

The Phenomenon of Semantic Prosody and Negative Positivism: Insights from Igbo

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Abstract

*Semantic prosody involves the tendency of words to line up with either positively or negatively evaluated words. In addition, this possibility of negative or positive associations of words could be confused with the phenomenon of negative positivism, which has been established for the Igbo language by Romanus Egudu. However, despite the various advances in the study of semantic prosody in mostly European and Asian languages, there has been no attempt to study this phenomenon in the Igbo language. The purpose of the study is to examine the realization of the phenomenon of semantic prosody in the Igbo language. It relates this to cross-linguistic findings on the phenomenon, in addition to distinguishing it from the well-established phenomenon of negative positivism. Sixteen Igbo literary works constituted the corpora used for the study. The AntConC3.5.7 software was used to elicit the data as they occurred in context. The concordance lines of *mé* 'happen' was analyzed through both descriptive approach and the application of the theoretical framework of Extended Unit of Meaning-Oriented approach to demonstrate that *-mé* 'happen' displays negative evaluative meaning. In addition, extracts of negative positivism that were analyzed reveal that negative positivism differs from semantic prosody because its meaning is basically on figurative usages. On the basis of the examined data, it could be established that the phenomenon of semantic prosody exists in the Igbo language. Hence, the Igbo language confirms the view that semantic prosody is a cross-linguistic, natural phenomenon in human language. Finally, this also helps to further distinguish the phenomenon from negative positivism, which seems to be a peculiar Pan-Igbo attribute.*

Keywords: Semantic Prosody; Collocation; Multiword; Idioms; Negative Positivism

Introduction

Words share semantic relationships at various levels, revealing nuances of meanings. Negative positivism is a phenomenon which involves the use of a negative expression to express a strongly positive state, action or attribute. It is a class of idiom that is usually negative but expresses a positive sense (Egudu, 1975; Emenanjo, 2015). Semantic prosody could be easily confused with the phenomenon of negative positivism, which

Sinclair (1996) used to refer to the idea that words collocate in language use with specific semantic groups as well as with individual words. Thus “words and phrases are said to have a negative or positive semantic prosody if they typically co-occur with units that have negative or positive meaning” (McEnery and Hardie, 2012:135). The negative, positive and/or neutral polarity associated with semantic prosody arises from co-occurrence relation of words. This is so because words do change their meanings when they co-occur with other related words and acquire the meanings of the surrounding words. While some lexical items denote a positive meaning in co-occurrence relationship with other words, some others denote predominately negative meaning. However, some words cannot be inferred to have predominantly negative or positive meanings when they habitually co-occur with other lexical items.

The concept of Semantic Prosody is a linguistic phenomenon that has been established in various languages, including Asian and European languages. The phenomenon has also been examined in Igbo (Egenti, 2017). It is important to note that the study of semantic prosody springs up from the study of collocations following Firth (1957:179). Collocation, on the other hand, has to do with words that are often used together in a language. In other words, it relates to a word’s selection of neighboring words. There are some words that freely combine with other words, while some combinations are fixed, as in idioms (i.e. group of words whose meaning cannot be predicted from the meanings of the constituent words). Some other combinations are explained by semantic selectional rules, that is, rules that restrict and/or specify how words are combined in a context.

The phenomenon of semantic prosody (henceforth, SP) and negative positivism (henceforth, NP) shares similar features especially with regard to the use of negative/positive attribute associated with co-occurrence relationship of lexical items. For example, the investigation of the lexical item *cause* in some languages has given credence to the fact that *cause* has negative SP. Also, Sinclair (1991) observes that *set in* has a negative connotation because its main collocates include *rot, decay, malaise, ill-will, decadence, inflection, prejudice, vicious, rigor, mortis, numbness, bitterness, mannerism, anti-climax, anarchy*, et cetera. Likewise, on the opposite side, *career* is dominated by positive prosody. It mostly collocates with words like *satisfying, successful, good, potential, academic, teaching*, et cetera.

On the other hand, negative positivism relates to SP in terms of the use of the feature of negativity associated in its description, but NP differs from SP with regard to the negative or positive profile that is involved in SP because the meaning of word combinations in NP is fixed and cannot be predicted from the constituents as instantiated using the expression: *Obi taraamọọsunaakwukwo*. The expression which literally means ‘Obi is a wizard’,

figuratively translates to ‘Obi is very intelligent’. Therefore, there is use of a negative attribute in a positive sense in the expression. The pattern of use of this phenomenon by speakers and writers of the Igbo language is common. Although, both phenomena share some similarities with regard to their syntagmatic relations and their meanings being derived from context, they differ with regard to their meaning realizations.

