

Meaning in Discourse; A Relevance – Theoretical Approach to EkeGusii Polysemes.

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Abstract

This study is motivated by assertions made by Bréal (1924 [1897]) claiming that deciphering of polysemes at a synchronic level should not posit a problem because meanings of such polysemes are mainly determined by the context of the discourse: It is the context that eliminates ambiguity and foregrounds the meaning of a particular polyseme. The study is based on the tenets of relevance theory, particularly the cognitive and communicative principles, (Sperber and Wilson, 1986/1995; and Carston, 2002) to render a pragmatic account of EkeGusii polysemes. It strives to investigate how polysemous senses of EkeGusii lexical items are established and meaning deciphered. This study deduces that the meaning of a polysemous word is inferred pragmatically as a result of the addressee endeavouring to deduce what a speaker intends by the particular lexical concepts they encode; hence it is a communicative phenomenon that is highly dependent on the addressee's ability to employ pragmatic inference.

Key words: *Lexical Pragmatics; Lexical broadening; Metaphor; Polysemy; Relevance; Inference*

1.0 Introduction

Determining meaning of words by considering their semantic – pragmatic interaction has been an area of focus by many scholars and researchers in the recent past (Lewis, 1979; Grice, [1967] 1989; Searle, 1983; Travis, 1985

and Recanati, 1995, 2004). More recently, a number of cognitive linguists (Tyler & Evans, 2001, 2003; Zlatev, 2003; Allwood, 2003; Evans, 2005, 2009 and Taylor, 2006) have studied polysemy within a perspective of context dependency of word meanings. Scholars in other disciplines have also done research on the interaction between semantic and pragmatic aspects. They include pragmatists, computational linguists and psychologists (Barsalou, 1987; Gibbs, 1994; Pustejovsky 1995; Copestake & Briscoe 1996; Carston, 1997, 2002; Lascarides & Copestake 1998; Blutner, 1998, 2002; Wilson & Carston, 2007; Glucksberg, 2001; Murphy, 1997, 2002; Falkum, 2011). Their main concern has been to discover the extent to which individual words are assigned meaning by linguistic underdeterminacy. This is referred to as lexical pragmatics - an area that interrogates how words with linguistically specified meanings are modified in discourse-. Much of the work conducted within 'lexical pragmatics' has had a leaning to polysemy with particular focus on polysemy in communication as regards how the speaker's intended lexical meaning is derived by considering the concepts and the context (cf. Carston 1997, 2002, 2010; Recanati 1995, 2004; Blutner 1998, 2004; Wilson & Carston 2006, 2007).

Falkum (2011) argues that normally, a speaker assumes that an addressee would be able to depend on the discursual context to decipher the intended meaning of particular words. According to Falkum, disambiguation of a polysemous word is a process that we easily engage in most cases. Falkum (2011, p. 106) postulates that we need not rely on linguistic operations to comprehend polysemes but rather we should rely on an inferential system that is pragmatic. Falkum's assertion augments Speber and Wilson (1998, p. 197) who argue that polysemy is a result of a pragmatic processes in which intended senses are inferred on the basis of encoded concepts and contextual information. They further argue that polysemy is eventuated by linguistically encoded concepts bearing broader or narrower denotations. According to Speber and Wilson, polysemes are constructed when hearers engage in the process of inferring the meaning intended by a speaker in a particular communicative construct.

Studies done on the comprehension of metaphor indicate that people decipher meanings of metaphors and metaphorical expressions as effortlessly as they decipher literal meaning (Glucksberg, 1998, 2001; Glucksberg & Keysar 1990; Gibbs, 1992, 1994; Glucksberg, McGlone & Manfredi, 1997). Wilson (2004) argues that there is no clear cut line between pragmatics and lexical semantics. According to Wilson, semantic representations are used as inputs in pragmatic processes. In this regard lexical pragmatics entails understanding the semantics of a lexicon and its pragmatics. Wilson (2004) argues that lexical pragmatics is mainly concerned with the modification of literal word meanings in specific communicative spaces. According to Wilson, words are interpreted unconsciously and spontaneously by applying lexical pragmatic processes. Wilson advocates for a unified approach of lexical-pragmatic processes including broadening, narrowing and metaphorical extension, a view also held by relevance theorists (cf. Wilson & Sperber 2002; Carston 2002). Crowley (1997) defines lexical broadening as a change in meaning which could result in a word processing additional meanings while retaining the original meaning. (cf. Gibbs, 1994; Campbell, 1998; Sperber & Wilson, 1985/1986, 2008; Recanati, 1995; 2004; Glucksberg, 2001; Wilson, 2003; Wilson and Carston, 2006, 2007; Carston, 1997; 2002; Vega-Moreno, 2007; Falkum, 2011). Relevance theorists, claim that the general types of lexical broadening include hyperbole, metaphor, category extension and approximation.

