IDIOMS AND FIXED COLLOCATIONS IN IGBO DICTIONARIES

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Abstract
Idioms are fixed collocations that belong to the semantic-pragmatic domain of natural language frequently entered in conventional dictionaries, whether monolingual or bilingual, general purpose or learners' dictionaries. An idiom by its structure and content is a lexeme, and in dictionary compilation is regarded as a lexicographic word, hence counted as dictionary entry. This paper investigates the lexicographic treatment of Igbo idioms. It specifically examines the scope of lexical coverage of idioms, their headword status, arrangement and the strategies adopted for translating idioms in Igbo-English dictionaries. Extant bilingual Igbo dictionaries of Williamson (1972), Igwe (1999), Echeruo (2001) and Akponye (2011) provided the sources of data for the study. The study reveals the lack of uniformity among the lexicographers in the presentation of idioms as headwords; the uneven coverage of idioms as lexical units, and the unsatisfactory lexicographic treatment of the idioms that distorts the entire alphabetical order of the dictionary macrostructure making search tedious and sometimes fruitless.

Introduction

Idioms are an intriguing aspect of natural language that are frequently documented in the English language dictionaries but not sufficiently so in Igbo dictionaries. Conventional general-purpose dictionaries have established principles for entering idioms. They are treated as full-fledged lexemes entered as run-on entries in native speakers' dictionaries, but as main entries/headwords in the learners'. Translating idioms can be quite a daunting task. It is one of the major challenges faced by lexicographers particularly because of their formal, cultural and figurative implications. Idioms are lexemes whose meanings are not predictable from the composite words but must be learnt as a lexical unit. Lexicographers are aware of this fact and are careful to reflect this linguistic resource in dictionaries.

Despite the recognition by Igbo scholars, Emenanjo (2005, 2012), Emenanjo & Oweleke (2011), Asonye and Asonye (2013), Oweleke (2017) and Onyegbuchilam (2018) of the existence and description of the structure, function, and pragmatic relevance of idioms, no serious attempt has ever been made to investigate the lexicographic relevance of this important aspect of the Igbo language. Works abound in English, other European languages and in Bantu languages of the lexicographic treatment of idioms and phrasal verbs. There are specialized dictionaries of idioms in English such as *Oxford Dictionary of English Idioms, Cambridge Dictionary of Idioms, The American Heritage Dictionary of Idioms,* among others. These are collections that contain well over 20,000 idioms with their definitions, equivalents and sometimes synonyms. No lexicographic work on idioms is attested in Igbo studies. Igbo lexicography is yet to diversify into specialized dictionary compilation hence, the absence of any dictionary of Igbo idioms. Similarly, academic researches are available on idioms and fixed collocations in linguistics,

corpus linguistics, psycholinguistics, language teaching and learning, cognitive linguistic perspectives and a host of others. Researches in corpus linguistics particularly have significantly drawn attention to the abundance and frequency of use of idioms and idiomatic expressions in lexicographic studies. Furthermore, the study of idioms has also been approached from the lexicographic perspective.

Idioms are a type of fixed collocations. Cruse (1986), Emenanjo (2005), Crystal (2008), Saeed (2003), Halliday (2004) Teubert (2004) and others believe that idioms can be described as 'fixed' 'frozen' or 'fossilized' expressions because unlike flexible collocations, they rarely allow variation in form as they cannot be changed or decomposed to smaller units of meaning. In addition, their meanings are not deducible from the sum of the meanings of the words that make them up. Idioms are culture-specific expressions and this explains the difficulty of their translation. An idiom is actually regarded as a lexeme with a unit of meaning even though it is made of two or more words. It is typically entered in the dictionary as a sub-entry not as a main entry.

A dictionary is a reference material in the form of a book or electronic programme that gives both linguistic and extra linguistic information about lexical entries. It gives phonological, morpho-syntatic and semantic, pragmatic, as well as etymological, pragmatic and encyclopedic information. Thus, Mc Arthur (1986) has aptly described dictionaries as 'containers of knowledge'. As containers of information, dictionaries include a wide array of information types, such as spelling, pronunciation, orthographic, categorization and sub-categorization facts of lexical items, word forms and word formation facts, different senses of meaning a word might have, as well as dialect variation, etymological and context of use of each lexical item, among others. Idioms and fixed collocations constitute a significant aspect of the semantic and pragmatic information provided in dictionaries considering the primary function of dictionary compilation – to provide semantic equivalents. Most lexicographers agree that both linguistic and extra-linguistic information categories are essential parts of language description and so relevant in contemporary dictionary compilation. Furthermore, they believe that information on idioms and fixed collocations should be included in dictionaries as they are lexical items whose meanings are not deduced from their composite parts. Their inclusion has significant implication for Igbo language learners as literal interpretations of idioms usually result in breakdown of communication. The paper is of great relevance to lexicographic study of idioms and collocations, language teaching and learning, language documentation and studies in language typology.