It is due to this possible source of confusion of NP in relation to SP, at least superficially, arising from the polarity relations of both phenomena, and the need to clearly show how the two phenomena differ, that this study is necessitated. Hence, the use of negative positive expression to show co-occurrence relations as discussed in Egudu (1975), Emenanjo (2015) and Egenti (2018) is different from its use in semantic prosody. Thus, there is a need to provide this distinction between SP and NP which this study has set out to do. The rest of this paper goes into the following issues: section 2 discusses SP and NP and their features, section 3 compares SP and NP, while the last section forms the summary and conclusion.

An Overview of Semantic Prosody

The concept of semantic prosody is associated with Sinclair (1991) and Louw (1993). Louw, a close associate of Sinclair, publicly coined the term “semantic prosody” in his 1993 work and was developed in Sinclair’s (1996) later work in which Sinclair used the concept to refer to the idea that words collocate in language use with specific semantic groups as well as individual words. Since then, it has become one of the important concepts in corpus linguistics, and has attracted the attention of corpus linguists. The phenomenon of semantic prosody springs from studies of collocations following Firth’s (1957) theory related to prosody in phonological terms. In phonology, prosody refers to the phenomenon when preceding and following sounds define the realization of a particular phoneme. This phenomenon of ‘prosody’ is also shared by lexical items in lexical patterning. This explains why Louw (1993:170) uses the concept of prosody to argue that some expressions prepare the reader/hearer for the production of what follows, which is sometimes something unfavorable. He illustrates SP with the expression *symptomatic of* which he claims, prepares the speaker for the production of what follows; that is, something undesirable (example: *parental paralysis, management inadequacies, numerous disorder*). He therefore, concludes that the word has an unfavorable semantic prosody. Louw therefore refers to SP as a form of meaning which is established through the proximity of a consistent series of collocates, often characterizable as positive or negative. Following Berker, Hardie & McEnery (2006), therefore, this study is interested in the meaning of prosody as patterns in language that are revealed via corpus analysis (often via looking at concordances or collocations).

According to Sinclair (2003:117), “Semantics is determined by meaning and prosody because it is not only related to one word, but involves the combination of several words. Furthermore, semantic prosody is a kind of connotation coloring resulting from a given word taking on the affective meaning common to all its typical collocates (surrounding words). It is an obligatory component of the extended meaning of the lexical item (Sinclair, 2004). Liu (2020) refers to semantic prosody as the attitudinal meaning of the “extended unit” as a whole at a more abstract level. Stubbs (1996) divides semantic prosody into positive semantic prosody, negative semantic prosody and neutral semantic prosody. In positive prosody, the collocations of the node words are positive words; in neutral prosody, there are both positive words and negative words; in negative prosody, the node words always collocate with negative words (Zhao, 2017).

Studies in semantic prosody cut across Asian and European languages. Some of these studies discuss SP from different perspectives such as the diachronic (Louw, 1993; Bublitz, 1996), synchronic (Sinclair, 2003), pragmatic (Sinclair, 1996; Stubbs, 1995, 2001) and connotative terms (Whitstitt refers to Partington 1998, 2004; Hunston, 2002). However, Hunston (2007:250) agrees with Whitsitt’s observations with regard to the description and/or different perspectives of semantic prosody in what he calls “sites of disagreement”. Moreso, scholars have given definitions to the concept of SP such as ‘an ‘aura’ of meaning’ (Louw, 1993); ‘halo of meaning’, ‘transferred meaning’ (Bublitz, 1996); ‘collocational prosody’ (Louw, 2000; Stubbs, 2001); ‘evaluative intention’ (Sinclair, 1996; Stubbs, 2001); the ‘property of an item’ (Partington, 1998; Xiao & McEnery, 2006; Morley, 2007); and ‘pragmatic and attitudinal meaning’ (Sinclair, 2004). However, the definitions of SP fall into two major perspectives: functional and collocation meaning perspectives. While, the former shows how the rest of the item is to be interpreted functionally with its surroundings i.e., its attitudinal quality, an approach which is known as the extended unit of meaning (EUM) approach; the latter, refers to SP which is associated with the lexical item and how it expresses itself in patterns of co-occurrence which has been referred to as the polarity-oriented approach. In other words, since meaning does not belong to the single word alone, but to multiword items, i.e., to a unit that is larger than the word, most scholars commonly talk of SP as having an evaluative intent of the speaker, i.e., the attitude s/he has to the topic in any individual text fragment. The overall SP choice dictates the choices of phraseology and lexis. This seems to be the meeting point of all the views. They seem to agree to describe SP as one which expresses a ‘type of meaning’ following the choices and co-occurrence behavior of words that give rise to the negative, positive or neutral prosody of such words.

