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A Lexico-Semantic Study of Culinary Terms in Nigerian English: the Question of Intelligibility Revisited

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Abstract

This paper explores the use of culinary terms among the educated Nigerian speakers of English and how this relates to intelligibility. Contextual Relativity (CR) is adopted as the theoretical framework as it bridges the gap between the study of the meanings of words and their linguistic and cultural environment. Ninety questionnaires were analysed. Data were complemented with selected Nigerian-based literary texts. The data were subjected to simple statistical and linguistic analyses. Findings reveal that most Nigerian speakers of English do not differentiate between the use of some of the culinary terms on the basis of their semantic properties. This is attributed to socio-cultural differences, poor knowledge of the existence of such differences and the lack of sufficient vocabulary to account for such cooking processes. The study concludes that there is the need to check the extent of innovativeness and to define the yardstick for the acceptable and intelligible usage. Unfortunately, Nigerian literary writers have not been able to enlighten Nigerians on the use of some unfamiliar culinary terms.

Key Words: Lexico-semantics, intelligibility, culinary terms, Nigerian English, contextual relativity, innovation, acceptability.

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