2.1 Collocations

Collocation is a predominant lexical feature of languages. Baker (2011:52) defines collocation as "the tendency of certain words to co-occur regularly in a given language". Cruse (1986:40) and Crystal (2008:86) describe it as the "habitual co-occurrence of lexical items". Teubert (2004) simply describes collocation as the occurrence of two or more words that is monosemous. Words

that frequently occur or are frequently used together are referred to as collocates. They give examples of some collocates in English as *torrential/heavy rain, fine weather*, *auspicious occasion*, *green with jealousy, lick and tongue, addled egg, rancid butter, soured milk,* and *dog and bark,* among others. Similarly in Igbo, these collocations are common: ụ̀tụ̀tụ̀ 'morning' and atu 'chewing stick' *ázíz̀à* 'broom' and *àní '*ground/floor'; *anya ḿmílī* 'tears' and *ákwá* '*cry*'; *ọ̀bàǹté* '*shorts'/'knickers'* and *úkwù 'waist'; ọ̀gbíg̀bọ́* 'barking' and *ńkít̀ā '*dog'. Words that collocate are often used together that is, if one hears the first word, the second is expected. Simply put, collocation is the regular co-occurrence of certain lexical items.

Collocation, quite often is arbitrary, that is, the co-occurrence does not always follow logically from the propositional meanings of the words. Cruse (1986), Palmer (1981) and Baker (2011) all stress that meaning does not always account for collocation patterning. Baker (2011:52) reports that the English word, *break* collocates with *rules* but not with *regulations* so, *break rules* is acceptable but *break regulations* is not. We can also bend rules but rules are not *bendable* but *flexible*. She adds that we *pay a visit* and not *carry out a visit*, or *undertake a visit*, and we do not say *grill bread* even though we put bread in a grill. Similarly, Palmer talks of *blond hair* not a *blond door* or *a blond dress* even though the colour is exactly that of blond hair. Palmer (1981) notes that this feature of arbitrariness of collocation is most prominent in collective nouns in English – "flock of sheep", "herd of cattle", "school of whales", and others. It is observed in natural languages that some lexical items go with some items and not with others. This co-occurrence possibility of words is also referred to as collocational restrictions. Brown and Miller (1985:85) express this phenomenon thus: "in normal use of language, all linguistic forms do not freely co-occur with other linguistic forms". They point out that there are certain co-occurrence rules that govern the co-occurrence or collocation of certain lexical items. Some collocations can be flexible in form (that is vary in form) while others are fixed.

But while some collocates occur frequently together, their co-occurrence is not fixed. Saeed (2003) observes that collocations that have gone through a fossilization process can become fixed expressions where the individual words have ceased to have independent meanings. Thus, Jackson (1985 & 2002) has suggested that lexicographers should include fixed collocations rather than free collocations. Idioms, phrasal verbs, Inherent Complement Verbs, fixed/formulaic expressions, proverbs and complementary binominals are some types of fixed collocations found in natural languages. Every language has a phraseological repertoire of these expressions. A class of fixed collocations, Complementary Binominals (CBs) common in the Igbo language has been identified by Emenanjo and Oweleke (2011).

2.2 Nature, types and classification of Idioms

Just like other fixed collocations, idioms are lexical items whose meanings are not compositional as there is usually no link between an idiom and its meaning. They are typically used in a figurative sense. Most language scholars stress the non-compositionality of the meaning of idioms. Frazer (1970:22) defines an idiom as a constituent or series of constituents for which the

