



THE INVESTIGATION OF DENOTATION AND CONNOTATION IN MODERN LINGUISTICS

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Abstract:

This article studies how denotative and connotative meanings of words are used in English. Connotation and denotation are a part of language and communication. They are two principal methods of describing the meanings of words. The connotation of a word or term adds elements of emotion, attitude, or colour. The meaning or use of denotation and connotation depends partly on the field of study. It also discusses the types of meanings and groups of denotation and connotation in linguistics.

Keywords: denotation, connotation, meaning, semantics, discourse, language.

Introduction

As we know that the branch of linguistics which specializes in the study of meaning is called semantics. As with many terms, the term semantics is ambiguous for it can stand, as well, for the expressive aspect of language in general and for the meaning of one particular word in all its varied aspects and nuances (i.e. the semantics of a word = the meaning(s) of a word).

The meanings of all the utterances of a speech community include the total experience of that community; arts, science, practical occupations, amusements, and personal and family life. The modern approach to semantics is based on the assumption that the inner form of the word (i.e. its meaning) presents a structure which is called the semantic structure of the word. Thus, meaning is a certain reflection in our mind of objects, phenomena or relations that makes part of the linguistic sign – its so-called inner facet, whereas the sound-form functions as its outer facet:

Within grammatical and lexical aspects of a language grammatical and lexical meanings are distinguished.

Grammatical meaning is defined as the expression in the speech of relationships between words. The grammatical meaning is more abstract and more generalized than the lexical meaning. It is recurrent in identical sets of individual forms of different words as the meaning of plurality in the following words students, books, windows, compositions.





Materials and Methods

Lexical meaning. The definitions of lexical meaning given by various authors, though different in detail, agree on the basic principle: they all point out that lexical meaning is the realization of a concept or emotion by means of a definite language system.

1) The component of meaning proper to the word as a linguistic unit, i.e. recurrent in all the forms of this word and in all possible distributions of these forms [5,174].

2) The semantic invariant of the grammatical variation of a word [6,819].

3) The material meaning of a word, i.e. the meaning of the main material part of the word which reflects the concept the given word expresses and the basic properties of the thing (phenomenon, quality, state, etc.) the word denotes

The conceptual content of a word is expressed in its denotative meaning. To denote is to serve as a linguistic expression for a concept or as a name for an individual object. It is the denotational meaning that makes communication possible.

Connotation is the pragmatic communicative value the word receives depending on where, when, how, by whom, for what purpose and in what contexts it may be used. There are four main types of connotations: stylistic, emotional, evaluative and expressive/intensifying [7,151].

Stylistic connotations is what the word conveys about the speaker's attitude to the social circumstances and the appropriate functional style (slay vs kill), evaluative connotation may show his approval or disapproval of the object spoken of (clique vs group), emotional connotation conveys the speaker's emotions (mummy vs mother; UA батько vs татко; відомий vs славетний vs сумнозвісний.), the degree of intensity (adore vs love; UA вітер vs вітерець vs вітрище vs вітряга.) is conveyed by expressive or intensifying connotation.

The interdependence of connotations with denotative meaning is also different for different types of connotations. Thus, for instance, emotional connotation comes into being on the basis of denotative meaning but in the course of time may substitute it with other types of connotation with general emphasis, evaluation and colloquial stylistic overtone. E.g. terrific which originally meant "frightening" is now a colloquialism meaning "very, very good" or "very great": terrific beauty, terrific pleasure.

The orientation toward the subject matter, characteristic of the denotative meaning, is substituted here by a pragmatic orientation toward the speaker and listener; it is not so much what is spoken about as the attitude to it that matters.





Fulfilling the significative and the communicative functions of the word the denotative meaning is present in every word and may be regarded as the central factor in the functioning of language [5,178].

The expressive function of the language (the speaker's feelings) and the pragmatic function (the effect of words upon listeners) are rendered in connotations. Unlike the denotative meaning, connotations are optional.

Connotation differs from the implicational meaning of the word. Implicational meaning is the implied information associated with the word, with what the speakers know about the referent. A wolf is known to be greedy and cruel (implicational meaning) but the denotative meaning of this word does not include these features. The denotative or intentional meaning of the word wolf is "a wild animal resembling a dog that kills sheep and sometimes even attacks men". Its figurative meaning is derived from implied information, from what we know about wolves – "a cruel greedy person", also the adjective wolfish means "greedy".