In discussing SP, Stubbs takes a synchronic approach, just like Sinclair, while simultaneously taking cognizance of the role of discourse. This explains why Stubbs

(2001:65), uses the concept of ‘discourse prosody’ instead of SP to refer to “relating to the way that words or phrases, often reveal (hidden) attitudes.” Example *happen* has discourse prosody for unpleasant things. His emphasis is on the attitudinal quality associated with a word, i.e., the expression of attitude of the speaker/writer towards some pragmatic situation. In his later work, Stubbs (2009) uses the term to refer to relations that involve evaluative meaning, i.e., speakers making judgments following from the lexical choices they make. Hunston (2007:257) is of the view that SP refers “not to simple co-occurrence, but to the consistent discourse function of the unit formed by a series of co-occurrences: the unit of meaning”. The ‘units of meaning’ is the cluster of words. Sinclair (1996) refers to it as the cluster of words in a text that are bound together in a way i.e., the units of meaning are somewhere between words and sentences. He calls it: “extended units of meaning” and proposes four steps or levels to identify them. These four steps constitute the Extended Unit of Meaning (EUM) approach, made popular by Sinclair (2004). Sinclair’s model of Extended Unit of Meaning (EUM), which forms the basis of analysis of semantic prosody in this study, comprises four parameters namely: (a) Collocation (the relationship between a node and individual words); (b) Colligation (the relationship between a node and grammatical categories); (c) Semantic preference (semantic sets of collocates); and (d) Semantic prosody (affective meaning). In EUM, the core and semantic prosody are obligatory categories, while collocation, colligation and semantic preference are optional ones. The core can also be called a node word. It is closely related with collocation, colligation, semantic preference and semantic prosody on lexical, grammatical, semantic and pragmatic levels respectively. In the identification of attitudinal meanings, semantic prosody plays a pivotal role.

Other recent studies such as Nakkaew’s (2020) study of semantic prosodies on pedagogy using Thai high school foreign language learners show the role of context in enhancing the collocation and semantic prosody knowledge of Thai EFL high school students in teaching and learning of vocabularies in Thai, and how corpus materials can be utilized for improving students vocabular learning. Also, in a corpus-based analysis of semantic prosody in COVID-19 corpora, Puruitarini’s (2020) study of words "suspect" and "patient" identifies the frequency of using the words 'suspect' and 'patient' in the COVID-19 corpus and the significant collocates based on the frequency score whether they are in a positive or negative sense. Using a corpus-based approach, the author found out that the word 'patient' is more widely used in scientific research on the topic of COVID-19 than the word 'suspect'. Based on the semantic prosody, the words that follow the word 'suspect' are collocating negative tendencies, while words that follow the word 'patient' have collocates with a positive tendency. Also, in an effort to ascertain whether meaning-shift can account for the behavior of Chinese intensifiers using the corpus-based

approach, Liu and Zhang (2021) demonstrate in their study that meaning-shift is influenced by the categories of co-selection, in which semantic prosody plays a decisive role. What this means is that meaning is not isolated. Another study by Liu (2021) compares semantic prosody differences between Chinese English learners and native speakers when they use the “get-passive” using the Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen and the I Write Baby Corpora. The author shows that, Chinese English learners tend to have neutral semantic prosody when using this structure, while the native speakers tend to prefer negative semantic prosody. Having discussed SP, the subsequent section explicates the features of negative positivism.

Features of Negative Positivism

Emenanjo (2015) confirms Egudu (1975) as the first to identify the phenomenon of negative-positivism as a literary feature of Igbo literary aesthetics. According to Egudu (1975), negative positivism involves the use of a negative expression to express a strongly positive state, action, or attribute. In fact, ‘positive negativity’ was designated by Egudu (1975:174) as an:

aspect of Igbo idiomatic expressions that seem to possess (sic) some extra aesthetic potentiality which makes it more imaginatively appealing than what may be called straightforward idiomatic usages in Igbo.