Lexical broadening is a phenomenon that is predominant in EkeGusii discourse. EkeGusii is a Bantu language that is spoken in south Western Kenya and predominantly in Kisii and Nyamira counties. Guthrie (1964) classifies it as a Central Bantu Language and labels it E42. By the 2009 Kenya population census, the EkeGusii speakers are 2,205,669 (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2010). This number is estimated to have grown to a population of over 3,000,000. It is a notable fact that many other EkeGusii speakers have settled in other places that are not their ancestral land. Such areas include areas in Trans-nzoia and Nakuru counties. According to Bosire, 1993; Mecha, 2004; Basweti, 2005; Mose, 2012, EkeGusii has two main dialects: the Rogoro (the Northern) and the Maate (Southern) dialects. This study has its focus on the 'Rogoro' dialect. The

EkeGusii language is extensively used at home, social places, and even at rural schools especially in lower primary as a medium of instruction (Magachi, 2015). In the larger Kisii area, it is evident that EkeGusii is used as a language of administration, socialisation and even instruction. Moreover, it is the language used for informal communication in most institutions in Kisii and Nyamira Counties. It is an interesting realisation that despite the prevalence of lexical broadening and polysemes in EkeGusii discourse, communication is not hampered. This study sought to investigate how communication is enabled despite the many polysemes and lexical broadening in EkeGusii discourse. The study sought to investigate how the hearers in communication processes are able to use context to infer the meanings intended by the speakers of the different utterances.

2.0 The Relevance-Theoretical approach

This study takes as its basis for analysis the Relevance Theory (RT). RT was advanced by Sperber and Wilson in 1986/1995 and was further expounded by Wilson and Sperber (2002), Carston (2002), and Wilson (2003) among others. Kihara and Schroder (2012:65-66) postulate that, RT is cognitive inferential and pragmatic in its nature. RT views cognition as a kind of mental computation in which the mental deductive device engages in a process of providing inference that is seen as spontaneous (Allott, 2014, pp. 6-9). Relevance, therefore, presumes that a particular input becomes more relevant by yielding more cognitive effects and less relevant if it takes more effort to process (cf. Wilson & Sperber, 2004:609).

RT holds that determinacy of what a speaker says and what they mean is highly dependent on pragmatic interpretation mechanisms. According to RT meanings of utterances and linguistic encodes cannot be derived by decoding of the concepts but rather by inference through pragmatic mechanisms that have specified comprehension procedure. It posits that the search for relevance triggers lexical-pragmatic processes. This process engages the cognitive effects, the context of an utterance and the content. It is the interrelatedness between these trio that enables a hearer decipher what the speaker intends. This pragmatic process stops when either the speaker's intentions are realised by the hearer or when the hearer abandons their

search for relevance (Wilson, 2003 p. 282) (cf. Sperber & Wilson, 2008; Wilson & Carston, 2006; 2007; Carston, 1997, 2002; Vega-Moreno, 2007).

RT holds that a speaker should strive to make his/her utterance easy to process by providing enough cognitive effects that would not hamper the hearers in their interpreting attempts. In this regard, the speaker has to make his/her utterance more informative in order to assist the hearer to render an accurate interpretation. On the other hand, the hearer's goal in communication is to find an interpretation of the speaker's meaning that meets the expectations of relevance raised by the ostensive stimulus itself. The hearer/addressee should strive to render an interpretation that meets the expectations of the speaker's intended meaning as raised by the stimulus provided by the speaker.

The Cognitive principle of RT stipulates that the cognitive system of humans provide attention and resources for processing inference that would be relevant to the encoded inputs. The hearer of a particular utterance engages retrieval mechanisms provided in their memories to use the relevant assumptions provided by the context to effectively engage in the inferential system of processing the meaning intended by the speaker. The communicative principle holds that a speaker should be able to, in a way and to some extent, predict what a hearer of their utterance would infer from their utterance. According to Sperber & Wilson (1995, pp. 266-71) the communicative principle of RT holds that utterances generally provide nuances that make it easier for interpretation. Such nuances suggest that a particular interpretation for an utterance would be more relevant and compatible to a speaker's intended meaning than any other alternative interpretation. The addressee takes a linguistic concept, and to interpret it, follows a path of inference which provides for an interpretation that meets the expectations of relevance. RT posits that the pivotal point of relevance is embedded in the manner in which content, cognitive effects and contextual assumptions interact and how they are constrained by expectations of relevance.

This study holds that particular words in EkeGusii discourse behave as though they have underspecified meaning and their meaning is context dependent. RT provides that interpretation of the speaker's meaning

of ad hoc concepts involves processing the encoded concepts using the encyclopaedic information and contextual assumptions as inputs to the inferential process. The hearer/addressee should strive to render an interpretation that meets the expectations of the speaker's intended meaning as raised by the stimulus provided by the speaker. The study is guided by two main principles advocated for in the R; the cognitive and the communicative principles. It held that EkeGusii speakers engage in mental computation by using mental deductive devices to do spontaneous inference relevant to the encoded inputs. The study also held that, in the EkeGusii discourse, hearers of utterances engage retrieval mechanisms provided in their memories to use the relevant assumptions provided by the context to effectively engage in the inferential system of processing the meaning intended by the speaker. Moreover, the study engaged the communicative principle of RT to show how utterances provided nuances that made it easier for interpretation by the addressees.

