a range of reasonable dimensions of meaning depending on the speaker's intent. The verb "búgà" form takes different grades depending on the context or speaker's locutionary expression. The data for this study are selected from the electric media, print media and literary works as well as unobtrusive medium. An analysis subsequently gives idea about possible diverse realizations of the verb *buga* in Hausa.

4.1 The realization of *buga* as a compound Morpheme

Despite the fact that this paper treats mainly the semantic perspective, notwithstanding, we recognize worthy to reckon the function of *buga* from the morphological perspective. Here we study the lexical aspect of compounding. Compounding is a branch of lexical morphology concerned primarily with the concatenation of two or more words, (stems/roots, elements), to form another word which could be simple or complex. Compound word is made up of two or more concatenated words which function as a unit. The process through which these words are formed

together as a unit can be described as compound formation. Hausa compound formations are formed by joining together two or more words, stems/roots functioning as a lexical unit (as obtained in other languages). However, the compound formation process varies according to various language types which some are language specific (c.f Allen 1978, Lieber 1980, Selkirk 1981).There are several definitions of compounds by scholars from different linguistic points of view. Crystal (1985:63) defines compound as "a term used in descriptive linguistics to refer to a linguistic unit which is composed of elements that function independently in other circumstances." Pinchuck (1977:93) as quoted in Bulakarima and Shettima (2012:63) defines compounding as: *new words formed by combining two independent words to create a new word that functions as a single word.* Car (1939) in Ahmad (1994:4) defines compound as "a combination of two or more independent words into a higher word unit, e.g *bluebird* is a compound for it consists of blue and bird." Hartman and Stork (1972) quoted in Abdulmumin (2012:107), defines compound word "as the combination of two or more nouns joined to form compound, e.g typewriter, apple- tree" He also mentioned that "other parts of speech may also occur in compound, e.g flyover, nevertheless, blue-eyed, overtake, as counterparts by means of different stress patterns, e.g White house, as opposed to white house".Moreover, a major feature of a compound word that it is used and considered as a single word or phrase conveying one meaning. Although, no matter the number of words that are combined to form a compound word, it is often seen and taken as one word expressing single meaning or thought. In addition, Abdulmumin (2012:111) views Hausa compounds structure in the followings:

> "The orthography of Hausa compounds, the use of hyphen between the words forming a compound or phrase unites the words together to appear as single indivisible unit of speech". He also points that, "a desirable semantic feature of the compound word in Hausa

is that it should be written with hyphen between the words". In any case if a compound word appears without a hyphen it will merely be a combination of words forming phrase, clause or just idiomatic expression without a compounded sense".

Therefore, the use of hyphen between compound words serves purpose of conjugation between words to appear with one meaning, or for the purpose of sporadiness of action, plurality, or indicating a partial meaning (in case of adjectives) or intensity.

Ahmad (1994:15) mention that among the features of which makes compounds resemble simple words is that compounds are often lexicalized, i.e assigned some specialized meaning. He added that Spencer (1991:312) asserted that compounds are often subject to semantic change that is usually associated with stored words through this semantic change. The meanings of compounds become non-compositional. Similarly, points some lexical restrictions that operate on compounds and which often result on paradigmatic gaps. He further asserted that the compound *penknife* for instance, does not have any relationships with pens, although, it originally referred to 'a knife for cutting pens'.

4.2 The use of ***buga*** **in the formation of Hausa compounds**

The verb *bùgà* is used in the formation of certain compound categories in Hausa. It serves as the left most item with Verb +Noun or Verb +Verb structure in which the compounded morphemes become lexicalized, their meaning can be interpreted from the two morphemes which function as indivisible entity. Here are some few examples;

	Verb	**+**	**Noun**		**Gloss**
1. a.	buga	+	ƙasa	buga ƙasa	forecast /prophecy

b. buga + hatimi buga hatimi to stamp

c. buga + jarida buga jarida newspaper printing

d. buga + waya buga waya make a phone call

e. buga + shiga buga shiga wonderful out-fit

f. buga + ihu buga ihu to make amazing sound

The above examples show the verb *bùgà* serves an important element in Hausa compounds. Compound formation in Hausa are not only viewed as morphological entities, however, they are package of innate Hausa intellectual competence and pragmatism in which the language accommodate linguistic benevolence.

