



## Hyponym variations of semantic fields in Lutirichi

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### ABSTRACT

Studies in the field of semantics show that hyponymy is a basic semantic sense relation through which the nexus between a generic term (hypernym) and a specific instance of it (hyponym) can be manifested. However, to understand hyponymy, the inclusion relation between a hypernym and hyponymy within a semantic field is crucial. The purpose of this study was to examine hyponymic structures and their variations within selected semantic fields in Lutirichi, such as flora, fauna, kinship, and artifacts. The study was anchored in the Semantics Field Theory (SFT). A descriptive research design was employed. Data was collected through administering key informant interviews to native speakers of Lutirichi. The findings established that some semantic fields exhibited a high degree of lexical specificity and multiple layers of hyponymy, whereas others relied on broader, more generalized terms. The study also observed that hyponymic variations were also due to the sense of entailment in Lutirichi hyponyms. The study concludes that hyponymy in Lutirichi is meaningful only in their semantic field, and thus they are bound to change their meanings from one context to another context. These results contribute to a deeper understanding of semantic field structuring in underrepresented languages and provide insights into the cognitive and cultural underpinnings of lexical organization in Lutirichi. We recommend deliberate documentation and preservation of Lutirichi lexical items across semantic fields to safeguard their contextual meanings and promote linguistic vitality within the community.

**Keywords:** Entailment, Hypernymy, Hyponymy, Lutirichi, Semantic Field

### I. INTRODUCTION

There is an inter-related network of lexical items existing in a language. Each group of words related in one way or the other belongs to the same semantic field. However, in the same field, there are entailment variations within different semantic fields thus creating context specific meanings for various lexical items. The present study was interested in the semantic variations of Lutirichi hyponyms from one context to another context of usage. Whereby, the meanings of some Lutirichi hyponyms vary in sense when used in different contexts.

According to Anjiji (2008) Lutirichi is one of the nineteen varieties of the Luhya macro language. Marlo (2011) also posits that Luhya language is made of a minimum of nineteen languages. The members include Lubukusu, Lukhaayo, Lumarachi, Lusamia, Lunyala (East and West), Lutura, Luloogoli, Lutirichi, Lunyore, Lwisukha, Lwidakho, Luwanga, Lumarama, Lutsotso, Masaba, Lukisa, Lukabaras, Lusonga and Lutachooni. Mudogo (2017) identifies Lusonga as one of the Luhya languages. Available studies differ on the exact number of languages that comprise the Luhya language (Kebeya1997). Lutirichi is spoken by Abatirichi. The area inhabited by Abatirichi speakers include: Shiru ward, Shamakhokho ward, Muhudu ward, part of Banja ward, Jepkoyai and part of Gisambai ward.

In this context, the study sought to examine how hyponymic relations in Lutirichi reflect semantic field organization and contextual meaning variation. The overall aim was to analyze how lexical items within selected semantic fields—such as flora, fauna, kinship, and artifacts—interrelate and vary in meaning across contexts of use, thereby contributing to the understanding of how meaning is structured and negotiated within Lutirichi.

#### 1.1 Research Objective

The objective of this study was to analyze the structure and variation of hyponymic relations within selected semantic fields in Lutirichi, specifically flora, fauna, kinship, and artifacts, in order to understand how lexical specificity and entailment shape meaning within the language



## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Theoretical Review

Scholarly studies reveal that there exist some theories of semantics which deal with the meanings of words and sentences not as isolated entities but as related to situations of occurrence and use. For instance, Field theory developed in Europe by Trier explains the vocabulary or lexicon of a language as a system of inter-related networks or semantic fields. Semantic fields may vary across speakers and words may belong to more than one category. These may include: clothing, parts of the body, emotion, directions etc. For instance, trousers, hat, loafers, shirt, blouse, high heels etc., belong to the same semantic category as 'clothing'.

