

## **Sociological and Anthropological Culture of the Anaang Language of Ikot Ekpene Variety in Akwa Ibom State: From the viewpoint of Lexico-Structural Ambiguity**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The purpose of this study is to examine the sociological and anthropological culture of the Anaang language of Ikot Ekpene Variety in Akwa Ibom State, from the viewpoint of lexico-structural ambiguity. The thematic considerations include lexical ambiguity, structural ambiguity, idiomatic constructions, polysemy and homonymy in Anaang language of Ikot Ekpene Variety. This study explains the features of these concepts, their characteristics, contrasts the semantics relations. Meaning is central to communication. Various scholars have attempted to give their views on meaning. Semantic relationship deals with an association between the meanings of words at the word level and sentences at the sentence level. The choice for this topic came as a quest to show the sociological and anthropological culture of the Anaang language of Ikot Ekpene Variety. The study used a random sampling technique. The instrument used for the collection of data was the Anaang word list. Findings reveal that polysemy and homonymy are aspects of meaning relation. This work is a fallible foundation for understanding the words, their meaning, and their usage in Anaang language of Ikot Ekpene Variety.*

**Keywords:** *Anaang language, lexical ambiguity, structural ambiguity, idiomatic constructions, polysemy and homonymy.*

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The advent of civilization, western education and culture in Nigeria has affected the culture of Anaañ people negatively (Ekpo, Nkanta and Effiong 2023). However, Anaang constitutes the second largest ethnic group in Akwa Ibom State, with an estimated population of about four million people (National Bureau of Statistics, 2015). , the Anaang people live in village clusters (iluñg), made up of lineages (ekpuúk) which live in compounds of extended families "*eka ikùdde*" (Effiong, 2019). Language plays a vital role in communication; it is an integral aspect of human existence. It is a system of communicating ideas or feelings by the use of conventionalised signs, sounds, gestures, or marks having understood meanings (Ekpo *et al.* 2023). Anaang belongs to the Lower-cross group of the Niger-Congo family of languages (Udondata, 2006; Enang and Urujzian, 2013a) and Contrary to the western view that Africa has no culture, hence termed a "dark continent" (Enang 2018, Ekpo *et al.* 2023), the Anaang people have a unique cultural heritage; they attached important values to its customary rites and subjected it to unique cultural norms (Effiong, 2019). Oral literature has been used in transmitting and preserving the custom and cultural beliefs of the people right from preliterate era (Ekpo *et al.* 2023) and Enang and Urujzian 2013a). Effiong (2019) argues that no known human society survives without a culturally defined heritage. Cultural heritage is expressed through language in diverse ways. It could be expressed in folksong, proverbs, folktales, myths, legends, emotions and so on.

Semantics is an area of linguistics that studies the meaning of words and sentences in a language (Filmore and Atkins 1992). According to Ndimele (2007) and Enang (2009), the problem with the word "meaning" is that it serves many functions. In his explanation, he listed some words or phrases people use to refer to what something means: stands for, signifies, denotes, symbolizes means, implies, translates, represents, expresses, portrays, designates, and indicates. Cherry (1957) and Enang (2018) said that meaning can be said to be a harlot among words. He likens meaning to a temptress who can seduce the writer or speaker from the path of intellectual chastity. Semantics is the study of meaning in human expressions (Filmore and Atkins 1992). Once we understand the semantics of a language, we completely understand that language (Lobner, 2002). According to Hurford and Hearsley (1983), meaning involves more than just the semantic interpretation of an utterance. It is central in any form of communication. Falk (1978) opines that meaning originates in the mind. Palmer (1976) explains that the meaning of a word is determined by the arrangement of the words in a sentence (Unger *et al.* 2002; 2006). Every language has its mode of expression seen in the people's way of interaction within a locality or geographical region as it enables them send and receive information (Ekpo *et al.* 2023).

