



## Verbs of Cooking and Washing in Urhobo

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**Abstract.** Cooking and washing as essential parts of human activities showcase both the language and the culture of a people. It represents features such as socialisation, identity, actions and perception of a people. This paper explored the nature of cookery terms through the lexical field analysis of the generic verbs of cooking and washing in Urhobo. Invoked in this study is a notion of semantic field as the theoretical framework. The research design adopted for this research is qualitative research. In the design, the quality of cooking stuff and the degree of heat application or none and the instruments of cooking combined to form the delimiting frame for the cooking types and the types of verbs use. The research is limited to verbs of cooking and washing that pertain to cooking such as washing of fish, meat, plates and other cooking utensils. Using a total of 50 questionnaires distributed equally among native speakers of Urhobo, the study collected data from adult speakers of the language. The data generated were subjected to semantic and syntactic examination to reveal the meaning of the vocabularies in their structure respectively. The difference and relationship of the terms are also investigated using hyponyms. It is observed that such hyponyms are determined based on a particular type of food and the process or pattern of the cooking involved. The study reveals how verbs of cooking and washing varies in Urhobo due to types, quality and degree of cooking and washing. The study reveals how the verbs variables make distinction in their lexical field when it comes to cooking and washing terms.

**Keywords:** Verbs in Urhobo, cooking and washing

### 1. Introduction

This paper investigates the verbs of cooking and verbs of washing in Urhobo. Cooking, 'chere' in Urhobo involves different processes which include washing and the other processes of cooking. Washing takes place at different times: before cooking, during cooking and after cooking. There are different kind of washing during cooking. These

are washing of meat, fishes, vegetable, plates, dishes, pots, knife, etc.

Cooking is something that we all need to do and when you are with Urhobo speaking people, experience can be made much simpler by having the right vocabulary for the cooking and washing as a household chore. Cooking and washing verbs are verbs that frequently appear when reading the cooking instructions in household services. Therefore, this paper will be of utmost help to as many that are into restaurants and cooking profession such as Caterer in Urhobo land. The meaning of a verb in a proposition varies, depending on its relation to the argument, with the various meanings of the verb (Ola, 2021), so the meaning discussed in this study is focused on the conceptual meaning.

Cooking is a major part of a people's culture. Just as a language, it cooking can be used to identify an ethnic group of people and their language. The research language for this study is based on Urhobo. Urhobo is a term used to refer to an ethnic group of people and their language. Urhobo is a major language in Delta state, and is among the first five largest socio-linguistically classed languages in Nigeria. "The population of those who identify themselves as Urhobo is currently about three million. Urhobo belongs to the Niger-Congo family of West Africa languages" (Ojaide, 2007:3).

### 2. Literature Review

This section is based on the review of related works of other researchers in this field. There are existing Studies already in this field that have discussed what we are currently studying. However, there are gaps they did not cover which have become the interest of the present study and made it to be unique.

Lehrer (1969) reviewed cooking terms as basis for studying lexical verbs, the work is quite related to the present study as it developed thirty-five hyponyms of the central lexeme – cook - drawing

from information about the specificity of the cooking types to distinguish one from the other, and from the general verb. The set of verbs provided as hyponyms are as follows: cook, boil, simmer, stew, poach, braise, parboil, steam, reduce, fry, sauté, pan-fry, French-fry, deep-fry, broil, grill, barbecue, charcoal (or charcoal-brail), plank, bake, roast, shirr, scallop, brown, rissole, sear, parch, toast, burn (unhappily), flamber. Lehrer data reviewed above are similar to the data in present study. However, Lehrer data were presented and discussed in English but the data in present were sourced from Urhobo terms of cooking and are discussed based on Urhobo linguistic approach.

Oha and Ajuwon (2015) studied Igbo and Yoruba verbs of cooking: ‘Sì’ and ‘Sè’ respectively and their culinary (lexical) fields. They observed that the lexical items within a delimiting set are culturally determined by the type of process involved in the cooking of the food item. Another discovery of the study is that cooking verbs involve stages that can be delineated into pre-boil, boil and post-boil. Certain food preparation may be accomplished at the first or second stage of the process while others may go through the three stages. The preceding stage or one stage may provide basis for the next stage. Oha and Ajuwon (2015) is similar to the present study but their language of study different. Again, their work is based on comparison between Igbo and Yoruba while the present is based only on Urhobo verbs of cooking. Cross-language, if the meaning of a language corresponds one to one with the meaning of another language, the two languages are semantically considered isomorphic or have the same semantic structure (Latupeirissa, 2016; 2019; 2020). The data presented and discussed in the present study features the uniqueness of Urhobo semantics structure.