According to the semantic classification, a lexical unit depends on the meaning and environment in which it is expressed; as well lexical units have the property of interconnectedness. Some relationships in a lexical unit consist of sense relations such as hyponym and hypernym. The relationship between a hyponym and a hypernym is a relationship between a general and a specific (thematic) term that represents the term hyponymy. For example, the words "red", "yellow", "green", and "blue" are hyponyms of the hypernym "color".

According to Griffith (2006, p. 25) entailment occurs when the truth of one proposition depends on the other. It means that the truth of two propositions correlates with one another. On the other hand, Rambaud (2012, p. 70) argues that entailments are related to the knowledge of a particular language, and it has nothing to do with the knowledge of the truth. In other words, in entailments, the meanings of two sentences or lexical elements correlate to each other without regarding the reality of the word. Cruse (2000) posits that entailment has a context-bound relation with regard to identity and inclusion relations. Entailment in hyponymy is a unilateral relation such that the meaning of one hyponym entails the meaning of the superordinate, but the meaning of the superordinate does not entail the meaning of each hyponym. Cruse's views on entailment and hyponymy are crucial to the study of hyponyms in Luterichi.

#### 2.2.1 The Semantic Field Theory

According to (Nordquist, 2017) a semantic field is a set of words (or lexemes) which are related in meaning. Semantic field is also known as a word field, lexical field, field of meaning, and semantic system. Semantic field more specifically is as a set of lexemes which covers a certain conceptual domain and which bear certain specifiable relations to one another (Lehrer (1985). In order to clarify the meaning of semantic field and exemplify it, Nordquist (2017, p.1) states that "the words in a semantic field share a common semantic property. Most often, fields are defined by subject matter, such as body parts, landforms, diseases, colours, foods, or kinship relations."

The core of semantic field theory is to analyze the relationship between genus and species of lexical study. (Mei, 1987) It suggests that the words of a language system are related with each other and they form a complete lexical system. In this system, certain words could form a semantic field under a common concept. For example, under the concept of stationery, pen, eraser, pencil, ruler and etc. could form a semantic field. In this semantic field, stationery represents the genus, or in other words, general concept; pen, eraser, pencil, and ruler represent species, or specific concept. In short, semantic field is a combination of a group of words that interact, dominate, distinguish and depend on each other. The semantic range of the combination is called the field range of the semantic field. Therefore, the semantic field theory is significant to the present study it explains clearly the role of entailment in Luterichi hyponyms.

Semantic field can be also called lexical field or domain, which refers to the combination of a bunch of words with interrelated meanings and dominated under a same concept (Zhou, 2001). It has two folds of meanings. Some words, from a language, which were dominated under one certain concept, combined together and formed a semantic field. This certain concept may be represented by a superordinate, while the semantic field is formed from either hyponyms or semantic features. For example, under the common concept of furniture, words like table, closet, bed, bookshelf, couch, sofa, chairs, etc., could be gathered as a semantic field. Another example, burgundy, purple, pink, green, yellow, blue, orange, white and black, these words go to a common concept of color. On the other hand, words that belong to the same semantic field are not only semantically related, but also interact with each other. That is to say, when checking the meaning of a word, the first step is to compare the semantic meaning of the other words under the same semantic field.

Hyponymy is the most common branch of semantic field theory. It contains all objects that belong to the same category. The most fundamental category is dualistic, for example, paddy field and upland field, autorotation and revolution, etc. Another category is diversified, for example, navy, marine, air force, etc. Hyponymy can be multileveled, which means the basic level could be divided into more specific levels, and even more specific ones. For instance, we could divide animals into human being and birds and beasts, yet birds and beasts could be further divided into birds, fishes, insects and mammals, etc. And the mammals could also be specifically divided into pigs, dogs, cows, wolves and horses, etc. And finally, for example, horses can be further divided into broncos, stallions, ponies and so on. These divisions implicate the system of hyponymy, which is basically the superordinate-hyponym semantic field, also called general terms and specific terms.