A lot has been devoted by scholars from different fields of endeavour like philosophy, anthropology, psychology, logic, and linguistics to the study of the nature of meaning. Until recently, so much has been done by linguists on semantics. The reason has been attributed to the nature of meaning. Meaning is not a stable phenomenon. One expression can be subject to several interpretations, depending on the speaker, hearer, or context. Falk (1978) and Enang (2018) believe that meaning originates from the mind. A speech comes as an abstract concept of the mind that has been made suitable for an expression, which the hearer converts into the meaning that the speaker has tried to convey.

According to Enang and Urujzian (2013a), Falk (1978) the syntactic system of the Anaang language is the set of principles that link the meaning of sentences with the form they have expressed. Once surface structures are created from deep structures, then the essential properties of the meaning of a sentence are represented in the deep structure of that sentence. According to Mgbagwu (1976), deep structure in the Anaang language is the level of meaning, an element that does not contribute to meaning need not be present in the deep structure but instead can be added transformationally (Enang and Urujzian, 2013b), (Mboho and Awak 2013).

According to Osuagwu (1996), ambiguity means a word, phrase, or sentence capable of many interpretations. In ambiguity, a single surface form with several meanings must have different deep structures. Kempson (1992) thinks that the phenomenon of multiple ambiguities of (phonological) words is known as a homonym, a term traditionally reserved for the unrelated meaning of words. Eke (2019) submitted that controversies are trailed because of ambiguity or broad definition of keywords or phrases, among others (Agha, 2022).

Ndimele (2007) sees meaning as a chameleon of a word that can change the colour of its effect with a change of speaker, hearer, context, or setting. Grammatical units in human language demonstrate several interesting meaning relations, which may exist at different levels that could be either word or sentence levels. Words can be ambiguous depending on the context they find themselves. The meaning of a word in isolation can change based on the relationship the word has with other words in the sentence. A well-arranged sentence may be either meaningless or ambiguous.

According to Osuagwu (1996) and Enang (2009), the American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language defines ambiguity as a phrase or sentence capable of many interpretations. According to Ndimele (1997), these semantic anomalies may be traceable to how a word relates and interacts with others in the sentences. Osuagwu (1996) further explains that ambiguity occurs around single or constituent words. Ambiguity

occurs as a result of a lack of tone marks. Tone marks disambiguate sentences to give them clear meaning.

Kempson (1992), Enang and Urujzian (2013a) explain that the ambiguity of a sentence occurs due to the existence of two non-identical interpretations of a single sentence. Ejele (1996) says that ambiguity arises if a word, phrase, or sentence has more than one meaning. Ambiguity is called lexical ambiguity if it relates to a word and phrasal ambiguity as it relates to a phrase; if it relates to a sentence, it is called sentential ambiguity. Ndimele (1997) categorized ambiguity in human language into lexical and structural.

In the Ikot Ekpene variety of the Anaang language, ambiguities occur at the sentence, word, and idiomatic levels, generative personification, and their associative constructions. Structural ambiguity results from how the words or phrases are in a particular sentence. Ndimele (1997) and Enang (2009) opine that a particular word or phrase can modify more than one construction. According to Yule (1994), structural ambiguity is a sentence with two or more different underlying interpretations which would be represented differently in the deep structure. All native speakers of a natural language have the innate linguistic ability to distinguish at the syntactic level, grammatical from ungrammatical sentences, and could recognize and categorize at the semantic level and various semantic forms, for example, ambiguity and anomaly. There are structural relationships between words in a sentence that are indispensable to making up the meaning of the whole.

This study is useful for a proper understanding of the Anaang language as this will expose one to the different shades of meanings of words. The aim of this study is to examine the sociological and anthropological culture of the Anaang language of Ikot Ekpene Variety in Akwa Ibom State, from the viewpoint of lexico-structural ambiguity in Nigerian languages (Enang, 2018).