4.2 The Polysemous description of the verb *buga*

Mostly, Hausa verb 'buga' manifest itself with several meanings in semaciological way in different Hausa expressions with different polysemos interpretations. This is attributed to the rich ness and flexibility of the language in the field of lexico-semantic expansion and native speaker's linguistic efficacy as described below.

4.2.1 Item describing epithet/praise

The grade 7 form of verb *buga* i.e *bùgú* is used freely to convey praise expressions orally or in literary context to connote self-praise or epithet. Daba (2002/2003:118) state that epithet as "a descriptive word or phrase occurring in place of the name of a person used as a form of address, it evaluates and describes the character or the attributes of the addressee. It may also express love, appreciation generosity among others". Here are some examples;

2. a. Sai nii *baƙin bugu* na Binta ta Gwale.

"I am the only one undefeatable, lover to Binta of Gwale"

The above epithet describes a kind of self-praise, in which the speaker uses the grade 7 form of verb *bùgú* in order to flatter himself. Although, the verb can also be used as a praise or epithet which may be proverbial, wise saying or truism for example;

b. Laadi buga duniya kwanar Ɗangora

Laadi extra wise (of) Kwanar Ɗangoora (town).

Equally, the late Narambaɗa uses the same form of the verb *bùgú* "beating" in a praise of Sir Ahmadu Bello as quoted in Daba (2012/2013:121) as follows:

Gohe mai raba kaya,

jikan mujaddadi, ɗan Iro qashin ***bugun*** qashi

ya ci maza ya kwan yana shirye

Gam-da-aren Sarkin kudu Ali.

"You surpass all, the generous,

Grandson of the reformer, the son of Iro, the defeater of the brave ones,

He conquered men, he is always prepared,

Gam-da-are, the Emir of Kudu, Ali is your associate".

The examples given above identifies the functional phase of the grade 7 form of the verb praising late Sir Ahmadu Bello.

4.2.2 The use of *buga* to describe excessiveness

A language speaker usually displays a serious or excessive reasoning through the use of special terms. Hitherto, most Hausa speakers employ *bùgà* to express excessive episode. Consider the following examples;

3. a. *buga* shari'a 'endless court case'

   b. *buga* allura 'a glut injection to someone'

   c. *buga* asaaraa 'great loss'

The above examples 3a-3c above illustrate the use of the verb *buga* to express excessiveness of action in daily conversations with a high degree in order to connote what the speaker expresses in mind in favor of excessiveness in a discourse or spoken form.

4.2.3 The use of *buga* to describe poisoning

The verb is customary employed to describe an act of illegal poisoning. Therefore, it is used to describe illicit act of poisoning someone using powder substance or the like. Also, it connotes the way in which one is either, arrested or defeated in a discourse or contextual argument. Here are few examples;

4. a. An *buga* wa Talle hooda jiya da dare "Talle has been poisoned yesterday night"

   b. Barawon ya tsere da motar bayan ya *buga* wa matukin hoda. "The thief escaped with the car after he poisoned the driver"

4.2.4 The use of *buga* to describe sudden illness

In this category, the grade 4 form of the verb i.e *búgè* is often used to describe a serious illness struck an individual or more people in a formal usage or in literature. The expression is normally in present or past tense. For example;

5. a. Zazzaɓi mai zafi ya *buge* Tanko jiya da maraice. "high fever struck Tanko yesterday evening"

b.. Zazzaɓi yana yawan buge jama'a da farkon bazara " high fever struck people during early summer frequently ".

The above examples show the grade 4 form of the verb is used to suggest an impulsive illness. Moreover, the normal use of the expression also depicts the speaker's elocutionary act in normal speech.