3.0 Methodology

This study investigated a naturally occurring phenomenon hence it adopted a qualitative design. Corpora for this study were elicited through recordings of verbal discussions among university students and support staff at Kisii University (Kenya) who are native speakers of EkeGusii. The researcher used six students (three male and three female) and six university support staff (three male and three male) who are native EkeGusii speakers as research assistants to record conversations among peers and colleagues. They revealed to the respondents their intention to record their conversations and sought their permission to use their recorded conversations. However, the main aspects of concern in the conversations were not revealed to the respondents. The conversations, which were not topic specific, were audio recorded using a recorder and later transcribed. A total of thirty seven conversations were recorded. They varied in duration varying between eight and fifteen minutes. Seven (20%) out of the thirty seven conversations were selected for transcription and analysis. After transcription, and by use of a check list, the researcher used his competence in EkeGusii language to identify constructions that evinced lexical broadening. A total of 244 constructions were identified. The constructions

were subjected to grammaticality judgement by three lecturers at the university who are native speakers of EkeGusii. From the authenticated list 24 constructions were sampled and subjected to analysis using the RT. The sampled constructions mainly focused on lexical broadening in reference to human beings. The encoded ad hoc concepts and their logical and encyclopaedic information together with contextual assumptions were taken as inputs in the process of inferring the meanings intended by the speakers.

4.0 Results and Analysis

This study revealed that EkeGusii speakers use broadening as a means of encoding different concepts and that these concepts are inferred by the listener following an inferential process. The study also found out that in EkeGusii, broadening in reference to human beings concerns human developmental stages, gender, names of animals, vices and occupations, states of being and names of inanimate objects. Broadening in the excerpted EkeGusii constructions is analysed below:

A. Broadening of lexemes on human developmental stages

Through this study it was realised that EkeGusii speakers broaden lexemes on human developmental stages to refer to other meanings. Consider the examples below:

- (1) Makori **nomwana**. Bono igo akoenana ebinto biaye bosa!
(Makori is a child. Now he gives his things for free!)

(Context: In campus. Two students are discussing a colleague by the name Makori who has been cheated into selling his laptop and printer to a fellow student at a throw away price)

Broadened word: Omwana

Encoded concept	Input to the inferential process			Output - relevant inference (meaning)
	Logical information/	encyclopaedic information	Contextual assumptions	
Omwana	Child	Small minded Gullible Behaves in an illogical manner	The adult (Makori) has been easily cheated into doing something	The adult is gullible

In the human developmental stages a child is regarded as a young human who is not yet mature. Children are seen to be gullible and easily manipulated. In EkeGusii, an adult who bears such characteristics is regarded as a child. In (1) Makori is regarded as a child because he has behaved in an illogical manner by selling his lap top and printer at a very low price. The addressee/listener in (1) infers that the referent (Makori) is not literally a child but that his actions are similar to that of a child. The addressee infers that the referent is not mature. The same notion is presented in (2) below:

- (2) Enachiete ka inkanyora **omoisi** ori Mogaka gakogita orobago
(I went home and got that young uncircumcised man, Mogaka, fencing)

(Context: Two members of staff are discussing about a young man who has not been attending their social meetings)

Broadened word: Omoisi

Encoded concept	Input to the inferential process			Output - relevant inference (meaning)
	Logical information/	encyclopaedic information	Contextual assumptions	
Omoisi	Young male who has not been circumcised	Not mature Not able to reason	Though big and circumcised, the adult (Mogaka) has not changed his mannerisms, he is still childish.	Mogaka is Immature

The term ‘omoisi’ as used in (2) is demeaning. According to the human developmental stages as held or observed by the Abagusii, Omoisi is a young boy who has not been circumcised. When this term is used pragmatically, it refers to an adult male who behaves childishly. Such an individual earns no respect from peers and those older than him. The context in (2) contributes greatly to the understanding of the addressee that the speaker demeans the referent because of his inability to attend their social meetings. The study however revealed that when a male gets some commendable achievement they are not regarded as ‘omoisi’ but as ‘omomura’. Consider (3) below.

- (3) Tinkomanya naki omonto oyio anyarete koruani ababisa bari bweka, ori nomomura bori!
 (I do not know how that person managed to fight those enemies alone; he is a young male adult)

(Context: Two male staff members are discussing about someone who fought some people single handedly).

Broadened word: Omomura

Encoded concept	Input to the inferential process			Output - relevant inference (meaning)
	Logical information/	encyclopaedic information	Contextual assumptions	
Omomura	A young male adult.	Strong Energetic and fearless	The referent fought fearlessly and without any help.	The referent is strong

The term **omomura** among the Abagusii indicates a developmental stage. It is a stage between childhood and adulthood just after a young male has been circumcised and before he marries. Among the Abagusii, wars used to be fought by young but mature males who had already been circumcised. They were seen to be energetic and fearless and as such were the community warriors. In (3) the referent has been regarded as ‘omomura’ due to his ability, strength and fearlessness to fight the enemies alone. It is evident that

the word *omomura* as has been used in (3) has been broadened to portray the fearlessness of the referent that has been able to fight some people singlehandedly. On the contrary, individuals who were cowardly were given demeaning names as is evident in (4).