Agbo (2009) worked on the Syntax and Semantics of Verbs of Cooking in Ìgbò, the work is a study of three semantic sub-classes of Igbo verbs of cooking: the verbs of heating, the verbs of mixing and the verbs of parboiling. The members of these three classes each have inherent properties that encode different shades of meaning in their syntactic constructions. The study concluded that the distinctions in syntax and semantics are the bases for the classification of the verbs. The study is related to the present study because it is based on verbs of cooking and the data were discussed semantically. Agbo move beyond semantic analysis into Syntactic analysis of the verbs of cooking which made the study to be unique and different from the first two literatures reviewed above and the present study. The present study is different from Agbo's work in it own way by language of study and in going deeper into the semantic structure by discussing the hyponyms of the verbs of cooking and washing.

Moreover, the three literatures reviewed in above are limited to verbs of cooking while the present study includes both verbs of cooking and verbs of washing as parts of the processes of cooking.

### 3. Data Collection

Data collected for this research were elicited from speakers of Agbarho and Agbon dialects of Urhobo. The choice of the Agbarho and Agbon dialect of the Urhobo is based on their generality. The Agbarho and the Agbon dialect are very related and are easily understood by other Urhobos. These data were transcribed by the author who is a native speaker of the language and the Agbarho dialect. The transcribed data were subsequently subjected to discussion with five other Urhobo speakers of the Agbarho and Agbon dialects. The author discussed with these speakers the co-occurrence restrictions of the verbs of cooking and washing. The author presented to the speakers the constructions that are hyponyms, such as chere ‘cook’, rho ‘parboil’ and phiòrò ‘steam’. Meanwhile, this construction is bad based on the author’s competence in the language. However, four out of the five informants and native speakers judged the hyponyms to be correct.

### 4. Data Presentation and Analysis

This section is based on data presentation and the data analysis. Here, data on lexical verbs of cooking and washing are presented and analysed semantically. The verbs are glossed in italics and are also used in sentences.

#### 4.1. Verbs of Cooking in Urhobo

Urhobo is rich in grammar and uses different terms to express different aspect of cooking. The different terms are related words that are of semantic class known as hyponyms. Hyponym is a term used to name a particular word coming out from a broader class of words. Hyponyms are subcategories. Hyponyms refers to labelling sub-categories of words and what differentiate the word categories (Griffiths, 2006). “Hyponyms refers to the sense relation between a more general, more inclusive word and a more specific word” (Dai and He, 2013). In Urhobo, verbs of cook are in semantic agreement with the objects. That is, the verb of making a particular food ready for eating must be semantically related to such a food and the process. The verbs of cooking discussed in this study includes the verbs in the preparation of cooking and the verbs use in the actual cooking by transfer of heat to make food done. Therefore, in the following sections we shall discuss verbs to cook by heating, verbs of washing, verbs to peel and verbs in many other processes of cooking.

#### 4.1.1 Verbs to Cook by Heating and the Hyponyms

This section deals with verbs involves in the transfer of heat on food to make it ready for use. In Urhobo, there are different verb hyponyms in the use of heat for the preparation of food. The following are examples of verbs to cook in Urhobo and their hyponyms.

chere		
<i>cook</i>		(to cook food)
chere irosu na		
<i>cook rice the</i>		‘cook the rice’
kake		
<i>fry</i>	‘fry’	(to fry groundnut, fish or stew)
kake isaghwe na		
<i>fry groundnut the</i>		‘fry the groundnut’
ton		
<i>roast</i>	‘bake’	(to bake garri/cassava flour)
ton igarri na		
<i>roast garri the</i>		‘bake the garri’
Rho		
<i>parboil</i>	‘boil’	
rho eranvwe na		
<i>boil meat the</i>		‘boil the meat’
Vwoṭon		
<i>use to roast</i>		‘roast’
me vwoṭon nu		
<i>I use roast [pst]</i>		‘I have roasted it’

Examples 1 - 5 are all related terms and hyponyms to cook. That is, they all mean the application of heat to food stuff to make it done for consumption. The objects of the verb structures determine the differences in their semantic structures and the distinct meanings. Learners of Urhobo must be aware that despite the fact that the verb kake for instance is to make food done for consumption, it cannot be use in syntactic structure along with some food object such as rice.