However, Emenanjo (2015) rather uses the term ‘Negative Positivism’ to designate the use of an expression which is patently negative to express a strongly positive state, action, or attribute. This current study, therefore, goes with Emenanjo’s use of the term ‘Negative Positivism’ and his explanation because his term clearly represents what the concept stands for. One of the features of negative positivism is that it operates on the basis of contrast/oppositional relationship with respect to the words that make them up and the literal meanings of those words. Egudu attempts a categorization of these negative expressions which are also captured in Emenanjo (2015:619). Some of the instances from Egudu (1975:175-180), with their adopted translations are presented below:

I. Excellent performance or achievement described as destructive actions:

- (1). Àda òjìrì mkpìsì akwukwò
Ada broke her pen writing (lit.)
Ada wrote extremely well (fig.)

II. A virtue or an achievement seen in terms of physical or moral defect:

- (2). Àda bú òkè òzū
Ada is a mighty corpse (lit.)
Ada is a very important/eminent person (fig.)

III. A happy situation seen in terms of a sad incident:

- (3). Akwukwò riri Àdaisī
 Book eat-rVpst Ada's head (lit.)
 Ada loves (reading) books very much. (fig.)

VI. Excellence described in terms of a wicked or evil spirit or animal:

- (4). Àda bu ajō nnunù
 Ada is a bad bird (lit.)
 Ada is very very experienced and wise (fig.)

Observe from examples (1), (2) and (4) that a negative epithet is always introduced partly for the purpose of intensifying or emphasizing the quality or virtue being praised. The juxtaposition of the negative and positive words shows the contrast/oppositional relationship. Also, some of the negative-positive expressions can have different meanings depending on the contexts. For instance, in (3), in terms of academics, the meaning could be, 'Ada is exceedingly intelligent' or 'somebody that loves reading very much'.

Egudu (1975:182-184) also points out the various dimensions and features of Igbo Negative Positive expression such as:

- They are richer in terms of aesthetic functionality which marks them out as an aspect of idiom of a special class.
- It operates on the same basis as the figurative usage, especially in respect to metaphor, personification and oxymoron. The connection between figurative usage and negative positivism is that they operate on the principle of indirection.
- Negative positivism has some elements of witticism which are naturally humorous and are handed down from generation to generation.
- It has the nature of irony especially where sarcasm or cursing is intended. Also, it differs in a way from irony especially where eulogy is involved or expressing satisfaction with a person or a situation. Hence, irony and negative-positive expression, in intention or purpose, work in opposite directions, yet resemble in some levels of meaning which contradict each other.

Following the explanations of negative positivism, one could see that it has a peculiar feature of using a negative quality, state or action to describe a positive one. This feature distinguishes it as an aspect of idiom.

Semantic Prosody and Negative Positivism: Any difference?

This section provides some instances from the corpus to show the differences between semantic prosody and negative positivism.

Like other idioms, the meaning interpretation of negative positivism is by means of figurative usage such as metaphor, personification, oxymoron and metonymy; unlike semantic prosody whose meaning is dependent on the co-occurrence relationship of words in association. Observe the figurative usages in (5) and (6) which are different from how meaning is derived in (7) and (8):

(5) Ọ riri amōōsū n' ọrụ ugboalà`

PRO eat-rV2 witchcraft PREP-repair vehicle-land

He ate witchcraft in vehicle repairs (literal)

'He is an expert in vehicle repairs' (figurative)

(6) Ọ dà-rà dimkpa ịi Egwù`

PRO fall-rV2 strong Be Fearful

He is a strong man that is very fearful (lit.)

'He is a very powerful and courageous man' (fig.)

(7) Ọ matāghī etu ihe mēreya sirimee ya`
know- come.to do

S/he NEG. how thing do-rV2 him/her him/her

'S/he did not know how what happened to her came about'

(8) a. Ihe mee mmaadi, Ọ mara ihe`
Thing do person, PRO know-rV1 thing

'When something happens to someone, he takes precaution'

b. Mānà egwù bàrà ya àhụ ubochi ahụ. *Ihe*
CONJ fear enter-rV2 him DEM day DEM. Thing

kuz
ier
mēre ya mapuru yà Obi mà e ya ihe`
teach-rV2 him
do-rV2 him jumpout-rV2 him heart CONJ thing

'...But he was frightened that day. What happened to him terrified him but also taught him a lesson'

- (9). Ġĩĩ̄ mètè? Ofunna wètè ùrā̄ chàrā̄
 òkũ̄
 What happen-rV2? Ofunna take slap ripe
 fire
 Were hichaa Nnamđi ntì
 Take clean Nnamđi ear

‘What happened? Ofunna gave Nnamdi a dirty slap’

