

Aspects of Lexical Meaning

Lecture

ASPECTS OF LEXICAL MEANING

1. *THE DENOTATIONAL ASPECT*
2. *THE CONNOTATIONAL ASPECT*
3. *THE PRAGMATIC ASPECT*
4. *COMPONENTIAL ANALYSIS*

1. THE DENOTATIONAL ASPECT

- **The denotational aspect** of lexical meaning is the part of lexical meaning which establishes correlation between the name and the object, phenomenon, process or characteristic feature of concrete reality (or thought), which is denoted by the given word.
- e.g. *booklet* - 'a small thin book that gives information about something'

Through the denotational aspect of meaning the bulk of information is conveyed in the process of communication.

The denotational aspect of lexical meaning:

1. expresses the notional content of a word.
2. is the component of the lexical meaning that makes communication possible.

2. THE CONNOTATIONAL ASPECT

- **The connotational aspect** of lexical meaning is the part of meaning which reflects the attitude of the speaker towards what he speaks about. Connotation conveys additional information in the process of communication.

Connotation includes:

1. **The emotive charge** is one of the objective semantic features proper to words as linguistic units and forms part of the connotational component of meaning, e.g. *daddy* as compared to *father*.

a hovel – ‘a small house or cottage’ – implies a miserable dwelling place, dirty, in bad repair and in general unpleasant to live in.

synonyms

large	big	tremendous
like	love	worship
girl		girlie
dear		dearie

2) Evaluation, which may be positive or negative, e.g.

- *clique* (a small group of people who seem unfriendly to other people) as compared to *group* (a set of people);
- *celebrated* (widely known for special achievement in science, art, sport, etc.) as compared to *notorious* (widely known for criminal act or bad traits of character).

3. Imagery:

- *to wade* – to walk with an effort (through mud, water or anything that makes progress difficult). The figurative use of the word gives rise to another meaning, which is based on the same image as the first – *to wade through a book* ;

- 4) **intensity/expressiveness**, e.g. *to adore – to worship – to love – to like*;
- 5) **connotation of cause, duration** etc.

Word+part of speech	Denotational component	Connotational component	Type of connotation
Lonely <i>adj.</i>	Alone, without company'	Melancholy, sad	Emotive
Notorious <i>adj.</i>	Widely known	For criminal act or bad traits of character	Evaluative, negative
Celebrate <i>d adj.</i>	Widely known	For special achievement in science, art, etc.	Evaluative, positive

Word+part of speech	Denotational component	Connotational component	Type of connotation
To glare <i>adj.</i>	to look	1. steadily, lastingly	Connotation of duration
		2. in anger, rage, etc	Emotive connotation Connotation of cause
To glance v.	to look	Briefly, passingly	Connotation of duration
To gaze v.	to look	Steadily, lastingly in tenderness, admiration	Emotive connotation

Word+part of speech	Denotational component	Connotational component	Type of connotation
To shiver v.	to tremble	1. lastingly	Connotation of duration
		2. usu with the cold	Connotation of cause
To shudder v.	to tremble	1. briefly	Connotation of duration
		2.with horror, disgust, etc.	Connotation of cause Emotive connotation

Thus, a meaning can have two or more connotational components.

The given examples present only a few: emotive, evaluative connotations, and also connotations of duration and of cause.

3. Examples of different types of Connotation

- I. The connotation of degree or intensity
- *to surprise — to astonish — to amaze — to astound;*
- *to satisfy — to please — to content — to gratify — to delight — to exalt;*
- *to shout — to yell — to bellow — to roar; to like — to admire — to love — to adore — to worship*

II. Connotation of duration

- *to stare — to glare — to gaze — to glance — to peep — to peer;*
- *to flash (brief) — to blaze (lasting);*
- *to shudder (brief) — to shiver (lasting);*
- *to say (brief) — to speak, to talk (lasting).*

III. Emotive connotations

- *to stare — to glare — to gaze;*
- *alone — single — lonely — solitary;*
- *to tremble — to shiver — to shudder — to shake;*
- *to love — to admire — to adore — to worship;*
- *angry — furious — enraged;*
- *fear — terror — horror.*

IV. The evaluative connotation

- *well-known — famous — notorious — celebrated;*
- *to produce — to create — to manufacture — to fabricate;*
- *to sparkle - to glitter;*

A. *His (her) eyes **sparkled** with amusement, merriment, good humour, high spirits, happiness, etc. (positive emotions).*

B. *His (her) eyes **glittered** with anger, rage, hatred, malice, etc. (negative emotions).*

V. Causative connotation

- *to sparkle - to glitter;*
- *to shiver - to shudder;*
- *to blush - to redden.*

VI. Connotation of Manner

- *to stroll — to stride — to trot — to pace — to swagger — to stagger — to stumble;*
- *to peep - to peer;*
- *to like — to admire — to love — to adore — to worship.*

VII. The connotation of attendant circumstances

- One *peeps* at smb./smth. through a hole, crack or opening, from behind a screen, a half-closed door, a newspaper, a fan, a curtain, etc. It seems as if a whole set of scenery were built within the word's meaning. It is not quite so, because "the set of scenery" is actually built in the context, but, as with all regular contexts, it is intimately reflected in the word's semantic structure.