semantic interpretation is not a compositional function of the formatives of which it is composed". According to Emenanjo (2012), the meaning of an idiom is not the result of the compositional function of its constituent. Similarly, Jackson (1985:66) notes that an idiom is a *relatively frozen expression* whose meaning does not reflect the meaning of its component parts. Palmer (1991) sees an idiom as involving collocation of a special kind with a unit of meaning, and explains that the meaning of the idiom *kick the bucket* is not in any way related to the meaning of the individual words that make up the idiom. Baker (2011:67) believes that idioms can be defined in terms of flexibility of patterning and transparency of meaning, in that they are frozen patterns of language which allow little or no variation in form, and carry meanings which are not deduced from their individual components. Most scholars agree that idioms are inalterable or fixed in form and allows just little or no alteration at all, - *skeleton in the cupboard /closet; spill the beans* not spill beans, *face the music* not face the classical music, *long and short* not short and long. They are described as fixed or fossilized expressions because unlike the flexible collocations, they do not allow a major variation in their form as they cannot be changed or decomposed to smaller units of meaning. Slight grammatical (mostly inflectional changes) may be allowed. Idioms form an integral part of the Igbo language that sets apart a competent speaker of the language who is able to distinguish an idiom from a similar string of collocates. It is believed that successful language learning involves the mastery of idioms and collocations in the language. A competent Igbo speaker is certainly aware of the distinction between the idiomatic expression: *wènitẹ ụkwụ̄* as 'hurry up' and not 'lift one's leg'; similarly, *anya ụfụ* is not 'painful eyes' but 'envy'.

An idiom is actually regarded as a lexeme with a unit of meaning even though it is made of two or more words; hence Jackson (2002:6) describes an idiom as a 'phrasal lexeme' with typically metaphorical or figurative meaning. Idioms are also referred to as multi-word expressions or multi-word constructions. A few examples of English and Igbo idioms are given here*:* *bury the hatchet* "to agree to stop quarrelling or arguing" or "to make peace"; *a dog in a manger* "one who keeps something that is not useful to him to prevent another person from having or using it"; *when the chips are down* "when a crisis arises" *to paint the town red* "to go out in the evening enjoying oneself, drinking a lot of alcohol and dancing" and *in cold blood* "without feeling of guilt, ruthlessly or deliberately; *aka azụ̄* back hand - 'bribery'; *lachata aka* lick hands - 'suffer consequences of one's action'. *ukwu ọkụ̄* 'hot waist-'infertility'; *atụ nà ụ̀tutụ̀* "chewing-stick and morning - 'complementarity'; *anya idị̄ n'enū* "to have one's eyes up – 'waywardness.

Idioms are categorized on the bases of their form and meaning. Structurally, idioms are more often noun and verb phrases, unlike proverbs which are sentences. While it is true that idioms are usually phrasal, there are very many words used by competent speakers of the language which are loaded with idiomatic nuances derived from allusions, and so can be used as idioms. Structurally, idioms allow very minimal lexical and grammatical variability thus, on the basis of structure; idioms can be classified as variable and non-variable. Because of the complex nature of Igbo verbs, idioms exhibit more variability than English idioms. The types of idioms

identified in the literature, Emenanjo and Oweleke (2011), Emenanjo (2012), Onyegbuchulam (2018) and others include associative constructions, ergative verb phrases, complementary bi-nominals, and verbal complexes.

Complementary Binominals (CBs) are pairs of words that have a fixed number of items and a fixed word order and are regarded as a single semantic unit. They are made up of a co-ordinated noun/noun phrases or two or more verbs with or without an overt conjunction. For the noun phrase, the conjunction is usually *nà* 'and'. Binominals are culture-specific terms - (*ǹzè nà ọzọ̄ "*the noble and the titled - 'nobility'; *mmụọ̄ nà ǹmadụ̀* "the spirit world and the human world - 'all of creation'; èzi nà ụnọ̀ "compound and house - 'family'; *ǹgba nà ọ̀gụ̀* "wrestle and fight 'struggle'; *ikwu nà ibè* "kins and peers – 'everybody' *enū nà anị̀* "top and ground -'everywhere irrespective of location. Like idioms, the forms of CBs are fixed and the meanings are usually not deducible from the individual words that make them up. Though the English language has some examples such as *kith and kin*, 'rock and roll', 'to and fro', 'sick and tired', 'long and short of it', it is not as productive as in the Igbo language; it is an integral part of the language that distinguishes a competent speaker from a learner of a language. The examples show clearly that complementary binominals as fixed collocations or idioms are typically non-compositional in meaning and non-variable in form. They are intricate expressions and very difficult to translate. Translating binominals and other idioms literally would yield faulty interpretations. For example, a translation of the sentence *O nwètèrè ya na ǹgba n'ọ̀gụ̀*, as 'He got it through wrestling and fighting' would make no sense in the Igbo language. The non-literal interpretation would be: 'He achieved it through a determined and vigorous effort'.