4. **Egesagane** eke igo okagete ng'a ebinto bionsi nabo bigokoru masaragata igo?

(You young (uncircumcised) girl, do you think that all things are just done carelessly like that?)

(Context: In Campus. Two male staff members are discussing an issue. One of them rebukes a colleague who admits to have done something carelessly).

Broadened word: Egesagane

Encoded concept	Input to the inferential process			Output - relevant inference (meaning)
	Logical information/	encyclopaedic information	Contextual assumptions	
Egesagane	Young uncircumcised girl	Childish Immature Not commanding respect	The man has acted immaturely	The man immature and commands no respect

The term 'egesagane' is used by the Abagusii to refer to a developmental stage (for female) between childhood and maturity. This study revealed that the lexeme 'egesagane' as used in (4) is broadened to refer to both male and female in a manner that demeans them. The demeaning happens when the persons in reference behaves in a manner that reveals their lack of decorum or diligence. Though the referent in (4) is a man, he is referred to as 'egesagane' because he has acted carelessly. The addressee in (4) draws his inference of the encoded ad-hoc concept from contextual information provided. The fact that the referent has done something carelessly warrants his being referred to as a young uncircumcised girl (egesagane).

B. Broadening of lexemes on gender

Apart from the broadening of lexemes depicting human developmental stages, this study also found out that EkeGusii speakers broaden lexemes on gender to refer to human beings. This is evinced in the examples presented below:

5. Tigana **nomokungu** oyio. Takogokonya kende. Nigo are omwoba mono
 (Leave that woman alone. She cannot do anything. She is a coward)

(Context: Some male students are engaged in an informal conversation. One speaker disregards a proposal by a member to engage or incorporate some acquaintance of theirs in doing some task.)

Broadened word: Omokungu

Encoded concept	Input to the inferential process			Output - relevant inference (meaning)
	Logical information/	encyclopaedic information	Contextual assumptions	
Omokungu	An adult woman	Fearful/ cowardice	The man is a always fearful	The man is a coward.

The term omokungu among the Abagusii refers to an adult woman. Women among the Abagusii are seen as being fearful. Example (5) shows how this term is broadened to refer to men who are cowards. The listener(s) in (5) are able to infer the meaning of the encoded word (omokungu) by combining both the conceptual assumptions and the encyclopaedic information. The contextual basis in this statement enables the listener to infer that the referent is not a woman but has characteristics similar to those of a woman. Possibly the task they want to engage in is either difficult or dangerous in some way and his acquaintances feel that the referent cannot engage in that task. The antonym for ‘omokungu’ (woman) is ‘omosacha’ (man). As is presented in (6), an individual is termed ‘omosacha’ (man) if they are audacious.

6. Ng'a Mageto akaru chiropi echio chionsi! Ori **nomosacha**.

(That Mageto gave all that money! He is aman)

(Context: Some female staff members are conversing about a fundraising that they had had on a weekend. One of them is surprised that Mageto (a colleague) contributed a huge amount of money.)

Broadened word: Omosacha

Encoded concept	Input to the inferential process			Output - relevant inference (meaning)
	Logical information/	encyclopaedic information	Contextual assumptions	
Omosacha	An adult married man	Strong Fearless Audacious	The man does not fear giving his money.	Mageto is a brave man

Generosity, among the Abagusii, is construed as bravery. Bravery is an attribute given to men. According to this study, the fact that one is able to do something courageously makes them be regarded as men. In (6) Mageto is referred to as a 'man' because of his courage. In (6) it is indicated that the referent gave a lot of money; this is construed as audacity. The study found that even women may be referred to as men if they are seen to be brave. On the other hand, as exemplified in (5) men who are seen to be coward are referred to as women – omokungu -.

7. Nabo natebete ng'a omomura oyio **nomogaka**. Monto taiyo orange konyara kogamba buna agambete.

(I said that that young man is an old man. Nobody would have been able to deliver a judgement like he did)

(Context: a male staff member is discussing with a colleague about a colleague who had given a wise judgement)

Broadened word: Omogaka

Encoded concept	Input to the inferential process			Output - relevant inference (meaning)
	Logical information/	encyclopaedic information	Contextual assumptions	
Omogaka	An old man	Experienced Wise Sagacious	A young man has been able to solve a difficult situation or to handle a complex scenario	The young man is sagacious

The Abagusii regard old men as wise. It is assumed that their wisdom is accrued from the experience they have accumulated in life. The lexeme **Omogaka** (old man) as is evinced in (7) is broadened to refer to any male who proves to be wise. Although the young man in (7) has not become old, he is regarded to as an old man since he has been able to deliver a wise judgement. This study realised that the lexeme ‘omogaka’ is only used in its broad form to refer only to men in the society and not women.