Ton as in example 3 can go with garri/cassava-flour but cannot go with some other objects such as rice or beans.

Rho as in example 4 can go along with the object such as rice, garri/cassava-flour, meat and fish syntactically and semantically. It is verb of cook but semantically different in that it mean half cook and half done.

Phiṛo		
<i>steam</i>	‘steam’	(to steam meat).
phiṛo eranvwe na vwe erhanre.		
<i>steam meat the in fire</i>		‘steam the meat on fire’
	or	
vwe ofigbo na phiṛo erhanre		

*use oil the steam fire* ‘melt the oil on fire’

Torhe  
‘born’ ‘roast’ (to born away unwanted parts, e.g. kpomo hire).  
torhe eto nu eranvwe na  
*born hire off animal the* ‘born the animal hire with fire’

or  
irosu na torhe re  
*rice the born [pst]* ‘the rice got burnt’

Vuvwun  
*bake* ‘preserve with fire’  
vuvwu eranvwe na  
*bake meat the* ‘dry the meat on fire’

Wurhie  
*Stir* ‘Stir’  
wurhie oghwo na  
*stir soup the* ‘stir the soup’

Gbe  
*mix* ‘turn’ (to turn ebba)  
gbe iti ke vwe  
*mix tea for me* ‘make tea for me’

Gbekugbe  
*Mix* ‘Mix’ (to mix something, e.g. flour and yeast together).  
gbe emu na kugbe  
*mix food the together* ‘mix the food together’

Examples 9 - 11 are hyponyms in that they all mean to stir food. However, the object stir determine distinct semantic difference.

The verbs in 1 - 11 are traditionally coded with their structures.

#### 4.1.2 Verbs of Washing and the Hyponyms

The following are verbs of washing in Urhobo and the hyponyms.

Hworhe  
*Wash* ‘wash’ (to wash meat, fish, plate or other dishes)

Ghworie  
*rinse* ‘rinse’ (to rinse plate, pot, meat, fish etc.)

Rien  
*clean* ‘clean’ (e.g. to clean the knife, kitchen, table etc).

the verbs of washing in examples 29 – 31 are hyponyms because they are in the same class of semantic relation, and they all have the same causative result. They all *cause* something to be clean. They are all means of making something to be clean.

Causative because they cause something to happen.  
For example, we can say:  
o hworhe omoze na fon  
*he/she wash plate the clean* 'he washed the plate clean'

32b) o hworhe onę na fon  
*he wash yam the clean* 'he washed the yam clean'

o ghworie omoze na fon  
*he/she raise plate the clean* 'he raised the plate clean'

33b) o ghworie eranvwe na fon  
*he raise meat the clean* 'he raised the meat thoroughly/clean'

o rien omoze na fon  
*he/she clean plate the clean* 'he cleans the plate thoroughly'

34b) o rien ukoni na fon  
*he clean kitchen the clean* 'he mops the kitchen neatly'

#### 4.1.3 Verb to Peel

Unlike English, in Urhobo, verb to Peel must be in agreement with what is to be peel. The verb to peel yam is different from the verb to peel plantain or orange. See examples in 12 – 16 as following:

Kpen  
*Peel* 'Peel' (to peel, e.g. banana or plantain).  
kpen orhe na  
*peel plantain the* 'peel the plantain'

Kane  
*Scrape* 'peel' (to peel raw yam)  
kane onę na  
*peel yam the* 'peel the yam'

Bien  
*Slice* 'peel' (to peel back of orange or onion)  
bien utien na ke vwe  
*peel orange the for me* 'peel the orange for me'

Vworhie  
*Scrap* 'scrape' (to peel roasted yam)  
vvorhie onę na  
*peel yam the* 'peel the yam'

In Urhobo, it is semantically wrong to say kpen onę na 'peel the yam'. That is kpen not semantically agreed with yam to mean peel. But it can be used for plantain or banana. Kane also mean 'peel' it can only be used with fresh yam but it cannot be used with roasted yam, orange, plantain and banana.