### III. METHODOLOGY

The present study adopted a descriptive research design (Koh & Owen, 2000). The research site was in Hamisi sub-county which is one of the five sub-counties found in Vihiga County namely: Luanda, Emuhaya, Hamisi, Vihiga and Sabatia. The local language spoken in the areas is predominantly Lutirichi. Primary data was collected from the respondents using through key informant interviews and FGDs. The researcher targeted to collect 250 words from three categories of lexical items that included hypernyms, hyponyms, and subtypes of hyponyms. Every third lexical item from each set was picked. Thus, a total of 27 lexical items which included nouns, verbs and adjectives were sampled for analysis.

### IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

#### 4.1 Findings

The analysis of Lutirichi lexical items revealed that several hyponyms exhibit meaning shifts depending on the context of use. These variations illustrate the dynamic nature of semantic relations in the language, where a single lexical item may extend beyond its primary referential meaning to convey figurative or context-dependent senses. Such semantic flexibility demonstrates how cultural, social, and situational factors influence meaning construction in Lutirichi. Table 1 presents selected examples of hyponyms that show notable meaning variations across different contexts of use.

**Table 1**  
*Hyponym Variations in Lutirichi*

HYPONYM	GLOSS	MEANING VARIATION	SENTENCE UTTERANCES	GLOSS
<i>lipwooni</i>	Potato	Bribe	<i>Shuuma uhani lipwooni kwanyoore mhinsi.</i>	Shuma has bribed in order to get a job.
<i>Vuree</i>	Millet	Alcohol	<i>Khuhuuli vuree vuduukhu vwosi</i>	We drank alcohol the whole night.
<i>Shimuli</i>	Flower	Vanity	<i>Tsirupya ni shimuli vutswa.</i>	Money is vanity.
<i>Shing'ang'a</i>	Fox	Merciless	<i>Oyoo ni shing'ang'a uheense vulaahi.</i>	He is merciless, be careful.
<i>Khuteekha</i>	cooking	To get married	<i>Vuleche wa teekha Kakamega</i>	Vuleche got married in Kakamega.
<i>Shighaari</i>	Big	Leadership/promotion	<i>Unyori vughaari</i>	He has become a leader/He has been promoted.
<i>Imwamu</i>	Black	Evil heart	<i>Urhi nu mwoyo mumwamu.</i>	You have an evil heart.
<i>Isimbwa</i>	Dog	bad behavior	<i>Mwikhula wewe ni isimbwa</i>	His son is behaving badly.
<i>Linani</i>	cheetah	Giant/very big	<i>Yagwaa linani.</i>	He has grown very big/ He is a giant.
<i>Musaala</i>	Tree	Sly person	<i>Anusu ni musaala murherere</i>	Anusu is sly.
<i>Khulola</i>	See	foolish	<i>Akhuloli musiro</i>	He taking you for a fool.
<i>Khuchenda</i>	Walking	Fail to succeed	<i>Lero nda khuchenda vutswa.</i>	Today I did not succeed.
<i>Inasore</i>	Bhang	Stupid	<i>Akhubimii inasore.</i>	He thought you are stupid.
<i>Musaala</i>	Tree	Bhang	<i>Mwikhula wa reve ang'wetsa musaala.</i>	His son is smoking bhang.
<i>Musaala</i>	Tree	A prominent person	<i>Musaala kwa mang'ana kugwire mutirichi.</i>	A prominent person has died in Tiriki land.
<i>Khuchenda</i>	Walking	Prostitution	<i>Khang'ahi achenda lichenda.</i>	Khang'ahi is a great prostitute.

From the data in Table 1, it was observed that there is meaning variations in Lutirichi hyponyms. *Vucheeri*, for example, is a hyponym which refers to intelligence can also be used in a different context to mean a witch. *Uyu nii mucheeri wamaala vanduu tooto*, to mean this one is a witch he has killed so many people. Lutirichi hyponyms such as *lipwooni* (potato), *vuree* (millet), *shimuli* (flower), *shing'ang'a* (fox), *kuteekha* (cook), *shighaali* (big), *imwamu* (black), *isimbwa* (dog) and *linani* (cheetah) have different meaning when used in different contexts. The semantic field theory was relevant in explaining how the meaning of a word can only be fully determined in terms of contrast in which it stands with other words in the field. For instance, in the examples given above, the hyponym *lipwooni* (potato) which is a noun is altered to a verb (bribe) when used in a different context. Therefore, the findings of this study are in agreement with the study and findings of Andriani, 2023 who investigated the central or core meanings of selected fruit,