Associative constructions contain two words; the first usually a noun is in associative relation with another noun or an adjective, and the two constituents are not connected by a conjunction. A few examples include *anya ikē*, *'strong eye* – fierceness', *ogige mbekwu* 'tortoise garden'/'tall tale' or 'cock and bull story', *aka ikē* 'strong hand – high handedness', *obi agụ̄* 'lion heart - 'courage', *anya ukwu* 'big eye 'greed*, afọ njọ̄* 'bad stomach – wickedness; *afọ ikē* 'strong stomach - constipation, This type of idioms are identified as most productive in the language. Idioms of the ergative verb phrase form consist of a noun followed by an infinitive verb and another noun phrase. They are of the type: *anya irū àlà* 'eye to reach ground -"to be very observant'/'careful'; *afọ ịtā (mmadù) ǹmrī* 'stomach to dry (person) water-'to be extremely wicked'*; ịdị̄ ahụ nàabọ̀* 'to have two bodies - 'to be pregnant'; *anya idi n'enu* 'to hang eyes up – waywardness'; *obì ikō (mmadụ̀) n'enù* one's heart to hang up – 'worry', anxiety'.

Another type of idiom in Igbo is classified as the verbal complex. The term, verbal complex has been used by Emenanjo (1978, 2015) and in the general literature to refer to the inherent semantic nature of the verb that obligatorily coexists with a nominal element. The close-knit syntactic and semantic relationship generates an idiomatic or metaphorical meaning. These idiom types are numerous in the language. They are different from inherent complement verbs whose meanings are determined by the obligatory nominals that complement the CV verb root. Here are

a few verb complex idioms in Igbuzo-Igbo: i*tāji anya*, 'to chew eyes – 'be envious', *ịgwọ̀ ofe* 'take excess soup to swallow a ball of foo-foo - *'*mischief especial by an adult'; *ịwa agba* 'to tear (someone's) jaw - 'punish' severely', i*bù isi* 'carry head – 'be astonished'*, kpa aka ani* 'hand ground – 'be mischievous', *nye (mmadu) aka n'isi* 'cross hand over someone's head –' to dishonour or disrespect', *mùnye nà mbọ* 'fix under the nails - 'to be unforgiving, mean or petty; counting wrong', *ju afọ̄* fill stomach 'be pleased'. The different types of idioms above have shown that they are more or less inferable from the meanings of the parts.

2.3 Collocational/Selectional Restrictions

Collocational (selectional) restriction is the constraint or non-compatibility that exists between lexical items. Linguists are not in agreement as to the distinction between collocational restrictions and selectional restrictions. Palmer (1981:134) uses both terms interchangeably but Baker (2011) and Crystal (2008) make some distinction. Baker explains that while collocational restriction is an arbitrary co-occurrence, selectional restriction is not. She also notes that the difference between them is not clear-cut. In collocation, the co-occurrence or non-cooccurrence is arbitrary as explained above. In selectional restrictions, the semantic rules of the language, specify the semantic properties of lexical items and thus, constrain the combination of the senses that underlie the co–occurrence. For example, the following sentences are semantically anomalous and unacceptable because they violate the selectional facts of English.

? The fish admired Peter. ('*admire'* selects an animate subject)

? I drank bread last night. ('*drank*' selects an object that is [+liquid]

In Igbo, the verb -*gwù* 'dig/harvest' is semantically constrained to select object nouns, that is, crops that are uprootable such as *yam, cassava, cocoyam* etc. and so blocks the selection of other nouns. Colocations such as -*gwú ji* 'uproot/harvest yam', or -*gwu édè'* 'uproot/harvest cocoyam' -*gwu akpu* 'uproot/harvest cassava' are acceptable. Whereas, -*gwu ji* and *gwu ede* are acceptable, -*wọ ede* and *wọ ji* are not. What is semantically acceptable in the language is *wọ ọkwụrụ* 'harvest okra' or *wọ ose* 'harvest pepper'.

2.4 Productive Semantic Fields of Idioms

A close look at Igbo idioms describes them as culture specific expressions which intrinsically invoke specific semantic fields. Teubert (2004) believes that idioms are an important part of our cultural heritage. They are culture-specific expressions that reflect the religious, material, social and ecological world views of the people in such a way that only competent native speakers can decipher their full meaning. This explains the difficulty of defining or translating these lexical items in dictionaries. As a lexical unit that makes use of figurative expression, an idiom on profuse display of certain imagery which makes deciphering of meaning difficult for the one not conversant with the culture

Studies have shown which semantic fields constitute the main sources of idioms in dictionaries in English and other languages. A research by Grauberg (1989) investigated the predominant semantic fields of idioms in English, French and German. The study revealed that most idioms are couched around the parts of the body. He believes that idioms mirror general human experience and so reflect specific semantic fields. Studies have shown that the fields of parts of the body, flora and fauna items ecological and agrarian items of the community within the immediate environment are the common and most productive fields for idioms in the language. The environments of the idioms make them context-dependent and difficult to interpret and to translate.

