

The Semantic Content of Hausa Collocation

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Abstract

This paper examines the semantic content of Hausa collocation. Collocation refers to the habitual juxtaposition of a particular word with another word with a frequency greater than chance. In other words, collocation alludes to words that generally go together, even though; it is possible to use other word combination. Some of the semantic features found in Hausa collocation include combinations that contain collocators with denotative meanings, exemplified by *Bugā }wallō*, collocators in which one is denotative the other register, exemplified by *hanīnyar dōki* and collocators in which one is denotative the other a taboo, exemplified by *}arfe gudā*.

Introduction

The task before this paper is to investigate the semantic content of Hausa collocation. The data used in the present analysis are largely collected from direct observation. The conversations of Hausa native speakers in homes, workplaces and on television were observed for weeks by the presenter with the view to gathering collocations in the language.

Collocation is a sequence or juxtaposition of words that co-occur more often than would be expected by chance. Collocation is the natural joining and set ordering of words in longer structures. Thus, collocative meaning is the meaning of a lexical item deriving from other lexical items. The collocation of lexical items in a language is based on related semantic field. Crystal (2008:87) states that collocation is:

A term used in lexicology by some (especially Firthian)

LINGUISTS to refer to the habitual co-occurrence of individual LEXICAL ITEMS. For example, *auspicious* collocates with *occasion, event, sign, etc;* and *letter* collocates with *alphabet, graphic, etc.,* on the one hand, and *postman, pillar box, etc.,* on the other.

It would be seen from the above that, a collocation is the association of two or more words that often go together. Such association just sounds right to native speaker of a language. Some words go together either because people who use the language have always put them together or because they belong to the same category of objects. It is this type of togetherness of words that is referred to as collocation. Such terms as 'crystal clear', 'fast food', 'Lion roar', 'nuclear family', 'great mistake', 'bomb blast', are examples of collocated pair of words. Many English lexemes, for example, have collocations, but some are much more predictable than others. Thus *blond* collocates with *hair*, *cock* with *crow* and *dog* with *bark*.

There are two main factors which determine the collocational range of an item: specificity and sense number. At specificity level, the more general a word is, the broader it's collocational range; the more specific it is, the more restricted its collocational range. The verb *kill*, is likely to have a much broader collocational range than any of its co-hyponyms, such as *slaughter* or *assassinate*. While it is quite appropriate to kill a person, animal or time, but it would sound awkward to slaughter a mosquito or time. At sense level, some words have several senses which tend to attract different set of collocation for every sense.

A word with a certain meaning which occurs in a collocation along with another word is often referred to as collocator. Like grammatical collocations, semantic and lexical collocations consist of groups of words with a certain meaning that often occur together, however, whereas the grammatical collocations consist of a dominant word and a function word e.g. *abide by, abstain from, adhere to*, the semantic and lexical collocations

usually consist of words having approximately equal status e.g. run a business, run a company, run an institution (Svensén, 1993).

The Semantic Content

Collocations as associations of words that become established through repeated context dependant use of terms are unlike idioms whose meaning is derived (Moon, 1998). In Hausa, a collocator for a given term can have denotative or transferred meaning. In some cases, a collocator might be a register or a taboo.

Denotative Collocation

Denotative meaning refers to the kind of meaning which describes the physical property and/or function of a referent. Denotational meaning equates roughly with literal meaning, contrasting with the subjective and personal associations of connotation (Crystal, 2008). Denotative collocation is one in which the associative collocators have denotative meaning. Example of such is provided below. Abraham (1978) is, hereby, employed in marking tones and vowel length. In Abraham (1978) long vowel is shown with line above it, low tone is marked by a line below the vowel to which it applies, high tone is unmarked and falling tone has arrow below:

Illustration 1

Collocation	Meaning
i. larīn cikī	Miscarriage
ii. Būga }wallō	Play football
iii. Jēfā }urī'ā	Cast vote
iv. Yin adō	Tog oneself up

In the above example, the collocative verbs simply describe their collocative nouns counterpart. For instance, larīn cikī portrays the spontaneous natural termination of pregnancy. Būga }wallō demonstrates the use of hands and/or feet in playing ball. Jēfā }urī'ā expresses the act of voting in an election. Yin adō describes the act of elegant dressing.