Observe that the *mere* with the meaning ‘happen’ in (7) has the structure of an experiencer object as in a subject object switching (SOS) construction. Also, it is the expression ‘happen’ *ihe mere* that gives the meaning ‘happen’. There is a preponderance of grammatical choices like co-occurrence with the pronoun *ya* than lexical choices, while in (8a), the meaning is implicit in the sense that people usually take precaution when they have had ugly experiences. Likewise, in (8b), the surrounding words co-occurring with happen show something that is unpleasant. In (9), there is the use of question marks (?) and exclamation marks (!) to indicate the nature of what has happened. The Wh-question (how/when/what) is mostly used when the meaning of *-me* is ‘happen’. This is prevalent in the novels and has something to do with giving the verb ‘happen’ an aura of meaning that is mostly negative. It is therefore important to note generally that the lexical environment of the verb *-me* with the meaning ‘cause’ and ‘happen’ in the three novels *Oja Dufuo Dike*, *Ofunna* and *Ogbenye Nwee Ndidi* en gender feelings of *fear*, *anxiety* and *difficulty* contingent upon its semantic preferences. These meanings point to a negative semantic prosody. Also, the lexical choices associated with the meaning of ‘happen’ especially and the colligational patterns of the use of questions and exclamation marks, implied by the feeling of fear and anxiety, give an evaluative negative meaning. Also, the use of *ihe* ‘thing’ (showing lack of knowledge of what happened), especially what happened to somebody or somewhere, all contribute to the negative aura that is associated with the node. We can, therefore, deduce that *-me* with the sense ‘happen’ has a negative semantic prosody.

An additional point is that some lexical items, as instantiated with ‘happen’, have implicit meaning that is negative. For instance, the core semantics of *me* with the sense ‘happen’ is not immediately obvious since the collocates are not overtly delineated, except in few cases where it is mentioned such as *iheojoō* ‘bad thing’, *iheikē* ‘difficult thing’, *iheegwù* ‘fearful thing’, *iheoso* ‘chaos causing race’ at L1 of the node. The overtly collocates show that something bad has happened somewhere or to somebody, with the link to the

colligational patterns which are mostly nouns or prepositional phrases used to show who is affected by an incident, and the place where the event occurred. This is due to the fact that the use of the noun *ihe* ‘thing’ as grammatical subject in some cases encodes unpleasantness that is shrouded in the unstated events. Thus, the meaning of impending danger and disaster or unpleasant circumstance is implicitly stated. Also, the choice of colligational patterns such as question marks, exclamation marks, strongly link up with the node to give it a negative meaning in most of the contexts. The verb has a semantic preference for abstractness expressed by the colligational patterns when it does not have an object, but where it does; the majority of the co-occurrences with noun phrases and prepositional phrases are mostly inanimate, showing the person being affected by the misfortune and the place of occurrence. However, there are few contexts where it has a neutral meaning, especially in cases where it is used to make a statement of fact or assert a truth such as *Qihemēēēmē* ‘that is the truth/fact’.

As Egudu (1975:183) points out, all the expressions possess an element of negativity and more than a regular metaphorical expression. With regard to SP some lexical items may possess positive, negative or neutral meanings; however, a lexical item is said to have a negative SP if the collocates are predominantly negative.

(10) O	mà-rà	mma,	mabì-rì	.onū̄
3Ps	be-rV1	beauty,	cut/slide off-rV1	mouth
She has a beauty that cuts off the mouth (lit.)				
‘She is extremely beautiful’ (fig.).				

Example (10) describes as bad what is naturally good. The expression extols and portrays the natural beauty of a woman but with an element of negativity. Unlike in SP where the collocates, grammatical words and semantic preferences contribute to give a lexical item a positive, negative or neutral meaning.

The role of context is emphasized for both negative positivism and SP. In other words, to clearly understand the use of negative positivism (i.e., the meaning to be associated with it) and SP, the context of use is very necessary. On the other hand, SP can be discovered by means of corpus-based studies via Key-Word-in-Context (KWIC) displays of concordance lines which facilitate the discovery of these prosodies. However, both NP and SP share similarity with regard to context of usage.