In this work, ambiguity is an essential element of a language that contributes to its richness of a language. In trying to investigate the different aspects of lexical ambiguity in the Anaang language of the Ikot Ekpene variety, this analysis focuses on the Mentalist Theory of Meaning (Chomsky 1957) and the Use Theory (contextual/operational theory) (Weinreich 1953). The Mentalist Theory of Meaning states that the meaning of a word/expression is the mental image the word/expression invokes in the minds of the speaker and hearer. Meaning is assessed based on the speaker and the hearer's perception of the utterance. According to Enang and Tsavmbu (2022), English is used by more speakers than its native speakers. For instance, the English word light means electricity, knowledge, and brightness, among others.

**Table 1a:** Ikot Ekpene variety of the Anaang language, meanings of the lexical items

Lexical	Meaning	Structural/gloss
Ikáñ	Gun/fire/light	ben ikañ di – bring the light/gun/fire
Tèm	Cook/cause to sit	Tem ayen – cause the child to sit/cook the child
Mkpõñ	Yesterday/tomorrow	Di mkpõñ – come tomorrow

The Use Theory (contextual/operational theory) (Wittgenstein 1953) locates the meaning of an expression in the context of its usage. Meaning is assessed based on the context of speech

**Table 1b:** Ikot Ekpene variety of the Anaang language, meanings of the lexical items

Word	Denotative Meaning	Connotative meaning
Íkút	Tortoise	Tricky person, tortoise
Únàm	Animal	Stupid/Foolish person
Ñsék-nsék	Tender/weak	Fresh/virgin/delicate/innocence

### 3.0 METHOD

The method used for this work was the oral interview. The fieldwork took the form of interactions and conversations with competent speakers of the language. The study used a random sampling technique. Eight (8) (3 youths and 5 adults) speakers of the language were selected. Only native speakers who had resided in the village for a good number of years and had a substantive level of education were selected. They presented data with the right tonal and orthographic representations. The age range was between the ages of 18 and 65. The reason was that the age of an informant matters in data collection because the language competence of a child cannot be compared with that of an adult. English has justifiably undergone a metamorphosis, a kind of re-coloured social painting which characterizes the different cultures of the world (Enang, 2020). The wordlist was written in English, and its gloss was in Anaang. Information from the library and Scholarly works were also used. The question asked during the interactions and conversations were as follows:

1. What is ambiguity?
2. Mention the words that have more than one meaning in Anaang.
3. Make sentences with these words to show how they are used,
4. Mention the idioms of the language.
5. Give their different meanings.

#### 4.1 LEXICAL AMBIGUITY

According to Ndimele (1997) and Enang, E. (2018), lexical-ambiguity results when a construction has more than one meaning or interpretation due to the presence of a particular word in that construction. It could be a word in a sentence. For example,

<b>Anaang</b>		<b>English</b>
Dí kwuòk ufòk	-	come and clean the house/clear the house
Atim ato ntunuunu	-	Atim is from a very remote area/uncivilized place.
Ke ben Eto Idaha nsòk	-	Go and bring walking stick for me/signalling one to sit down.
Eyem ekakeed agwo	-	They are looking for everybody/they are looking for people of same mother.
Esin Ikañ ke ufòk	-	The house is set ablaze/electric light has been connected in the house.
Anyen amo agwuò	-	The eye has been plugged off/the colour has faded.
Atim Apon inua	-	Atim has a big mouth/Atim exaggerates
Nwam tem ayen	-	Help me cook the child/help me cause the child to sit.

The possible interpretations of the words that cause the ambiguity in each of the above sentences are:

Kwuòk	-	To sweep/to clear
Ntunuunu	-	A remote place/an uncivilized place
Eto Idaha	-	A walking stick/a word used to signal somebody to sit down.
Ekakeed	-	Everybody/people from same mother
ikañ	-	Fire, light, gun.
Agwuò	-	To fade/to go out
Akpon inua	-	Big mouth/to exaggerate
Tem	-	Cook/cause to sit.