8. Nyamokami nigo amoiranereretie nobwororo. Ori **nomong’ina**.
(Nyamokami answered her politely. That is an old lady)

(Context: A group of ladies engaged in a discussion. One of them narrates how Nyamokami proved a heroine by answering an aggrieved lady politely hence not provoking her to a quarrel)

Broadened word: Omongina

Encoded concept	Input to the inferential process			Output - relevant inference (meaning)
	Logical information/	encyclopaedic information	Contextual assumptions	
Omong’ina	An old woman	Wise Sagacious Respectful Caring	Being able to handle difficult situations	The lady is sagacious

In (7) and (8) *omogaka* and *omong'ina* have been used respectively to evince a level of maturity accorded the referents in the two examples. This maturity is attributed by the sagacity in their mannerisms. Among the Abagusii old women are regarded as sagacious, respectful and caring. In (8), the lexeme **omong'ina** has been broadened to refer to the young lady. She is seen to have been sagacious for giving a polite answer. Just as it was in the case of (7) as regards the lexeme **omogaka**, the term **omong'ina** as has been used in (8) is used in regard to the female gender alone.

C. Broadening of lexemes on animals

According to this study, EkeGusii speakers also use animal names broadly to imply various meanings. The broadened animal names are for both tamed and untamed animals.

i) Tamed animals

The study revealed that lexemes for tamed animals are broadened to give various references to human beings. This is attested by the examples presented below.

9. Omomura oywo nesese. Tari mwana moke tari mong'ina
(That young man is a dog. He neither spares the young nor the old)

(Context: Two students are discussing about a friend whom they believe is ill mannered for being sexually immoral)

Broadened word: E sese

Encoded concept	Input to the inferential process			Output - relevant inference (meaning)
	Logical information/	encyclopaedic information	Contextual assumptions	
E sese	A tamed animal	Dirty manner less eats dirty food including its own vomit	A man who has no regard for himself and seems not to care.	The referent is a womaniser

The AbaGusii regard dogs as dirty animals due to their habits/ characters. Dogs are seen to eat dirty food and can even eat their own vomit. Men with wayward behaviour may be referred to as dogs in EkeGusii. They are deemed to be dirty. In (9), the referent is regarded as a dog because he is seen to be promiscuous. The addressee in (9) is able to infer the meaning of the lexeme dog as used in this construction due to the contextual information that he has about the promiscuity of the referent.

10. Ori tari buna omokagerete, gose **netwoni**. Ning’o otamomanyeti?
 (He is not as you think of him, he is a cock. Who does not know him?)

(Context: Two university students discussing about one of their male class mate’s behaviour)

Broadened word: Etwoni

Encoded concept	Input to the inferential process			Output - relevant inference (meaning)
	Logical information/	encyclopaedic information	Contextual assumptions	
Etwoni	A rooster/cock	Serves many chicken, Ill mannered	The young man moves around with different women all the Time	The young man is ill mannered.

Cocks are regarded as having loose sexual morals; they freely and shamelessly move around with every chicken. Among the AbaGusii, men with similar attributes are referred to as cocks. Men are attributed this lexeme if they are seen as womanising. However unlike (9) where the lexeme esese (dog) is used in a demeaning manner, in (10) etwoni (cock) is thought to be positive and is taken as a form of praise. The study found out that the lexeme **etwoni** is broadened to render praises for people who are seen to have made remarkable achievements.

11. **Eng'ombe** eyio terikorengereri kende. (That cow does not think about anything)

(Context: some support staff have been angered about one of them who has decided to resign from the institution)

Broadened word: Eng'ombe

Encoded concept	Input to the inferential process			Output - relevant inference (meaning)
	Logical information/	encyclopaedic information	Contextual assumptions	
Engombe	A cow	Silly Thoughtless	The referent does things without putting thought to them hence does them foolishly	The referent is Thoughtless

The referent in (11) is seen as being foolish and thoughtless. His deed of resigning has probably been done hurriedly hence may bring about dire consequences. His behaviour has been likened to that of a cow which among the AbaGusii is seen as a foolish animal. Examples (12) and (13) are also similar to (11).

12. Tigana n'**eng'ondi** eye. Mmonto ki oranyare koenana ebesa yaye yonsi ase monto atamanyeti?

(Leave this sheep alone. Who can give out all their money to someone they do not know?)

(Context: A students showing her disregard for her classmate for giving away her money to a stranger)

Broadened word: Eng’ondi

Encoded concept	Input to the inferential process			Output - relevant inference (meaning)
	Logical information/	encyclopaedic information	Contextual assumptions	
Eng’ondi	A sheep	Silly Thoughtless	The referent does things without putting thought to them hence does them foolishly	The young man is ill mannered.

Although the referent in (12) is given similar attributes to the one in (11), this study found out that in (12) the foolishness is of a slightly higher degree as compared to (11). This is attributed by the fact that the referent in (12) is seen as having caused her suffering. In (12) the referent is likely to suffer because she has given out all her money to a stranger.