2.5 Collocations and idioms in dictionaries

Al Kasimi (1977), Malkiel (1975), Jackson (1985, 2002), Bwenge (1989), Gouws (1990), Hartmann (1990), Svenson (1993), Kiango (2000, 2005), Landau (2001), Oweleke (2017), and others, all believe that dictionary compilers should include different aspects of the semantic component of language to meet the basic need of a user. They believe that lexicographers should provide the meaning of words in isolation, relation, connotation and collocation (fixed or free) and others as part of the semantic and pragmatic information given in dictionaries. However some lexicographers argue for the inclusion of only fixed collocations since they represent a unit of meaning. Studies have shown that fixed collocations such as idioms, phrasal verbs, proverbs are frequently entered in conventional dictionaries. Jackson (2002) posits that English binominals are part of the semantic categories of headwords that should be entered in dictionaries. Understanding a word requires more than knowing the denotative meaning of the word. The user also needs to know the connotative and the figurative meanings, as well as meaning of words in collocation. The dictionary compiler is therefore, faced with the challenge of providing the different components of meaning and senses of a lexical item in a dictionary, as well as the order of arrangement of the different senses.

Since idioms have been identified as non-compositional categories in the language, providing meanings for this class of lexical items in the dictionary would require specific skills, training and competence in the languages involved. Jackson (2002) believes that it is in explaining, describing and defining the meaning of words that the major function of dictionaries can be judged as successful. Similarly, Atkins and Rundell (2008) posit that the skills of a bilingual dictionary writer lie in selecting the best target language word that matches the source language, that is, to find a TL expression whose semantic content matches as closely as possible to that of the SL. Discussing strategies that can be employed to translate idioms, Baker (2011) suggests using an idiom similar in meaning and/or form in the target language, borrowing source language idiom or translating the idioms by paraphrase. Atkin and Rundell (2008) suggest that since it is not always possible to find a matching counterpart in the target language for the source language idiom or fixed collocation, the idioms should be glossed. Similarly, Pastala (2006) argues that translation of idioms should focus on semantic equivalents and not necessarily lexical equivalents in the target language. Translation experts Al-Kasimi (1977), Jakobson (2004)

Atkins & Rundell (2008) and Baker (2011) and Oweleke (2017, 2022) have therefore argued for a combination of strategies for translation to create appropriate equivalents in bilingual translation.

Lexicographers vary in their choice of presentation of a headword/lemma of idioms and collocations in dictionaries. While some list idioms as headwords, others nest them as run-on items under a headword, including other derivatives. In the Concise Oxford Dictionary 9th edition, the idioms *by hook or by crook*, *hook line and sinker*, *off the hook* and *sling the hook* are nested as run-on entries, and the binominal *hook and eye* is entered separately in its right alphabetical position, whereas in Collins Concise Dictionary, it is entered as a run-on. In COBUILD, a learners' dictionary, idioms are typically lemmatised, that is, given a headword status. Jackson (2002) notes that even though dictionaries are not explicit on the rules for finding idioms, lexicographers should conventionally list idioms as run-on entries under the first main word. In Igbo lexicography, no decision or statement has been made regarding the choice of method of representation of idioms and collocations. However, whatever method is adopted, Atkin and Rundell (2008) has advised that methods of listing idioms should be explained in the front matter, and also adhered to strictly by the compilers. Equally worth noting is the non-uniformity of labels used by different lexicographers for identifying idioms in dictionaries. While some use abbreviations before the idioms such as IDM/idm, figure/fig, others use no labels at all throughout the dictionary. This causes great difficulty for the users.

With the help of computer technology in the 21st century, findings of studies of frequency counts of idioms have been made available. A frequency search of idioms in some dictionaries of English by Jackson (1985) notes that British English dictionaries enter more idioms than American English dictionaries; frequency count of idioms show that Webster's New 9th Collegiate Dictionary and the American Dictionary have fewer entries. A similar study embarked upon by Benson (1985) of the inclusion of idioms for English and American dictionaries shows that out of 20 idioms used for the study, Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English gives 19 idioms, Advanced Learners' Dictionary 17 and two other American dictionaries give eleven idioms each, and concludes that British learners' dictionaries cope better with idioms than American dictionaries. Furthermore, Patsala (2006) reports that Collins English-Greek Dictionary (2002) provides more information on idioms than Oxford English-Greek Learners Dictionary. A survey of Collins English Dictionary shows that lexicographers frequently enter binominals such as of *hook and eye*, to *and fro, and rock and roll*, among others as main or sub entries.