#### 4.2 STRUCTURAL AMBIGUITY

According to Mbagwu (1976) and Enang (2018), the structural relationship of indispensable words in a sentence constitutes the underlying system of a semantic structure.

##### **Sentences**

Akon kwuok ufok

-

##### **Interpretations**

Akon sweep the house

Akon pack everything from the house

Atim ato ntunuunu

-

Atim is from a remote area

Atim is behaving or looks like somebody from an uncivilized place

Afo ade ñkwõño

-

you are the leaf that dances at the slightest form of wind/you are restless

Edu afo atebe

-

you are morally reeking

You behaviour is bad

Ñkõm ifia akai

-

A firewood in the forest

An indomitable personality

Ke ben eto idaha nsok

-

Go and bring a walking stick for me

An idiom that signals a visitor to sit down

Arit tem ayen ade

-

Arit cause the child to sit

Arit cook the child

Udo ato abio ekpo

-

Udo is from the land of the dead

Udo is fearless/heartless

Atim aba nte abupo iyak

-

Atim is like a dead fish

Atim is a flirt

Arit ade iso eto

-

Arit has an ugly face

Arit has a face like a wood

Ade mkpọ ndap	-	It is a feature in the dream It is an unimaginable thing
Anye aba ate idut	-	He/she is like a firm rope He/she is a tough person
Afo ade mkpa	-	You are dead You are heartless
Mmeyene efañ	-	I have a rope from palm frond I have a tough person
Atie nte nsukpaha ebai	-	It is like a stubborn fish He is neither in nor out
Eyem ekakeed agwo	-	They are looking for everybody They are looking for people from the same mother
Ade akpọ ikut	-	It is the tortoise bone. He/she is a very strong person

**Table 3:** Idiomatic Constructions in Anaang Language of Ikot Ekpene Variety

Sentences	Surface Meaning	Deep/Root Meaning
Akpọk adide agwo ndọk anọ unen	The lizard has become a shameful thing to the hen	An object of high repute has suddenly become a thing of ridicule.
Mmọñ-ayet ebomonkuku aboiyo ekwọọñ	The tears of a red-eyed bird (a pigeon called <i>Ebomonkuku</i> ) has affected the Snail	The woes of the mighty has befallen the innocent
Ikut atayop ke etem afia	The tortoise that feeds on palm fruit has been cooked without oil	The rich has been buried poorly or wisdom has perished in the domain of the foolish
Asoñ agwo asoñ ifiọk	He who is older than a person, seniors in wisdom	The elders are wiser and more experience than the youths

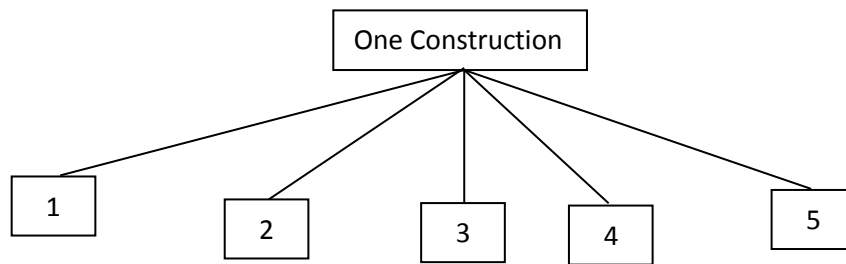


Ku kum anyen ke nuuk enañ agwo	Do not get blinded by another person's cow horn.	Do not let other people's problem be your undoing.
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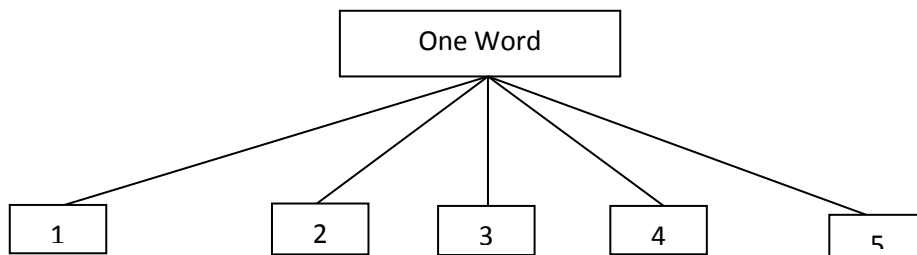
#### 4.4 AMBIGUITY POLYSEMY AND HOMONYMY