13. Omoisi oyio **nembori**. Natenene ande?
(That young man is a goat. Can he stop any where?)

(Context: A group of young men (students) have just come from a lecture hall. They are trying to ask a colleague to help them do some task but he refuses and gets on his way)

Broadened word: Embori

Encoded concept	Input to the inferential process			Output - relevant inference (meaning)
	Logical information/	encyclopaedic information	Contextual assumptions	
Embori	A goat	Jumpy Restless Careless Thoughtless	The referent does things without forethought or insight	The referent is thoughtless and jumpy

In (13) the young man has been referred to as a goat by a colleague. His action of refusing to help his colleagues seems to have earned him the

reference ‘goat’. He is seen as jumpy and restless hence thoughtless of what benefit he would have got by associating with colleagues.

14. Mbuya omonto abe omotaka kobua koba **ebunda** buna Mokeira (It is better to be poor rather than to be a donkey like Mokeira)

(Context: Two support staff are discussing about their financial status. One of them opines that it would be better they be poor as they are than to be like a friend of theirs who they feel is being mistreated)

Broadened word: Ebunda

Encoded concept	Input to the inferential process			Output - relevant inference (meaning)
	Logical information/	encyclopaedic information	Contextual assumptions	
Ebunda	A donkey	Overworked Mistreated Not self driven Stupid	A person being mistreated but unable to free herself because she needs money	Mokeira is Stupid

In (14) the referent (Mokeira) is regarded as a donkey due to her lack of thought. She is seen by her friends to be suffering out of the mistreatment she is getting from whoever she is working for. Her inability to free herself from the mistreatment she is suffering makes the speaker in (14) refer to her as a donkey. The addressees in (14) are able to infer that Mokeira is stupid and that Mokeira is a strong lady who could have used her strength in fending for herself but is being overworked and mistreated; she is therefore stupid.

15. Omosacha oye ngese **neeri**. Enchera ararwani omonto!!
(Her husband is a bull. The way he can fight someone!!)

(Context: one of the support staff is warning a friend not to insult a colleague because her husband could fight her.)

Broadened word: Eeri

Encoded concept	Input to the inferential process			Output - relevant inference (meaning)
	Logical information/	encyclopaedic information	Contextual assumptions	
Eeri	A bull	Very Strong Ferocious Aggressive Bully Fearless Rough Awkward Dangerous	The referent fights fearlessly	The husband is strong and ferocious

Bulls are normally strong and very aggressive. They are also seen to be fearless hence regarded as dangerous animals especially when provoked. The referent in (15) is regarded as a bull due to his ferocity in fighting. The speaker in (15) is cautioning her listener against provoking the man since he is dangerous.

ii. Wild animals

Apart from the fact that Abagusii broaden names of tamed animals, this study revealed that they also broaden names of wild animals. Wild animals are generally feared because of their destructive nature and their ferocity. The examples below evince how Abagusii give people attributes from wild animals.

16. Tigana na Mokaya pi. Eri n’eng’iti embe
(Leave Mokaya alone. That is a bad snake)

(Context: Two students are in a discussion about some venture they want to start. One of them suggests that they include someone else in the venture but the other student warns that he should not be included in their venture.)

Broadened word: Engiti

Encoded concept	Input to the inferential process			Output - relevant inference (meaning)
	Logical information/	encyclopaedic information	Contextual assumptions	
Eng'iti	Snake	Sly Dangerous Disguising	Mokaya is disguising and cannot be trusted	Mokaya is dangerous

Eng'iti is the EkeGusii word for snake - this differs from the phrase 'eng'iti y'orosana' which means a wild animal-. Snakes among the Abagusii are feared because they are dangerous. In (16) the referent is feared because he is seen to be sly and disguising. It is because of this that his colleagues are trying to avoid him. It is because of this that he is referred to as a snake. Note the emphasis provided by the speaker in (16) that the referent is a bad snake, no snake is good of course. This is intended to mean that the referent is very dangerous and the contextual and encyclopaedic information enables the addressee to infer this meaning without difficulties.

17. Omwana one n'**enchoke** tokomobuasabu.

(My child is a bee you cannot beat him in maths.)

(Context: Two support staff engaged in a discussion about their children's performance at school.)

Broadened word: Enchoke

Encoded concept	Input to the inferential process			Output - relevant inference (meaning)
	Logical information/	encyclopaedic information	Contextual assumptions	
Enchoke	A bee	Stings, Feared	The child performs well in maths and is feared by classmates	The child is sharp/ intelligent

In (17) the speaker compares his son to a bee due to his good performance in Mathematics. The indication here is that the child is feared because he performs well in a subject feared by many people. The fear in this case is positive just like in the case of bees where the sting is feared but the honey is liked.

iii. Detestable and demeaning animals

According to this study lexemes of detestable and demeaning animals are also broadened to refer to people with certain characteristics.