A study of what constitutes meaning in natural languages takes us, as we are all too aware by now, into a domain abounding in complex and heterogeneous problems. In many cases these problems have not yet been posed; in some, they have only been hinted at and but a few have been partly studied; and in others, they have been cast to one side or ignored. Despite the fact that linguists, psychologists, and philosophers interested in logic, among others, have constructed significant theories regarding the nature of meaning in natural languages, we still have not ascertained how linguistic meaning functions. Generally speaking, it would be true to say that we know how meaning functions in particular concrete cases and at given levels. For example, the longstanding tradition of lexicography convinces us each day more of its great practical worth. Moreover, the various studies undertaken in the fields of rhetoric, stylistics, and literary analysis have given a greater insight into the variety and richness of forms used to express all sorts of notions and ideas. Of the disciplines created during the last thirty or forty years, we know that text linguistics, as it is usually called, has made great advances by initiating work on discourse patterns and on the meaning of units greater than the sentence.

The syntactic theories [1,415] of the last forty years, and generative theories in particular, have opened the field to further advances in the description of meaning by combining syntactic structures within the sentence, and have, in general terms, made a significant contribution to the fundamental relationship between syntax and semantics. The different schools of European structuralism, 'functional' linguistics, and other scientific developments of the first seventy years of the twentieth Century have undoubtedly had a great bearing on progress in semantic studies. Despite all





these advances in the field, it would be true to say that no theory as yet exists that can offer a complete and overall explanation of the nature and function of meaning in natural languages. Furthermore, it is difficult — if not impossible — to make any coherent classification or grouping of the multiple phenomena in the field of linguistic semiotics [4,98] that form part of the catch-all notion covered by the term connotation. And there is yet another difficulty. The antithesis of connotation, generally known as denotation in linguistics, also has its own special characteristics, such as reductions of every kind, heterogeneities, ambiguities, and so on. Not unlike connotation, it is another word that is used, though more subtly, to designate many phenomena. The only way of ordering the terrain covered by the Opposition between connotation and denotation in linguistics (given that it is generally regarded as an Opposition) is to attach some new labels; this will at least make us aware that the object of study is not clearly definable, coherent, or systematic.

The one thing that we can be sure of is that we are studying two closely interrelated sets of phenomena. Our only hope of delimiting at least one part of the whole universe, which is nothing less than that of the meaning of natural languages, lies in the Separation of the two. As we have seen, linguists or literary critics often prefer, for methodological reasons, to admit only one of these as the object of study, although the two sets of phenomena are always interrelated. For example, linguists, on the one hand, tend to group all those phenomena that they find they can delimit, describe or construct a theory around under denotation and everything else under connotation. On the other hand, literary critics use the term connotation [2,96] to designate all those phenomena of a 'literary' nature, which may then be described, delimited, or placed within a theory. Nevertheless, we have also seen that some specialists in the field of natural languages attempt to study the two areas, or at least make the claim that linguistics is concerned with both, even though they may focus more on one term than the other.

Results and Discussions

There are also bound to be many linguists, other than those whom we have discussed who, whether they hold a binary methodological conception of meaning or not, do not oversimplify the phenomena included in their object of study to such an extent. The outlook in philosophy is, on the whole, quite different, since the denotation and connotation of the term are associated with problems that philosophers consider worthy objects of study. If we were to attempt at this stage to enumerate the phenomena included in each set, the length of the list would depend on the depth to which each phenomenon was analyzed. If we were to try to find the underlying





relationships in each case, the task would prove even more difficult, since we would have to design a very complicated theoretical framework in order to accommodate several theories of meaning at once. This presents a serious problem. The long-term solution is to restate all the problems for the purpose of constructing a new theory of meaning that would have the power to explain all the linguistic phenomena that have been discussed throughout this study, under the headings of connotation and denotation. Such a formidable undertaking should be preceded by a more profound analysis of the principal problems raised here. To this end, we shall make a tentative classification by listing, under the headings of denotation and connotation, the problems this complex panorama presents. We shall then embark upon a more detailed exploration of some of the fundamental aspects, taken mainly from the second part of this book, which emerges in most of the dichotomies in the theories of meaning we have discussed. The conclusions reached from this exploration will, we hope, give us a deeper insight into how we should approach and study the complex domain of meaning in natural languages.

In short, the list of problems grouped under the terms denotation and connotation will enable us to understand more clearly why linguistic aspects of meaning have not been treated in sufficient depth. Thus, we shall endeavour to explain many problems that have been left to one side or ignored in the different theories of meaning formulated during the last seventy years. The discussion throughout this chapter will be based on nine groups of problems, each of which will be divided into two fields [3,903].

The first field will consist of those problems that have always been considered in linguistics, and the second of those that have not been considered. This division into two major fields is determined by the different senses that have been given to denotation and connotation, and it has the great advantage of gathering the majority of the problems concerning how something means within the fold of the very varied senses or meanings attributed to these terms.