3. Methodology

Extant bilingual Igbo dictionaries of Williamson (1972), Igwe (1999), Echeruo (2001) and Akponye (2011) and some other library materials on Igbo idioms provided the major sources of data for the study. The data were supplemented by the native speaker intuition of the researcher.

Furthermore, ccompetent native speakers were consulted for the interpretation of the severely opaque idioms whose meanings were misleading. A total of 100 idioms were selected for the analysis. The paper adopts a descriptive and comparative approach to data analysis. A comparison of the four dictionaries and description of individual dictionaries was done to establish scope of coverage of idioms as lexical units and their lexicographic treatment in the Igbo dictionaries. A descriptive statistics was carried out to determine the relative success of inclusion and treatment of idioms in the dictionaries.

4.1Treatment of idioms and fixed collocations in the dictionary

Typically, idioms and other types of collocations, free and fixed are entered in Igbo dictionaries. However, this section specifically examines the types, scope of coverage, translation of idioms and the presentation of Igbo idioms in the dictionaries.

4.1.1 Lexical coverage of Igbo idioms and collocations in extant dictionaries

Data for the analysis have shown that the different types of idioms attested in the language are entered in the dictionaries of Williamson (1972), Igwe (1999), Echeruo (2001) and Akponye (2011), but in varying degrees of frequency by the compilers. The types of idioms included are Complementary Bi-nominals, Associative constructions, Ergative verb constructions and Verbal complexes. A survey of the different types of idiom in the dictionary show that the complementary binominal idioms are the least entered as they are rarely included. Apart from *èzi nà ụnọ̀* included by all the four lexicographers other binominals are not considered for inclusion by some of the compilers. Comparatively, Igwe has the highest number of entries for ergative verb construction type of idioms - *iti aka n'obì 'to be resolute', afọ ịtā mmirī*, 'extreme wickedness', *ilerū anya àlà* 'to be observant', and others. Associative construction idioms are less complex and more common in the language, hence identified by all the lexicographers. Table 1 gives illustration of the scope of entry by the compilers. Frequency count of idioms in the dictionaries shows that the Associative construction types which are the most productive in the language are entered in large numbers by the lexicographers as shown in the Table 1.

Table 1: Uneven treatment of idioms in the dictionaries of Williamson (1), Igwe (2) Echeruo (3) and Akponye (4)

s/n	Igbo Idioms	1	2	3	4
1	anya ọkụ̄	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	anya ukwu	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	anya ụ̄fụ	×	✓	✓	✓
4	ọdù anyā	✓	✓	×	×
5	anya ịdị n'enū	×	×	×	×
6	ilerū anya àlà	×	✓	×	×
7	ihū̄ju anyā	✓	✓	×	×
8	anya ihụ mmụọ̄	×	×	×	×
9	itaji anya	×	×	×	×
10	gbado anyā	✓	✓	×	✓
11	gbagwòju anyā	✓	✓	✓	✓
12	aka ikē	✓	✓	✓	×
13	ikē akā	×	✓	×	×
14	àzụ akā	✓	✓	×	×
15	aka azụ	✓	✓	✓	✓
16	aka ànị̀	×	×	×	×
17	aka ntagide	✓	✓	×	×
18	aka mèrè/lụ̀	✓	✓	×	✓
19	ụkwụ ìtọ̄ n'àlà	×	×	×	×
20	ita okwu ezē	×	×	×	×
21	iti aka n'obì	×	✓	×	×
22	ikò obì n'enū	×	×	×	×
23	afọ ịtā mmirī	×	✓	×	×
24	afọ ọma	✓	✓	✓	✓
25	afọ ojuju	×	✓	×	✓
26	èzi nà ụnọ̀	✓	✓	✓	✓
27	àkụ̀ nà ụ̀ba	×	×	×	✓
28	enū nà ànị̀	×	✓	×	×
29	ọ̀sa nà akwụ	×	×	×	×
30	atụ nà ụ̀tụtụ̀	×	×	×	×

Researchers agree that idioms are a central part of the vocabulary of languages and need to be accounted for in the dictionaries, since they have a unit of, and special idiomatic meaning that learners may often have problems understanding them in everyday speech. Benson (1985) has advised that the size of a dictionary should determine the number of idioms included. Most Igbo dictionaries are fairly comprehensive and should include more idioms than are currently entered.