4.2.5 The use of *buga* to describe elegance

Fashionable design of different kind of brocade materials of different varieties gives pleasure and admirations to both male and female in our society. This is attributed to esteemed or charismatic individuals. In this regard *buga shadda* succinctly portrays the feature of individual who deserve such elegance for the kind of brocade outfit for competition or pleasure. Consider these examples:

6. a. Talaatu 'yar buga shadda 'Talatu one with the high quality brocade wears'

b. .Angon yaa buga shadda 'yar ubansu 'The groom wears extreme high class brocade'

The above examples express the role of the verb *buga* to designate classiness or elegance of individual in context.

4.2.6 **The use of *buga* to describe cheating**

In recent times, it is observed that some people intend to cheat at all cost in almost all aspects of life which usually results to crime. This involves daily activities, business transactions, trade, goods manufacturing, giving fake currencies, selling of fake goods at the cost of good ones like cars, clothes, jewelries, sacks of grains etc. It is done at the cost qualitative products by people concerned with absurd character who cheat at all cost.

Equally, cheating is also found in the case of marriages, where males are sometimes cheated by marrying widows at the cost of virgins. Therefore, the act of cheating wisely in this situation is associated with the verb *buga*. Here are some examples.

7. a. Ali yaa buga wa Mato gwanjon mota "Ali sold forged second hand car to Mato"

   b. Mati ya ki yarda a buga masa kuɗin jabu. " Haru reject collecting counterfeit money to avoid being indignant"

   c. Yi hankali da auren yar birni kada a buga maka. "You should be careful when selecting wife from city so as to avoid getting resentful"

The examples above show that the verb *buga* is used to describe a covert statement in a context implied by a speaker.

4.2.7 The use of *buga* to express dilemma

Usually, most people plunge into yawning or placing the head to rest over hand when they fall into stress or serious confusion. This kind of dilemma portrayed by the speakers locution through the use of these terms: *buga tagumi* or *buga hamma*. Consider the following examples;

a. Delu ta buga tagumi "Delu pitifully rested her chin on her palm"

b. Mati yana buga hamma a cikin taro "Mati gives big yawn in public"

4.2.8 The use of *buga* to express flaw

Hausa speakers perceive the illocutionary facet of making fault in covert or overt statements. This incidence is usually followed by immediate outsmart in a wise manner. This occurrence is referred to *buga kwano* or *buga garwa*. For example;

a. Tukur ya buga garwa bai sani ba. "Tukur gaffed unknowing he has committed an error"

b. Da saurayin ya buga garwa sai ya wayance. "When the boyfriend, got to know he gaffed, he tried to switch the subject"

4.2.9 The use of *buga* to connote prompt take off

Most people take off at dawn in the intent to meet up early commitments. Thus, prompt take off in a context or isolation is referred to *buga sammako.* The semantic connotation that relates *buga* 'beat' and *sammako* 'early take off depict the perseverance of the person involved. Here are few examples;

a. Ma'aikatan bankuna suna buga sammako "Bankers take off promptly in the morning'

b. Dalibi yaa buga sammako don zuwa makaranta 'The student takes off promptly in the morning to go to school'

4.2.10 The use of *buga* to express darken

Hausa speakers employ *buga* in order to express certain actions by amplification in order to capture the speaker's eloquence and expression of surprise in both formal and colloquial contexts. For example;

a. Jaki yana buga tutsu "The donkey is misbehaving"

b. Makwarwa ta buga gwauron tashi "The bush fowl makes a wonderful fly away"

4.2.10 The use of *buga* to describe intensity

In Hausa, *buga* ankwa and *buga* maríí are used collocate indefinite arrest of a suspect when the suspect happens to be accused or innocent or just dogged in a misconceived case or affair. Yet this collocation is only used among speakers or in a discourse to express commitment of action. For example,

a. Ba tare da ɓata lokaci ba, jami'an tsaro suka buga mata ankwa. "The security men immediately handcuffed her"

b. An buga masa *mari* aka saka shi a turu.