Polysemy and ambiguity a linguistic unit give several interpretations. Ndimele (1997) asserts that ambiguity and polysemy are similar as one stretch of utterance is given more than one meaning. Ambiguity is characterized by the level of deep structure. Homophonous words give rise to lexical ambiguity. Most idiomatic/figurative expressions in Anaang have several interpretations; they are ambiguous. Ambiguous words could be disambiguated depending on the context in which they are used.

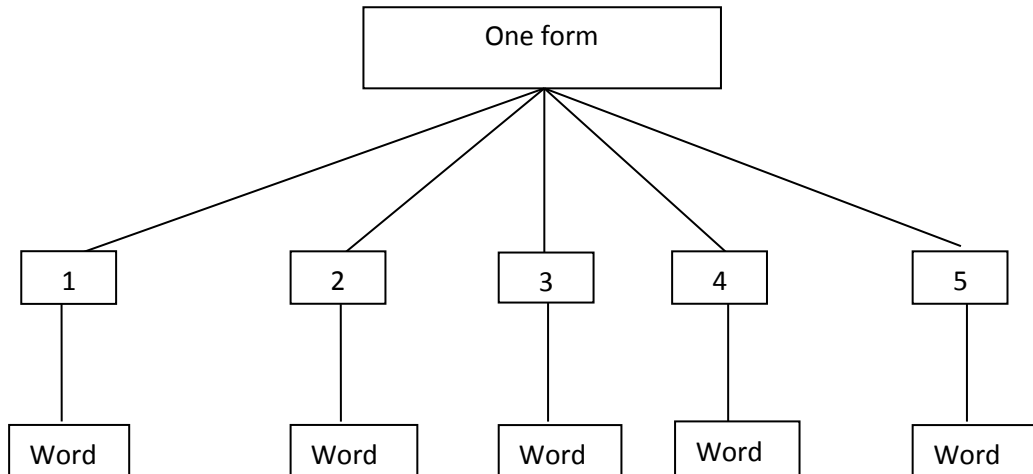
#### AMBIGUITY



#### POLYSEMY



## HOMONYMY



### 4.5 POLYSEMY IN ANAANG

#### /Ínùá/:

- |           |   |                            |
|-----------|---|----------------------------|
| Ínùá abe  | - | <b>mouth</b>               |
| Ínùá agwo | - | an opening, example, pit   |
| Ínùá úfọk | - | mouth - part of human body |
|           | - | an entrance to a house     |

#### /úkód/:

- |            |   |                               |
|------------|---|-------------------------------|
| úkód ebọbọ | - | <b>Foot</b>                   |
| úkód édim  | - | foot of a bridge              |
| úkód agwo  | - | the intensity of the rainfall |
| úkód íkọ   | - | leg - part of the body        |
| úkód Ísañ  | - | subject matter                |
|            | - | one's style of walking        |

#### /Ígwò/:

- |           |   |                           |
|-----------|---|---------------------------|
| ígwò úfọk | - | <b>head</b>               |
| ígwò agwo | - | group leader, family head |
| ígwò Íkọ  | - | head - part of the body   |
|           | - | theme or moral lesson     |

#### /ányèn/:

- |            |   |                      |
|------------|---|----------------------|
| ányèn úfọk | - | <b>eye</b>           |
|            | - | the eye of the house |