vegetable and flower names from the viewpoint of hypernym-hyponym relationships. Adrian concluded that dictionary users ought to realize that some word definitions needed improving and lexicographers should pay proper attention to core meanings and hypernym-hyponym connection. However, the present study differs from Andriani's, in the manner that the present study investigated general hyponyms in Lutirichi in terms of verbs, nouns and adjectives.

#### 4.1.1 Hyponyms for nouns

##### Example 1

Frank & Kathryn (1994) posit that hyponymy is sometimes referred to as inclusion. The superordinate is the included word and the hyponym is the including one. This is because when people utter statements, they often convey entailment whether intentionally or unintentionally because the basis of semantic description is the notion of entailment. However, from the data collected through the FGDs there was a contradiction established in some Lutirichi hyponyms whereby the notion of entailment is lost during usage for example; It is hard to relate the hyponym *lipwooni* (potato) and bribe, the two are different in the sense that a potato is a plant while bribe is a vice but Lutirichi speakers use *lipwooni* (potato) in some contexts to mean bribe.

##### Example 2

We cannot say that competency entails *iroong'u* (trousers). Trousers are clothes but can be used in Lutirichi to refer to competency. This was the reason why the present study saw it relevant to apply the Semantic Field Theory in the study. According to Wu (1988), he summarized Trier's semantic field theory as follows: Firstly, the vocabulary in a language system is semantically related and builds up a complete lexical system. This system is unsteady and changing constantly. Secondly, since the vocabulary of a language is semantically related, we are not supposed to study the semantic change of individual words in isolation, but to study vocabulary as an integrated system. Finally, since lexemes are interrelated in sense, we can only determine the connotation of a word by analyzing and comparing its semantic relationship with other words. A word is meaningful only in its own semantic field.

Nouwen (2011, p.2) explains that entailment can be used to establish whether two sentences are semantically independent, semantically related, or semantically identical. Technically, Nouwen portrays entailment as sentence S entails sentence S' if and only if S is true too. The present study agrees with Nouwen's explanation on entailment. *Lishaati* (shirt) entails *tsinguuvu* (clothes). This is because if you have a shirt then it means that you have clothes. Tomasello (2003), posits that language structure arises from repeated language use, meaning "structure emerges from use," and that people learn language by building up a mental inventory of specific linguistic constructions based on their experiences with language in context.

##### Example 3

Entailment is addressed logically since it is the foundation for all other logical relationships. These relationships consist of both "equivalence and contradiction". Therefore, the premise underlying "Molly is a cat" implies the premise underlying "Molly is an animal." As a consequence, one cannot simultaneously assert that "Molly is a cat and deny that it is an animal"; doing so would constitute a contradiction. Therefore, entailments are a crucial component of what is spoken, and they cannot be cancelled or separated (Bertuccelli, 1997, p.141). Likewise, Lutirichi hyponym *Linyolonyolo* (wandering jew) entails *tsinguutsa* (vegetables) which entails *virhaakwa* (plants) as it was established from the FGDs. This means that wandering jew is a type of vegetable which is a plant.

#### Hyponym for verbs

Finnegan (2008) argues that in spite of the fact that hyponyms can be found in dialects, ideas or words in hyponym relationship shift from one language to the next language. The present study through the FGDs came across a number of hyponyms in Lutirichi language for example *khutsenjeera* (gaze) is a hyponym of *khuloola* (seeing). This means that when we talk about gazing, we entail seeing. This study employed semantic field theory in which it is argued that meaning in use represents an approach to the functional or semantic dimension of linguistic communication. The intention was to combat the idea that meanings are things and instead focus on how people use linguistic conventions to achieve social ends. Therefore, the truth of one hyponym is the truth of the second hyponym which is one of the major characteristics of hyponyms. However, this study observed a unique characteristic in Lutirichi hyponyms.