4.2.11 The use of buga to describe boredom

The verbal collocates in this group are mostly placed as magnification in a discourse, on the other side; they are distinctively employed to express certain level of intensity or emphasis among speakers or in a discourse. Here are some few examples:

a. Suna ta *buga caca*, 'They engage in a surpass gambling'

b. Ma'aikatan banki suna kai har dare suna *buga lissafi* 'Bankers stay up till down to work seriously to balance their accounts'

c. buga sharia ‘a surpass court case’

d.. Yau Haladu ya buga aiki a gona “Haladu worked diligently on the farm today’’.

e.. Leburori suna ta buga aiki har cikin dare. “The laborers work diligently till night time”

4.2.12 The use of *buga* to describe wise inquiry

Usually, when there are certain facts or information under investigation of critical inquiry, the principal investigator take a wise inquiry through careful or planned conversation with a suspect or someone who can reveal the facts. This is technically referred to *buga ciki* ‘beat stomach’ in a discussion.

4.2.13 The use of *buga* to describe language efficacy

In Hausa society, it is technically conventional to collocate buga with efficient ability to speak English language as a second language by someone with English as L2 or further language. This is can be displayed in a discourse or among individuals to mark ability to speak fluent English. For example;

Tanko yana buga turanci da Mr. Stephen “Tanko speaks fluent English with Mr. Stephen.”

However, it has been noted that apart from English language, the ability to speak other languages diligently as a second language is not same with the verb *buga*. For instance, in the case of speaking fluent Fulfulde, the Hausas collocate it to other verb i.e “yaaraawa”, Thus, buga and yaarawa are in free variation in terms of usage as in. In this case it is noted that the item *yaar-a* isa deverbal item derived from *yaaree* meaning ethnic group in Hausa e.g

Sun iya yaara fillanci “They speak Fulfulde fluently”.

4.2.14 The use of *buga* to describe damage

This category shows the lexical function of the tone where by the change of the tone brings about a change in meaning. Thus, *bùga*áa is often used to describe a contaminated food, meat or fruits of any kind that get spoiled. However, it is syntactically conditioned where the speaker condemns certain food items. The verb is pronounced with a high tone on the second syllable. For example;

a. Tumaturin yaa bug*áá*. *"The tomatoes went bad"*

b. Abincin yaa bug*áá* "The food went bad"

The examples above are concerned with the lexical function of tone which change the meaning of the statement.

4.2.15 The use of *buga* to describe internal injury

Sometimes victims of accident are compelled to die without any physical injury, or some of them may escape unhurt, but eventually collapse as a result of internal injury. This accident is portrayed as bugun cikíí (lit. internal hurt) in the literature or conversational situation. By implication bugun cikíí refers to internal injury either in context or in isolation. For example;

(a). Ya samu bugun cikíí "he had an internal injury"

(b). Bugun cikíí yana saurin kisa "internal injury result to sudden death"

The above examples show that the verb can be used to describe a serious internal injury.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has demonstrated that the Hausa verb *bùgà* 'to hit' is a highly productive and semantically versatile lexical item whose meanings extend considerably beyond its basic physical sense. Through a descriptive lexico-semantic analysis, the study identified fourteen major polysemous senses associated with *bùgà* and its related grade 7 form *bùgù*. These senses illustrate how the verb is used to express a wide range of concepts, including praise or epithet, excessiveness, poisoning, sudden illness, elegance, dilemma, defect, sudden departure, darkness, intensity, purposeful inquiry, linguistic efficacy and damage.

The analysis also shows that *bùgà* plays an important role in Hausa compound formation, particularly in Verb + Noun constructions. In such constructions, the verb may become lexicalised, and the resulting expression may acquire a meaning that cannot be derived directly from the literal meanings of its individual components, This demonstrates the interaction between lexicalisation, morphology, context and pragmatic interpretation in the development of Hausa vocabulary.

Finally, the polysemy of *bùgà* provides significant evidence of the semantic richness, flexibility, and creativity of the Hausa language. Its diverse meanings demonstrate that lexical interpretation in Hausa depends not only on the inherent properties of individual words but also on their grammatical environment, collocational patterns, cultural knowledge, and communicative context. The study therefore contributes to the understanding of Hausa lexical semantics and highlights the importance of further research into polysemy, lexicalisation and semantic change in Hausa.

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