18. Oyio nigo akonyagoonchoka chingaki chionsi gose n’ekianda

(That one changes every time, he is a worm)

(Context: Three support staff engaged in a conversation. One of them opines that they cannot include someone because he does not have a stand)

Broadened word: Ekianda

Encoded concept	Input to the inferential process			Output - relevant inference (meaning)
	Logical information/	encyclopaedic information	Contextual assumptions	
Ekianda	A worm	Causes discomfort Unpredictable Parasitic	The referent is unpredictable due to his lack of stand	The referent is unpredictable

In (18) the referent is regarded as a tape worm. A tape worm turns in all sorts of directions in the stomach of either an animal or person and cause uneasiness and discomfort. Since it is a parasite, it may lead to the animal or person being less productive. The same is visualised for a person who has no stand. It is believed that such a person brings discomfort among the people he is with and may cause trouble. Such a person is seen as a traitor and may bring about failure if included in a group.

D. Vices and occupations

According to this study, names for vices and occupations are also broadened in EkeGusii.

19. **Omorogi** oyio Bikeri tomokorera gosori.
(That witch Bikeri, do not joke with him)

(Context: Some support staff are discussing about some evil that was done to one of them by a colleague)

Broadened word: Omorogi

Encoded concept	Input to the inferential process			Output - relevant inference (meaning)
	Logical information/	encyclopaedic information	Contextual assumptions	
Omorogi	A witch	Dangerous/ harmful, Evil Pretentious	Bikeri has done evil by hurting a colleague	Bikeri is crafty and evil

In (19) the referent (Bikeri) is called a witch. The speaker in (19) warns that the referent should be avoided because he is seen to be dangerous. The addressee in (19) infers the meaning of the encoded word ‘omorogi’(witch) by engaging the encyclopaedic information about how dangerous a witch could be and the contextual assumptions provided that indicate that the referent did something evil to a colleague.

20. Yaa aye **nomwarimu**. Enchera ogokora ebinto biao nendonge
(Young man you are a teacher. The way you do your things is good)

(Context: One male student is praising his friend for having done some commendable work)

Broadened word: Omwarimu

Encoded concept	Input to the inferential process			Output - relevant inference (meaning)
	Logical information/	encyclopaedic information	Contextual assumptions	
Omwarimu	A teacher	Wise Provides guidance Knowledgeable Skilful	The referent has done some commendable work. He has set an example that can be followed by others	The referent is unpredictable

Teachers among the Abagusii are respected. They are seen to set the development pace in most rural areas. Although this word is not originally an EkeGusii word, it has been nativised from Kiswahili and has earned great use in EkeGusii. What is astounding however is the fact that the EkeGusii word for teacher (omworoki) is not largely used when alluding to great achievements done by someone i.e. the word ‘omworoki’ (one who shows) is not normally broadened but omwarimu is. This can be explained by the fact that development is seen as a foreign phenomenon hence would be associated with foreigners. The young man referred to in (20) has done a remarkable work and has set an example for others.

E. Broadening of lexemes on states of being

This study realised that EkeGusii speakers broaden lexemes on the states of being as represented below.

21. Otagotigana **nebarimo** eye, nkgosoki ere

(Why don’t you leave this madwoman alone, she will shame you)

(Context: a group of support staff in a conversation. One of them warns a male counterpart to leave the referent alone because she could shame him)

Broadened word: Ebarimo

Encoded concept	Input to the inferential process			Output - relevant inference (meaning)
	Logical information/	encyclopaedic information	Contextual assumptions	
Ebarimo	A mad person	Careless Shameless Aggressive Harmful Courageous thoughtless	The referent does not fear anything. She can do anything including that which may bring shame	The lady is shameless

Mad people are feared. They are seen to be dangerous and fearless, careless and shameless. The speaker in (21) advises their audience to avoid the referent because he believes that the referent is likely to shame him. The speaker refers to the referent as a mad woman because of her likelihood to shame the addressee due to her carefree attitude.

22. Aye **nomomrwaire**. Ninki ekio bonoogokora?
(You are sick. What are you doing?)

(*Context: a student is reprimanding a colleague for behaving badly*)

Broadened word: Omorwaire

Encoded concept	Input to the inferential process			Output - relevant inference (meaning)
	Logical information/	encyclopaedic information	Contextual assumptions	
Omorwaire	A sick person	Weak Malnourished Behaves abnormally/ strangely	The referent is behaving queerly	The referent has malnourished Behaviour

A sick person is seen to be weak and malnourished. He or she is also seen to behave strangely or in an abnormal manner. In (22) the referent is termed a sick person because he or she is seen to engage in crazy deeds.

F. Broadening of in animate objects

Among the Abagusii, names of inanimate objects are also broadened. The examples below show how names of inanimate objects are broadened in EkeGusii to refer to human beings.