ányèn agwo	-	somebody's eye
ányèn afòñ	-	colour of a fabric
ányèn òdàb	-	the way one dreams
<b>/éfùd/:</b>	-	<b>bottom</b>
éfùd agwo	-	buttocks - part of the body
éfùd abasin	-	bottom of a basin
éfùd Únám	-	buttocks of an animal
<b>/édem/:</b>	-	<b>back</b>
édem agwo	-	back side of a human
édem ésá	-	back yard
édem mmoto	-	rare view of a car

### Denotative characteristics

/úsúñ/	-	road, door
/únàm/	-	piece of meat, animal
/áfùm/	-	air. breeze, wind
/tóp/	-	throw, sting, explode, shut
/wúúk/	-	rebuke, stop, stake

### Connotative Characteristics

Ébód	-	foolish person
Édi	-	a dirty person
Ékwòòñ	-	slow/dull person
Ikùd	-	cunning person
Édòñ	-	silly person

### Homonymy

Homonyms are responsible for lexical ambiguity. This is a situation where an expression is capable of having more than one interpretation in human language. There are two types of homonyms: homophones and homographs. Homophones are words which have the same pronunciation but different meanings. Homographs are words which are spelled the same but differ in both the pronunciation and in meaning (this disambiguates ambiguity).

## Examples in Anaang

### Homophone

/bò/	-	take, fetch
/fáád/	-	cut, embrace
/káñ/	-	deny, fry
/bóñ/	-	to pray, scream, nag
/tɔ/	-	hit, dupe, plant
/búùk/	-	burry, soak
/kóód/	-	call/read
/ufáñ/	-	opportunity, space
/újo/	-	voice, hot
/ñkà/	-	association, age mate
/mpóñ/	-	the day before, the day after
/Ipá/	-	hide of an animal, skin, cane, belt
/útoñ/	-	ear, loose end
/ikáñ/	-	fire/light/gun
/nsék/	-	fresh, delicate
/iféd/	-	chance/naked

**Homograph:** According to Enang (2020), "these are same spelling but different pronunciation occasioned by their tonal variations. This is a case of disambiguation; the tonal differences bring about a change in meaning".

típ	-	bore holes
típ	-	be blunt
únên	-	fowl
únén	-	right
ùkò	-	courage
ú-kó	-	over there
úkót	-	leg
úkôt	-	in-law
ábóñ	-	mosquito
ábòñ	-	Kane
àbóñ	-	Chief

Ambiguity is a grammatical phenomenon in which an expression gives more than one interpretation. It is similar to polysemy and homonymy as one stretch of utterance gives

more than one meaning, and a word gives many meanings. The data have demonstrated that the presence of the underlying lexical items in the sentence structure brings about different meanings. Enang (2020) see lexical ambiguity as a situation in which a single word is subject to more than one interpretation. For example, *Mmeyene Efañ* means I have a rope from palm fronds or I have a tough person. The core word is *Efañ*. It brings about possible interpretations that cause ambiguity.

Other examples can be seen in these words:

kwuok	-	sweep/clear
ntunuunu	-	remote place/uncivilized place
eto idaha	-	walking stick/a word used to signal somebody to sit down

Ndimele (1997) and Enang (2009) explain that lexical items are core words in sentences that connote meaning. Structural ambiguity arises when a particular word or phrase can modify more than one constituent or due to how the whole sentence is organized or how a word or phrase is placed in a sentence (Ndimele 2007). Yule (1994) states that structural ambiguity is a sentence occurs if two or more underlying interpretations which represented differently in the deep structure. Structurally, as demonstrated in the data presentation, one sentence or phrase can give different interpretations depending on the hearers' perception of the utterance.

For example, in a sentence like "*ke ben eto idaha nsok*", someone who does not understand that this is signalling him or her to sit down, will go around the village asking for a walking stick because anybody you talk to, will ridicule you, and keep referring you to another person.

Another example is in the sentence "*esin ikañ ke ufok*" – the first interpretation of the word *ikañ* will mean fire.