Other verbs used in cooking are:

Keghe  
*Grate* 'grate' (to grate onion or yam)  
keghe irhibo na  
*grate pepper the* 'grate the pepper'

Kene  
*Chop* 'Chop' (to chop yam, vegetable or onions)  
kene onę na ke vwe  
*chop yam the for me* 'chop the yam for me'

No  
*Grind* 'grind' (to grind pepper or onions)  
no irhobo na  
*grind pepper the* 'grind the pepper'

Duvwu  
*shook* 'pound' (to pound yam or other thing)  
duvwu onę na.  
*shook yam the* 'pound the yam'

Vwirhi  
*Break* 'Break' (to break indomie or stock fish into the plate or pot)  
vwirhi indomi na phiyo ipoto na  
*break indomi the into pot na* 'break the indomi into the pot'

Ghran  
*Melt* 'Melt' (to melt something, e.g. oil on fire or on heat)  
ghran ofigbo na vwe erhanre  
*melt oil the on fire* 'melt the oil on fire'

Bru  
*Cut* 'cut'  
bru erin na  
*cut fish the* 'cut the fish'

Mwerhie  
*Smash* 'smash' (to smash palm fruit with hand)  
mwerhie ibiedi na  
*smash palm-fruit the* 'smash the palm-fruit'

Davwe  
*Try* 'test' (to test the taste of food)  
davwe emu na  
*try food the* 'test the food'

Tue  
*sprinkle* 'pour' (to salt or a dry substance into food)  
tue ughwaka phiyo emu na  
*sprinkle salt into food the* 'pour salt into the food'

Tene  
*Pinch* 'Pinch' (to pinch fish or to pinch magi into food)  
tene erin ke vwe

*pinch fish for me* ‘pinch fish for me’

Vwie

*Done* ‘done’ (when the food is done on fire).

*emu na vwie nu*

*food the done [pst]* ‘the food has done’

Je

*chose* ‘dish’ (to dish food)

*je emu ke vwe*

*chose food for me* ‘serve food for me’

#### 4.2 Verbal Hyponyms of Cooking and Washing in Urhobo

These are different types of verbal relationship. Hyponym is a semantic relation used in grouping subtype. Here, hyponym is used to classify related terms of different activities in cooking. Verbal hyponym is used here to classify a group of semantic related activities that resulted in the same verb. Examples are seen below:

##### 4.2.1 Verbal Hyponyms of Cooking

The following are verbal hyponyms of cooking that causes something to *done* or ready for eating. They are different processes of making different food to be done for eating. Examples are as following:

chere

*cook* ‘cook’ (to cook food).

*Chere irosu na.*

*cook rice the* ‘cook the rice’

kake

*fry* ‘fry’ (to fry groundnut, fish or stew)

*kake isaghwe na*

*fry groundnut the* ‘fry the groundnut’

ton

*roast* ‘fry’ (to bake garri/cassava flour)

*ton igari na*

*born garri the* ‘bake the garri’

Vwoṭon

*use to roast* ‘roast’

*Vwo ṛhẹ na ton*

*use plantain the roast* ‘roast the plantain’

Examples 32 – 35 above are all class of cooking and processes of making something to be done or ready for eating.

#### 5. Conclusion

In this paper, the semantics of the verbs of cooking and washing in Urhobo were discussed. The study has been able to give the interpretation of the inherent and distinct meaning of the verbs and also classify them based on their hyponyms. The verbs of cooking in Urhobo fall under different semantic

classes of verbs: the verbs of cook, the verbs of parboiling, the verbs of frying, mixing, the verb of cutting and the verb of washing. It was observed in this study that the objects of the verb structures determine the differences in the semantic structures and the distinct meanings of the verbs. Moreover, the lexical representation of these classes portrays the inherent ‘temporal properties’ of these verbs, which enable us to conceive their actions and interpret these actions. The implication of this classification and interpretation is that an Urhobo child learning the language must learn to distinguish the verbs and the specific object NPs that collocate with them. This can be done through verbal cues from caregivers and also through the practical observation of the cooking activities of these caregivers. The knowledge the child has about the world around him will facilitate the correct use of these verbs.

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