To investigate the scope of coverage, 30 (see Table 1) common idioms relating to parts of the body – the eye, hand, stomach and heart were selected for this analysis, since it has been proven that parts of the body form the most productive semantic field of idioms attested in natural language. These idioms are believed to be popular and frequently used by competent speakers of the language. The idioms are: *anya ọkụ̄* * fiery eyes -'envy', *anya ukwu* * big eyes -'greed'; *anya ụfụ* *pain in the eye - 'envy'; *ọdù anyà* *tail of the eye – 'corner of the eye', *anya ịdī n'enū* *to keep the eye up -'waywardness' *ilēru anya àlà* *look down -'be observant', *ihụjū anya* toil/suffer', *anya ihū̄ mmụọ̄*, *ịtāji anya, *chew eyes 'envy', gbado anyā* *fix eye on - 'be deligent', *gbagwòju anyā* *have scattered piecec in the eye -'confusion', *aka ike*, *strong hand – stinginess', *ike aka*, *strength of the hand – 'authority'; *aka azụ* * back of the hand –bribery'; *aka ntagide* 'stinginess', *azu aka* 'bribery', *aka ani*, * hand on the ground 'mischief'; *afo oma* *good stomach - 'kindness', *afọ ōjuju *a filling stomach*, *ụkwụ ịtọ̄ n'àlà,* * leg transfixed to the

ground – 'perplexed'; *ita okwu eze*, and five complementary binominals – (nos. 26 -30). The investigation showed uneven distribution in the different dictionaries. Out of the 30 idioms listed above, Williamson enters only 13 which represents (43%) of the total number of the idioms selected, Igwe (1999) 20 (66%), Echeruo 8 (26%) and Akponye 11(36%), as shown in Table 1, for 1, 2, 3 & 4 respectively. Even though, Igwe records the highest number of entries, it still reflects an unsatisfactory treatment of idioms in dictionaries.

The coverage of idioms in Igbo dictionaries, even though uneven, shows that the lexicographers are aware of this important aspect of the semantic structure of the language. A good number of highly frequent everyday idioms and collocations of Igbo have not been included in these dictionaries. Since dictionary compilation is still largely based on individual effort, the inclusion of idioms as headwords in the dictionaries reflects the level awareness of the lexicographers.

4.1.2 Methods adopted for idioms as headwords in Igbo dictionaries

Igbo lexicographers vary in their methods and choice of presentation of idioms in the dictionary. The different styles adopted by Williamson, Igwe, Echeruo and Akponye inform the disparity in the micro and macro structures of their dictionaries. All four lexicographers are not consistent in their treatment of idioms. They are not in agreement as to the headword status of idioms. Williamson and Igwe wrongly treat idioms and other distinct lexemes as sub entries or run-on entries. The idiom *aka azụ* in Williamson is entered with other lexemes – *aka àfè, '*sleeve of garment', *aka ebē '*witness' *aka èkpèi, àkà afịụ '*last year' *aka ike, aka ngwe '*stone or wooden pestle for pepper', *aka nni* 'right hand', and other idioms as run-on entries. Even though Echeruo's inclusion is not comprehensive, he consistently lemmatizes idioms. The adoption of this approach accords them headword status as done in learners' dictionaries and not in native speakers'. There are no idioms as run-on entries in this dictionary. Igwe's nest for the entry *anya* runs into two pages and *aka* three pages with many full-fledged lexemes that should be entered separately as headwords all subsumed under these words. The run-on entries are equally not arranged alphabetically or semantically. The practice of entering idioms in conventional dictionary compilation is to choose to treat them as sub-entries under a nest or as headwords in their rightful position, not as both methods in the same dictionary. Consistency and economy of space is usually advocated in dictionary compilation. Although the treatment of idioms in these dictionaries is quite informative, the inconsistent presentation of idioms as headwords in Igwe and Williamson is relatively unsatisfactory, and makes search for lexical items in the dictionaries difficult, time consuming and sometimes fruitless.

Furthermore, the lexicographers are inconsistent in the representation of the written form of the idioms treated in the dictionaries. While some of the compilers treat idioms as closed compounds (with the components written together), others treat them as open compounds (with components written separated as shown in Table 2. Williamson consistently and rightly treats idioms as groups of words with non-literal meaning. Generally, lexicographers list idioms as run-on entries under the first main word. Equally worth noting is the non-uniformity and quite often complete absence of the labels used for identifying idioms in dictionaries. There is no micro-structural

identification of the individual idioms. All the compilers do not specify any lexical item as idioms, idiomatic or figurative expression. Williamson Igwe and Echeruo however, inconsistently identify the non-literal form of the idiom rather than the idiom itself.