In the sentence, *Eyem ekakeed agwo*, it could be embarrassing to interpret it to mean people of the same mother, where native speakers are.

A maid was told by the mistress to 'sweep the house' /*kwuok ufok*/. The maid interpreted it to mean – clear the house. Before the mistress came back, the house was left empty. The issue of multiple meanings poses a problem. Ambiguity is similar to polysemy so that one stretch of utterance gives more than one meaning; homonyms are lexical or ambiguous sentences (which may share surface form but have two or more different meanings) Enang and Uruzian (2013b).

Polysemous words have also been used to show anthropomorphic similes which are sometimes used as idioms of the language – e.g. *ányén*.

<i>ányén aadi</i>	-	the traitor is around.
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**Table 4:** The denotative and connotative usages of lexical items

Idiom	Denotative Meaning	Connotative Meaning
Akpòk adide agwo ndòk anò unen	The lizard has become a shameful thing to the hen	An object of high repute has suddenly become a thing of ridicule.
Mmòñ-ayet Ebomonkuku aboiyo ekwòñ	The tears of a red-eyed bird (a pigeon called <i>Ebomonkuku</i> ) has affected the snail	The woes of the mighty has befallen the innocent
Ku kum ayen ke nuk enañ agwo	Do not get blinded by another person's cow horn.	Do not let other people's problem be your undoing.

The denotative and connotative usages of lexical items have been demonstrated. Idiomatic expressions have been used to show ambiguity, for example, in the idiomatic expressions. Ambiguity is seen here in the different meanings they portray. Ambiguity seen as a construction capable of many interpretations is problematic because of the tendency of wrong interpretations (Enang, 2020). A case of a mistress telling the housemaid to /kwòk ufòk/ "sweep the house", and the maid mistook it to mean, pack everything away from the house. It could result in a catastrophe. Other examples include "Eto idaha", "Ekakeed", "Abio ekpo", "Abukpo Iyak". One discovery in this work is that ambiguity occurs as a lack of tone marks. In line with Osuagwu (1996), tone marks are used to disambiguate sentences to have a clear meaning. This study proves that homographs were used to distinguish meanings in words. Idioms are also used in languages to give several interpretations (Enang and Urujian 2013b).

It has also been seen that polysemy, homonymy, and ambiguity are related. Polysemy and ambiguity are related in a linguistic unit given several interpretations, while homophonous words give rise to lexical ambiguity. Moreover, polysemy could be expressed in anthropomorphic similes; parts of the body are employed in contextual senses. In the Ikot Ekpene variety of Anaang language, the labial velar consonant /kp/, is pronounced as the voiceless bilabial stop /p/ at the word medial position, though it is spelled as [kp].

e..g.

Ápán - Ákpán,

Mpòñ - Mkpòñ

The voiceless alveolar stop /t/ as the voiced alveolar stop /d/, at word final position, example, ukod – ukot.

## **6.0 CONCLUSION**

This study examined the sociological and anthropological culture of the Anaang language of Ikot Ekpene Variety in Akwa Ibom State, from the viewpoint of lexico-structural ambiguity in Nigerian languages (Enang and Tsavmbu, 2022). The thematic considerations were lexical ambiguity, structural ambiguity, idiomatic constructions, polysemy and homonymy in Anaang language of Ikot Ekpene Variety. Ambiguity is an essential phenomenon that operates in Anaang language. From the two types discussed, ambiguity plays an essential role in sentence interpretation; a stretch of linguistic utterance can give several interpretations (Enang, 2018). The different senses of an expression can set several underlying representations. The relatedness of polysemy, homonymy, and ambiguity has been demonstrated. Polysemy and ambiguity are closely related as they prove that a linguistic unit can give several interpretations, while homophonous words show lexical ambiguity. Care must be taken to avoid wrong interpretations since it could cause sociological and anthropological problems in the culture of the Anaang people.

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