Transferred Collocation

Transferred meaning refers to the secondary meaning of a word which in some ways conveys the speakers personal feelings and emotions. Thus, it is practically the interrelation between two types of lexical meaning; dictionary and contextual meanings (Galperin, 1977). Other terms which overlap with transferred meaning are affective, expressive, emotive and connotative. A phrasal association in which one term is denotative and the other emotive is a transferred collocation. Example of transferred collocation is given underneath.

Illustration 2:

Collocation	Meaning
i. Murzā }wallō	Play football
ii. Tāshin bōm	Bomb-blast
iii. Zūrā }wallō	Score ball
iv. Jefa }wāi	Lay egg
v. Kētā sāma	Fly in the sky

Unlike denotative collocation where the collocators exhibit referential sense, collocators in transferred collocation have different behaviors. Illustration 2 above testifies to this affirmation. For instance, the word Murzā in example 1 means, to roll some thread or massage a limb in order to remove tiredness. But it's meaning

as it collocates with }wallō is *to play*. Thus Murza has acquired another meaning. Similarly, the word tāshī in example 2 literally means to be on ones feet with the body in an upright position. But its meaning as it associates with bomb is *blast*. The literal meaning of the term zūra as found in example 3 is to lower bucket into the well or to thread the bends using needle. Zūra when used with }wallō has a different meaning. Here it simply means to score ball. The word Jēfā in example 4 has its literal meaning as *to throw*. But in its present association it means *to lay*; departing from its primary meaning to throw. The word kēta in example 5 literally means to tear or split. As the word associates with sama its meaning now changes to *fly*.

Register Collocation

Register, as a term used in stylistics and sociolinguistics refers to a variety of language defined according to its use in social situations (Crystal, 2008:409). Registers are the words which people generally use when they are talking about a particular subject, job or human activity (odiaka, 2007).

Such human activities, according to Latilo and Beckley (2008) include: Photography, book publishing, journalism, fishing, sports, entertainment, etc. Collocations in which one of the collocator is a register are provided in the illustration below:

Illustration 3:

Collocation	Meaning
i. Ḥanīniyar dōki	Horse neigh
ii. Caran zakara	Cock crow
iii. Fā]ūwār dāminā	Beginning of rainy season
iv. Sāran macijī	Snake bite
v. Hayē kōgī	To cross the river

From the above illustration, the identified registers are ḥanīniya, cara, fā]ūwā, sāra and hayē. Ḥanīniya is the word that pertains to the horse, cara pertains to the cock, fā]ūwā relates to the rainy season, sāra pertains to the snake and hayē pertains to the river.

Taboo Collocation

Taboo is a cultural or religious custom that does not allow people to do, use or talk about certain things because they are considered unpleasant and calamitous (Trudgill, 1983). Certain taboo terms are calamitous because mentioning them may earn a defaulter public shame and/or banishment. Some taboo-free collocators are provided in illustration four below:

Illustration 4:

Collocation	Meaning
i. {arfē gudā	One shilling
ii. Yin hūtū	Breaking wind
iii. Gaban namiji	Man's front
iv. Gaban macē	Woman's front
v. Sun sādū	They met

In Hausa society, names of husbands, in-laws and first-born child are not mentioned because of the belief that if that is done heaven and earth will collide. As such, the woman whose husband bears the name Sulaimān, will never call one shilling (sulai gudā) but instead will say one metal (}arfē gudā).

The Hausa descent word for the breaking wind is *hūtū*. The other synonymous term *tusā* is considered as a taboo; as mere mention of it in public usually evokes shame and indecency. Similarly, the word *gāba* is considered taboo-free, and is used to refer to both male and female genital organs. *Sādu* interpreted as meet is used to refer to sexual intercourse.

Conclusion

As it has been discussed above, collocative meaning is the meaning which a word acquires in the company of certain words. Words collocate or co-occur with certain words, thus producing a natural-sounding language. Such combinations often sound ‘right’ to a native speaker who use them all the time. On the other hand, other combination may be unnatural and just sound ‘wrong’.

We can see from the examples cited in the foregone discussion that some of the features of Hausa collocations include combinations that contain collocators with denotative meanings, as in *Bugā }wallō*; collocators in which one is denotative the other a register, as in *Hañīniyar dōkī*; collocators in which one is denotative the other a taboo, as in *}arfe gudā*.

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