Table 2: Non-conformity in representation of idioms

Williamson 1972	Igwe (1999)	Echeruo (2001)	Akponye (2011)
g**bagwòjù anya** confuse; abash	**igbag'òjù anya** to confuse; to be incomprehensible,…	**gbagwujuo anya** … confuse or be confused; baffle…	**Gbagwòjuoanya** To Confuse, Mystify, Bewilder, Perplex, Baffle, Astonish
anya ukwu: greed; coveteousness (lit. big eyes	**anya ukwu** big eye; jealousy, envy, covetousness, greed, rapacity **anyaukwu** greed, greediness, rapacity, covetousness, envy	**anya ukwu**: n … greed; covetousness	**Anyaukwu** n Greed, Greediness, Avarice, Rapaciousness, Rapacity
èzi nà ụnọ̀ household	**ezinàụlò** n. house, yard; household, family **ezi nà ụlò** n. house and yard; household, family	**ezi na ülö** n … family; household; lit: the compound-and-the-house	**Ezinụụlọ** n Family, Household

Igwe's use of two different forms to represent one idiom is misleading as seen in the entries for **anya ukwu** and **anyaukwu**, **anya ụ̄fụ** and **anyaụ̄fụ, etc**. One is entered in the nest and the other as a separate headword with no label to identify or distinguish them. They also share the same meaning.

4.2 Translating Idioms in Igbo Dictionaries

A comparison of extant Igbo dictionaries under review and analysis of the individual dictionaries show that the lexicographers correctly identify the multi-word expressions with idiomatic meaning as aspects of the semantic component of the language. Bearing in mind that, identifying, describing and providing equivalents in the target language present a daunting challenge for the lexicographers, these compilers would be commended for their significant efforts. Unlike in English monolingual dictionaries where the message not the semantic or lexical contents of the idioms is provided, Igbo dictionary compilers provide mainly lexical equivalents and synomyms for the idioms identified in the target language. Translation experts, especially on lexical equivalents and bilingual lexicography, have argued for a combination of strategies when direct equivalence is unavailable. The strategies adopted and their applications are discussed below.

Table 3: Translation of idioms in some extant Igbo dictionaries

Igbo Idioms	Williamson 1972	Igwe (1999)	Echeruo (2001)	Akponye (2011)
anya ọkụ̄	jealousy; envy (lit. fiery eyes)	zeal, eagerness, zealousness	envy	Envy, Jealousy
anya ukwu	greed; covetousness (lit. big eyes)	Greed, greediness, rapacity, covetousness, envy…jealousy,	greed; covetousness	Greed, Greediness, Avarice, Rapaciousness, Rapacity
gbagwòju ānya	confuse; abash	…to confuse; to be incomprehensible, bewildering	confuse or be confused	To confuse, mystify, bewilder, perplex, baffle, astonish
aka āzụ	bribery (lit. back hand)	to conceal; to be secretive; to give a bribe to.	bribery; dishonest dealing	Bribe, Bribery
èzi nà ulò	household	household, family	family; household (lit. the-compound-and-the-house)	Family, Household

Extant Igbo lexicographers have provided apparently good equivalents, but have not offered illustrations and explanations to clarify the meanings of the idioms for users of the dictionaries as done in other conventional dictionaries. Akponye quite often supplies a good number of synonyms entered in his dictionary. For example, for the idiom *gbagwòju ānya*, he gives six different synonyms- 'confuse', 'mystify', 'bewilder', 'perplex', 'baffle' and 'astonish' Williamson where necessary distinguishes the literal meaning of the idioms as shown in the table.

5. Conclusion

Idioms and collocations are an intriguing aspect of language that Igbo lexicographers have not ignored. A comparison of the extant Igbo dictionaries of Williamson (1972), Igwe (1999), Echeruo (2001) and Akponye (2011) and the analysis of individual dictionaries in this paper has provided proof of the relevance of idioms to the complete description of the language. The lexicographers have successfully identified this significant component of the language that marks a competent speaker, but creates difficulty for the learner. Since Igbo dictionary compilation is still largely bilingual, the inclusion, representation and lexicographic treatment of idioms and fixed collocations would still continue to pose challenges for Igbo dictionary writers. An improvement in the lexicographic treatment of this essential part of the Igbo language competence is therefore advocated through the cooperation of Igbo lexicographers.

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