Semantic Prosody and Negative Positivism are also similar with regard to syntagmatic relations, but Negative Positivism is usually a fixed expression with special meaning(s) different from the meaning of the component parts. Wales (2001) posits that idioms are

strings of words which are idiosyncratic in that they are specific, not easily translated from the meanings of their components. Omega (2007: 551-2) similarly concludes that, although an idiom is like a single lexeme, it does not function as one; hence, the combination of lexemes in an idiom yields some meaning different from the basic meanings of its parts. According to Omega, this explains why idiomatic expressions are difficult to translate from one language to another. An idiom can also have several meanings depending on the context of usage. For instance, *onũ idĩ nĩkõ* could mean 'convincing tongue' or 'a rude person' depending on the context. With regard to SP, the component parts contribute to the meaning of a node word. The meaning of SP is determined by the colouring of the words that collocate with the node word, which could be positive or negative. Unlike negative positivism in which it is used to express a positive one.

With regard to emotive/evaluative meaning, Negative Positivism is regarded as an imaginative device that explores more captivating imagery or engenders more powerful emotional appeal different from witticism, whereas SP can be described in relation to emotive or evaluative attitude expressed by the words surrounding a particular node word which could give it a negative, neutral or positive meaning.

Negative positivism is similar to irony in the sense that "the implied attitude or evaluations are opposed to those literally expressed, but while irony is used for satirical or sarcastic purposes, negative positivism is used to praise, commend or express satisfaction with a person or situation (Egudu 1975:183). This differs from SP which operates in a binary relationship between *irony* and *insincerity* and only the choice of irony is fully intentional (Louw 2000:9). Louw further explains that in the case of irony, there is always some well calculated collocational deviance from a SP present. It operates in ways which make our intuition move more slowly as we unravel the meaning. According to him, the process of unraveling will always contain overtones of mockery as present in Aristotelian criterion. He uses a very good example, culled from Moon (1998: 161, 256) from Bank of English to illustrate this.

(11). President Clinton fanned the flames of optimism in North Ireland

According to Louw (2000), the critical message of the writer of the above sentence is simply that the peace process which is initiated by the President is, ironically, almost as aggressive as the war it is designed to end. In essence, Louw's idea of irony in connection to SP is simply that when we recognize irony in a statement, we are intuitively recognizing that something presents a picture/image to us contrary to established norms. According to him, we recognize irony because it overrides existing primings. Partington (2004:146) also comments that "language users are able to swim against the current – can

“swift off” primings – when they seek particular creative effects”. We can, therefore, intuitively know when something runs counter to a norm, but cannot intuitively realize when we are adhering to a norm, as its semantic consistency is so ingrained in us that we cannot guarantee that we will notice. So, when we look at collocates and key-words-in-context on a concordance, we are able to pinpoint and begin to assess prosodies, and once we have found our prosodies, we can then establish whether any irony has been employed.

Summary and Conclusion

Semantic Prosody and Negative Positivism both involve syntagmatic relations. The study clearly shows that both NP and SP are different concepts. Although, they share some similarities with regard to their meanings being derived from context and syntagmatic relations, negative positivism has a fixed expression different from the meanings of its components; i.e. it is not compositional, while SP derives its meaning from the collocates that co-occur with a node word, in which the associated lexical items communicate an attitudinal, evaluative or emotional stance with regard to a particular context or scenario and its outcome (anticipated or actual). In other words, the component parts in SP contribute to the meaning of the node, giving it an evaluatively negative or positive nuance of meaning. One outstanding feature is that the meaning of negative positivism is by means of figurative usage such as metaphor, personification, oxymoron and metonymy, whereas the meaning of SP is dependent on the co-occurrence relationship of words which is considered positive, neutral or negative following the collocates. Also, negative positivism is usually characterized by oppositional relationship. The study provides instances of negative positivism from some Igbo novels which reveal the feature of negativity that is embedded in negative positivism as evident in the glossing, thereby clearly further illustrating how it differs from semantic prosody.

An additional point is that the meaning of SP can be explored through the use of a corpus tool, especially by examining the keyword-in-context (KWIC). In line with cross-linguistic findings, the study observes that *-me* with the sense ‘happen’ is found in evaluative negative contexts and this is mostly implicitly expressed. Again, the study of the lexical item *-me* as ‘happen’ also aligns with the fact that in other languages, for example in English as (Sinclair, 1991:112) observes, it is habitually associated with unpleasant events such as *accidents*, *mistakes* and so on. Therefore, using the four levels at which the co-occurrence of words (and sets of words) may be defined within the Sinclairian approach, it could be established that *-me*, with the sense ‘happen’, has the tendency to co-occur with negative words. The findings show that the collocates and the unfavorable state of affairs associated with the meaning of *-me* ‘happen’, confirm the

findings in the literature that ‘happen’ has a semantic prosody for unpleasant things following its overt and covert collocates and semantic preferences.

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