23. Omosubati ori **nekebarabara**. Tari gottenena ande. Rero naa mambi naria.
 (That lady is a propeller. She is always moving. Today she is here tomorrow she is there)

(Context: some staff members are discussing about a lady whom they regard as ill mannered)

Broadened word: Ekebarabara

Encoded concept	Input to the inferential process			Output - relevant inference (meaning)
	Logical information/	encyclopaedic information	Contextual assumptions	
Ekebarabara	A propeller	Has no stand Easily moved by the wind Moves in any direction, clockwise or anticlockwise	The referent cannot be in one position. She is always moving/rotating	The referent is jumpy

Normally propellers are known to rotate at different speeds depending on the force of the driving wind. They can rotate clock wise or anti clock wise. People who cannot contain themselves in one position are (among the Abagusii) referred to as propellers. In (23) the referent is called a propeller due to the fact that she is always moving. Among the Abagusii such an attribute is detested hence regarded as negative.

24. Gose riri **nerikembi**. Nditige ebesa?
 (That is a predator. Can she spare money?)

(*Context: some students are discussing about a lady they regard as being promiscuous*)

Broadened word: Rikembi

Encoded concept	Input to the inferential process			Output - relevant inference (meaning)
	Logical information/	encyclopaedic information	Contextual assumptions	
Rikembi	Predator	Disguising Dangerous Devouring	The referent disguises herself and pretends to be good but she is dangerous and inhuman.	The referent is a prostitute

Rikembi may be used in relation to predators. They may hide lying in wait of their prey or may at times disguise themselves in anticipation of catching their prey. Among the Abagusii the same is implied of prostitutes mainly. They are seen to capture people of loose will and make them their prey. In other cases such prostitutes may pretend to be good people, caring and loving but at the end they are destructive and turn out to be dangerous.

The analysis presented in this paper evinces that there is prevalent lexical broadening in EkeGusii and that when words are broadened by the speakers the hearers seem to make spontaneous inference to get the meaning intended by the speaker. The study reveals that EkeGusii speakers modify word meanings in use. In the examples provided (1 – 24) the speakers rely on the contexts in which the broadened words to infer meanings intended by speakers. This is in line with assertions made by Bambini, Ghio, Moro and Schumacher (2013) who argue that modulations of meaning by hearers are thoroughly context-dependent; for instance in examples (5) and (6) hearers

heavily depend on the contexts of the utterances to infer the different meanings of the words ‘omokungu’ (woman) and ‘omosacha’ (man). As averred by Kittay (1987) comprehenders aim at specifying meaning and selecting, out of the many possible interpretations, one interpretation that coheres with our background default assumptions and other contextual considerations. In (11) for instance, the speaker is talking of ‘eng’ombe’ (a cow). However the hearer uses the contextual cues together with their encyclopaedic endowment to infer that the speaker is not literally talking of a cow; the context indicates that the cow could not use his mind to think hence indicating to the hearer that the cow in reference in (11) is not an animal but a human being.

This study provides a vital contribution to the semantics of EkeGusii, its socio-semantics and the interface between pragmatics and semantics of EkeGusii. The study also lays a basis for considerations of research on occurrence and inference of ad-hoc concepts in other languages, and in particular Bantu languages, to draw a comparison between how concepts are inferred in different languages. For example there are indications of occurrences of broadening in Kiswahili: For example the word ‘mswahili’ (aSwahili) could in one context mean a person who speaks the Swahili language; in other contexts it could mean a con-man and still in another context it could mean a civilised person who lives in luxury. The word ‘Kondoo’ (sheep) may derive different meanings depending on the context in which it has been used. In some cases, especially in church contexts, it would mean a saint where as in other instances it would be used to refer to an enduring person or even to a fool. There is therefore need for more research to investigate whether there are more of such encodes and also whether other Bantu languages evince such phenomena. It is also worth noting that the broadened words analysed in this study were in informal conversations. There is therefore need to do a study on broadening of words in formal conversations to show whether the same scenario is replicated.

Conclusion

This study revealed that meaning in EkeGusii can arise as a result of lexical broadening; through lexical broadening EkeGusii speakers are able to maintain a semantic system by encoding and inferring meanings of various ad hoc concepts. The examples provided in this study evince that in EkeGusii there is pervasive use of polysemy which is both spontaneous and intentional. This study deduces that Polysemy is a product of pragmatic processes that entail encoding/construction and inference of ad hoc concepts. Although the communicated meaning may be different from the encoded linguistic concept, it is the dependence of the encyclopaedic information and the contextual assumptions that enables the listener or addressee to recover the speaker's meaning. In the examples discussed in this study, the broadened words are constructed and their meanings inferred in a complex context that also depends on the communication/conversation participant's knowledge about the topic, the existing relationship between them and their cultural background knowledge. This study provides evidence that pragmatics plays a pivotal role in the construction and inference of polysemy which would, otherwise lay semantic traps in communication. The EkeGusii examples analysed in this study indicate that interpretations are not decoded but are inferred by a pragmatic mechanism. Moreover, the study deduces that the inferential mechanism significantly enhances spontaneous inference of the broadened EkeGusii encodes by providing deductive devices that readily complete the inferring of the speakers encodes.

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