##### Example 4

Miao (2020) presented the importance of lexical/sense relations in learning vocabulary. During the FGDs the researcher deduced that meanings of vocabulary are largely determined by the lexical sense relations, which makes the understanding and analysis of lexical sense relations helpful in the mastery of meanings of words. However, some Lutirichi hyponyms are against Miao, for instance, *khuteekha* (cooking) a hyponym in Lutirichi Language when used in



a different context changes its meaning to getting married. For example, *Vuleche wa teekha Kakamega* (Vuleche got married in Kakamega.) Therefore, the present study found the semantic field theory apt for the study.

The findings of the present study established that the role of entailment in Lutirichi hyponyms is lost during the usage of the hyponyms in the language. This is because the dictionary meanings of some Lutirichi hyponyms change their meanings when used in different contexts as discussed above. The study observed that entailment in hyponyms was utilized by the young generation and middle-aged people thus those below 45 years old while those above 46 years mostly used the hyponyms in table 4.2 and 4.3 thus applying the semantic variations.

#### 4.1.2 Hyponyms for Adjectives

##### Example 5

According to Cruse (2000), entailment has a context-bound relation with regard to identity and inclusion relations. Entailment occurs freely with propositional synonymy. Although the two lexical items in near synonymy are close in meanings or related, entailment relation cannot be attained. Entailment in hyponymy is a unilateral relation. i.e., the meaning of one hyponym entails the meaning of the superordinate, but the meaning of the superordinate does not entail the meaning of each hyponym. However, during the FGDs it was established that some Lutirichi hyponyms lost this characteristic of entailment when used in a different context. For instance, *Vucheeri*, is a hyponym which refers to intelligence in Lutirichi language but it can also be used in a different context to mean a witch. For example; *Uyu nii mucleeri, wamaala vanduu tooto*, (This one is a witch, he has killed so many people.) Lutirichi hyponyms process this characteristic for example *Limaanya* (wisdom) entails *vucleeri* (intelligence). This means if you are wise then it means you are intelligent.

##### Example 6

According to Yule (1996) hyponymy is a word that shows relationships between a general and a specific meaning of a word. This means that the meaning of a word is included in the meaning of another word. In Lutirichi the hyponym *imuuchi* (red) entails *likoondo* (colour). This means that when we talk about red then we are referring to a colour. This means that some Lutirichi hyponyms like *imuuchi* (red) agree with Zule's definition of a hyponyms.

## V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 Conclusion

This study has examined the variation of hyponyms across several semantic fields in Lutirichi, revealing patterns of lexical organization that are both linguistically significant and culturally grounded. The analysis demonstrated that certain semantic domains, such as kinship and local flora, exhibit deep and finely differentiated hyponymic hierarchies, reflecting the cultural and ecological relevance of these categories within the Lutirichi-speaking community. In contrast, other fields, such as technological artifacts or abstract concepts, tend to have broader, less differentiated lexicons, often influenced by contact with other languages or limited functional necessity. The findings underscore the importance of considering both linguistic structure and sociocultural context in the analysis of semantic systems. The study not only contributes to the documentation of Lutirichi, a lesser-studied language, but also enriches our understanding of how languages can differ in the ways they classify and name the world. Future research could expand on this work by exploring diachronic changes in hyponymic structures or by comparing these patterns across related or neighboring languages.

### 5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends the deliberate preservation and promotion of Lutirichi vocabulary, especially within domains that reflect the community's cultural and ecological identity, such as kinship and flora. Language revitalization initiatives, including curriculum development, local literature, and oral documentation, should incorporate these context-specific lexical distinctions to sustain their semantic richness. Additionally, community-based language programs and cultural forums should be encouraged to ensure that evolving concepts, especially those influenced by external languages, maintain their relevance and authenticity within the Lutirichi linguistic system.

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