- One *peers* at smb./smth. in darkness, through the fog, through dimmed glasses or windows, from a great distance; a short-sighted person may also peer at things. So, in the semantic structure of to *peer* are encoded circumstances preventing one from seeing clearly.

VII. Connotation of attendant features

- *Pretty – handsome – beautiful*; special types of human beauty:
- *beautiful* is mostly associated with classical features and a perfect figure;
- *handsome* with a tall stature, a certain robustness and fine proportions,
- *pretty* with small delicate features and a fresh complexion.

IX. Stylistic connotations

- **(Meal).** Snack, bite (*coll.*), snap (*dial.*), repast, refreshment, feast (*formal*).
- These synonyms, besides stylistic connotations, have connotations of attendant features.
- *Snack, bite, snap* all denote a frugal meal taken in a hurry; *refreshment* is also a light meal; *feast* is a rich or abundant meal.
- **(Girl).** Girlie (*coll.*), lass, lassie (*dial.*), bird, birdie, jane, fluff, skirt (*sl.*), maiden (*poet.*), damsel (*arch.*).

Anecdote

- **J a n e**: Would you be *insulted* if that good-looking stranger offered you some champagne?
- **J o a n**: Yes, but I'd probably swallow the insult.

3. THE PRAGMATIC ASPECT

- **The pragmatic aspect** is the part of lexical meaning that conveys information on the situation of communication. Like the connotational aspect, the pragmatic aspect falls into four closely linked together subsections.

1. Information on the 'time and space' relationship of the participants

- Some information which specifies different parameters of communication may be conveyed not only with the help of grammatical means (tense forms, personal pronouns, etc), but through the meaning of the word.
- E.g. *come* and *go* can indicate the location of the speaker who is usually taken as the zero point in the description of the situation of communication

- The time element is fixed indirectly.
Indirect reference to time implies that the frequency of occurrence of words may change with time and in extreme cases words may be out of use or become obsolete.
- E.g. the word **behold** – ‘take notice, see (smth unusual)’ as well as the noun **beholder** – ‘spectator’ are out of use now but were widely used in the 17th century.

2. Information on the participants and the given language community;

- The language used may be indicative of the social status of a person, his education, profession, etc.
 - The pragmatic aspect of the word may convey information about the social system of the given language community, its ideology, religion, system of norms and customs.
- a) *They chucked a stone at the cops, and then did a bunk with the loot.*
- b) *After casting a stone at the police, they absconded with the money.*

3. Information on the tenor of discourse

- The tenors of discourse reflect how the addresser (the speaker or the writer) interacts with the addressee (the listener or reader).
- Tenors are based on social or family roles of the participants of communication.
 1. *Don't interrupt when your mother is speaking* (family roles).
 2. *There is an awful man in the front row, who butts in whenever you pause* (social roles).

4. Information on the register of communication

- The conditions of communication form another important group of factors. The register defines the general type of the situation of communication grading the situations in formality. Three main types of the situations of communication: *formal*, *neutral* and *informal*.
 1. I'm sorry if upset you, dear. I *certainly* didn't mean to (informal).
 2. There are certain *qualities* in his works that I greatly admire (formal).
 3. Who is the *girl* I saw you with yesterday? (neutral).

LEXICAL MEANING

Denotational
aspect

Connotational
aspect

Pragmatic
aspect

Emotive charge

Evaluation

Imagery

Intensity

Connotation

Information on the
'time and space'

Information on the participants and
the given language community

Information on the tenor of discourse

Information on the register of

communication

IV. Componential analysis = semantic decomposition

rests upon the thesis that the sense of every lexeme can be analyzed in terms of a set of more general sense components or semantic features, some or all of which will be common to several different lexemes in the vocabulary.

Componential analysis

attempts to treat components according to 'binary' opposition:

- male/ female,
- animate/ inanimate,
- adult/ non-adult,
- human/ non-human.

The sense of *man* might be held to combine the concepts (male, adult, human).

The sense of *woman* might be held to differ from *man* in that it combines (female (not male), adult, human).

Componential analysis allows us to group entities into natural classes.

- *man* and *boy* (human, male),
- *man* and *woman* (human, adult).

There are certain verbs, such as *marry*, *argue*, that are found with subjects that are [+human]. Moreover, within the English pronoun system, *he* is used to refer to [human] entities that are [+male] while *she* is used for [human] entities that are [not male].

Componential analysis of the word 'bachelor'

According to the dictionary it has 4 meanings:

1. a man who has never married (холостяк);
2. a young knight (рыцарь);
3. someone with a first degree (бакалавр);
4. a young male unmated fur seal (морской котик) during the mating season.

Bachelor

Noun

(Human)

(Animal)

(Male)

(Male)

[who has the first of
lowest academic degree]

[who has
never married]

[young knight serving
under the standard of
another knight]

[young fur seal when
without a mate during
the breeding time]

The old bachelor finally died.

‘Bachelor’ is not the fur seal (they are young).

(**young**) => is a marker not the distinguisher.

Theoretically there is no limit to the number of markers.

Markers refer to the features which the lexeme has in common with other lexical items,

a distinguisher differentiates it from all other items.

Distinguishers can be regarded as providing a denotational distinction, while semantic markers represent conceptual components of the meaning of lexical items.

Componential analysis

gives its most important results in the study of verb meaning, it is an attractive way of handling semantic relations. It is currently combined with other linguistic procedures used for the investigation of meaning.

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