Other simple or Compound designations which are used in the study of meaning and which are thus essential to this study will complement the division into two major fields. The nine groups are as follows:

- 1) Primary or only meaning or sense versus more than one meaning, or secondary, added or senses
- 2) Cognitive meaning versus other kinds of meaning
- 3) Direct reference versus indirect reference
- 4) Fixed meaning versus variable or free meaning
- 5) Homogeneous or systematic Information versus heterogeneous or asystematic information





- 6) Central or essential information versus additional, secondary, or complex information: style.
- 7) Literal meaning versus metaphoric or figurative meaning
- 8) A synchronic view of meaning versus a diachronic view of meaning
- 9) Linguistic meaning, a misnomer, versus non-linguistic meaning.

Within these groups, other kinds of meaning should also be taken into account, such as emotive meaning or sense, literary meaning or sense, normal meaning, dialectal meanings, poetic or aesthetic meaning or sense, and so on. All this will serve as a basis for an inquiry into the kind of problems semantic theories emphasize and prefer to study and the location of the greatest and most obvious gaps in the study of meaning in natural languages.

It is worth bearing in mind that most of the distinctions have been drawn from expositions, systematizations and theories which are generally quite coherent when studied individually and may have been or still are of great use in the analysis of one important aspect of meaning or another. We should not forget, however, that the purpose of this article is to give an overview, in all its complexity, of the problems arising from the term connotation, and, furthermore, that these problems are a clear, enlightening, and, thus, instructive reflection of the enormous and complex domain that attempts to give a satisfactory and comprehensive description of meaning in languages[1,413].

DENOTATION		CONNOTATION	
		Group 1	
Primary or One		Secondary or More than One	
One meaning (or sense)		More than one meaning (several senses)	
Primary meaning		Aggregate, cluster meanings	
A univocal referential relation		More than one referential relation	
		Group 2	
Cognitive Meaning		Other Kinds of Meaning	
Referential function		Other functions, symptomatic and appellative	
The objective		The subjective	
		Group 3	
Direct Reference		Indirect Reference	
Reference to singular terms		Mode of reference of the 'general terms'	
<i>in recto</i>		<i>in oblicuo</i>	
		Group 4	
Fixed Meaning		Variable or Free Meaning	
Minimal units (morphemes, words)		Larger units than the word, the phrase or the sentence	
Meaning shared by a linguistic community		Personal, individual meanings that may become aggregate meanings, which are fixed by culture	
Language (<i>langue</i>)		Speech (<i>parole</i>)	
Association of ideas, which are socially fixed		Free association of ideas	



DENOTATION		CONNOTATION	
'Normal' meaning = dictionary entry		Particular, contextual meanings given by: a) the speech act situation b) the text as regards its organisation of larger structures of meaning	
'Normal' meaning (high degree of acceptability)		Deviations from a norm ('abnormal' meanings or low degree of acceptability)	
Group 5			
Homogeneous or Systematic Information		Heterogeneous or Asystematic Information	
When cut synchronically, common usage in a diachronic system		Social situation, geographical dialects, specialised languages (technicisms and argots), use of archaic, scholarly, foreign terms, etc.	
Stability of a value within a system		Values gives by usage: taboos, exclamations, onomatopoeia, hypocorisms, etc.	
Group 6			
Central or Essential Information		Additional, Secondary, or Complex Information: Style	
Essential information		Additional = style	
Contents of principal code		Contents of subcodes	
Transmission of information by means of a message		Signal that refers to the information given by the construction of the message itself	
Group 7			
Literal Meaning		Metaphoric or Figurative Meaning	
Constant or general		Virtual or singular	
Lexicalised expression (fixed within a speech community)		New creations of meaning, not necessarily metaphoric	
Non-literary meaning		Literary meaning	
DENOTATION		CONNOTATION	
Group 8			
A Synchronic View of Meaning		A Diachronic View of Meaning	
A synchronic view of the meaning under analysis		Added meanings or senses given by the history of a word	
Group 9			
Linguistic Meaning		Non-linguistic Meaning	
'Linguistic'		Stylistic, cultural, anthropological, sociological, psychological, ideological, aesthetic, literary, rhetorical, textual, contextual, pragmatic, etc.	

The above figure clearly shows that only by systematizing and delimiting the object of study have the different disciplines interested in the study of meaning been able to give their work the necessary coherence [1,412]. What immediately meets the eye is their desire to work with the cognitive subject matter and units that are uniform, fixed, general, constant, homogeneous, and fundamental, as well as referential. This, of course, leads to an immediate rejection of whatever appears to be secondary, added,



variable, unstable, singular, individual, original, heterogeneous, and systematic. Each of the problems presented in the figure should now be examined individually. This will lend a greater insight into the linguistic study of meaning in natural languages and into the precise locations of the gaps that must be filled before any coherent description of linguistic meaning may be undertaken.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we are going to say that denotation and connotation in Modern linguistics are the most significant phenomena to investigate. We have given brief information on denotation and connotation and we hope that we will discuss all the groups of the denotative and connotative meanings in our next works.

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