

## LESSON SIX

### TYPES OF MEANING

**Denotation**: The denotation of a word is the meaning it has even before it is used in any context. It can also be said to be what a word stands for in the world of cognition. It is the basis for the other types of meaning we associate words with. We can thus conclude that denotation is the dictionary meaning of a word which is unmarked because it is not geared towards any focus or effect.

For e.g. a teacher is naturally, someone who imparts knowledge.

Denotation is also what is called conceptual meaning. It normally deals with componential analysis.

**Goat** can be represented as:

- +animal
- +mammal
- +4-legged
- +bleating

**Connotation** (or associative meaning): This is additional meaning a word acquires as a result of the way it has been used in circumstances. Connotation is different from what is naturally refers to (denotation).

For e.g. **Mercedes Benz** is a brand or type of vehicle. As a result of the way is used, it has acquired other associative meaning. Other e.g.s. like **angel** for kindness, goon news.

Connotation does not deal with the linguistic composition of a word, rather, it deals more with the sense or reference of that word. As a result, we say it is not language specific. For e.g.

Snake is

+poisonous

+deceptive

+deadly

(even though different langs. use different words to call snake).

Connotation can arise in two main ways. These are

▶ momentous

▶ recurrent

When a word, its sense or reference acquires its connotative meaning as a result of repeated association with a situation, then we say the connotation is recurrent.

Such connotations are obtained from the generalisation made from the repeated events or occasions.

For instance **woman** is seen to be

+sensation

+compassionate

was not given by observing just one woman, but many of them in different situations.

Also with **soldier**, we can add

+strict

+discipline

and these were not given by looking at just one soldier, but observing many of them in different instances. It recurred several times.

When a word, its sense or reference acquires its connotative meaning as a result of a single but important momentous event with which it is associated, then we say the connotation is momentous. For e.g. **Solomon** has the connotation wise because of an important judgement King Solomon gave in the Bible.

Other e.gs. Lewinsky, man, cocaine, e.t.c.

While denotation is linguistic, connotation is non-linguistic. Non-linguistic forms have connotative meaning. For e.g. **Red** connotes

+danger

+trouble

+ evil

**white** connotes

+purity

+innocence

+ holiness

A word thus, refers to its denotation directly, it refers to its connotation indirectly.

### Denotation versus Connotation

Denotation	Connotation
More determinate	Less determinate
Close-ended	Open-ended
(e.g boy) --	(e.g boy) ---
+human +male +young	+truant +stubborn +destructive e.t.c
General (Sweet drink)	Cultural-specific (Drink for medicine)
Objective (by componential analysis)	Subjective (by perception)
Remains static (basic meaning)	Changes from place to place and from time to time (changes in roles, perception,etc.)

Over time, some connotations have become denotation. For e.g. **desertion** was the connotation of boycott because a **Captain Boycott** and his soldiers deserted battlefield. Now **desertion** has become the denotation of **boycott**.

Also **deception** was the connotation of the **crafty** (craftsmen). Now it has assumed its denotation-they are **sly** and **deceitful**.

## OTHER ASSOCIATIVE MEANINGS

**Reflected Meaning:** This is the meaning that comes up when the use of a word calls up an image or sense other than its own. This means that certain feelings, emotions or evaluations attached to words or even names are the reflected meanings of those words. For e.g. **Holy Ghost** or **Holy Spirit** means **Comforter** (Supernatural powers, warmth, fear, e.t.c).

The fundamental Reflected meaning is usually used as against the others.

It has become part of the interpretation of other senses

For e.g. the word juice is any sweet liquid extracted from a certain substance. **Semen** is also seen as being extracted from a certain substance.

So even when **juice** was called and the senses were called up, semen was never left out. **Faeces** reflect the idea of **pungent smell, ugly** and **repulsive sight**. So if you mention it whilst one is eating, one becomes angry with you. Others like **cock** for **penis** and rooster, e.t.c.

Reflected meaning can be obtained from multiple connotations.

**Collocative Meaning:** This is an association that a word has with another or other words. This means that a word cannot move with just any word or words at all in a structure. It has to agree with those words in terms of association. These words that can move together in a structure are called **collocants**. So we have beautiful girl, woman, house, dress and handsome man, boy, reward, e.t.c and not the other way round. There are words like tremble and quiver (to shake slightly), yet each of them has specific words they can move with. So we say tremble with fear and quiver with excitement and not quiver with fear.

Collocation also deals with modulation and selection of senses. A word thus is restricted in the choice of words to move with in a structure.

For e.g. **African** means from Africa. **African Dance** means the dance originated from Africa. **African shop** (for preference in Europe, America), **African desk** at World Bank to benefit African countries), e.t.c. Here, we see that the meaning of Africa has not changed, but its meaning in each context has been restricted and directed by the words that exist in it.

Also, **school** a place of learning

**School bag**-purpose (for school items),

**School bus**-ownership,

**School crest**-for identification.

**Affective Meaning:** This is the meaning that acquired when one communicate his feelings, his perception or attitude to a subject. This is derived from context in which a word is uttered. For e.g., a word like **stubborn** may express negative feelings, yet people may use it as a catchphrase between them or to laud perseverance.

- ▶ Affective meaning is associated with the whole structure as against a word.
- ▶ It is parasitic in nature-it can be communicated through conceptual, connotative, reflected and others.
- ▶ It depends on aspects of the non-verbal context such as voice, gestures, facial expressions, touch, e.t.c.

Aspects of affective meaning include hate, love, sadness, interest, e.t.c. They are always responses to situations.

Some expressions to show care, disrespect and anger. Using insults, praise, e.t.c. Affective meaning can come out of stylistic meaning.

For e.g. speaking Pidgin instead of English to my H.O.D, or writing to him instead of speaking to him shows disrespect.

It can also be out of reflected meaning. If I use shit, am tlking about easing myself, but in addition, it communicates disrespect, communication incompetence or impoliteness.

**Stylistic Meaning:** This is the meaning acquired when we talk of use of language in social circumstances. This includes the description of that language, the purpose of the use of the language, the nature of interaction, e.t.c. Stylistic meaning deals with:

- ▶ Individuality-who is speaking
- ▶ Dialect-where does he come from
- ▶ Medium-how is (written or spoken)
- ▶ Time-when (early, middle or modern English)
- ▶ Interaction-alone, with someone, using questions, e.t.c
- ▶ Ideational-what are we talking about

**Thematic Meaning:** This is the meaning in terms of focus of an utterance. We are looking at what is important to the speaker or what their focus is, e.t.c. With thematic meaning, we use different ways to get our focus. These include:

- ▶ **Repetition**-for emphasis, show focus of speaker
- ▶ **Parallelism**-these forms maintain main idea (wish, size, poetry e.t.c)
- ▶ **Active/passive** constructions communicate emphasis or focus of speaker. (pot and Esi)-Esi broke the pot, the pot was broken by Esi

- ▶ **Non-cleft, pseudo cleft or true cleft**-draw attention to the noun if that is the focus. (Esi built the house, it was Esi who built the house; Esi is focus)
- ▶ **Intonation, stress**-it identifies one aspect or the other of a sentence which is the focus of the speaker. We use pitch, length, volume, to draw attention to the focus. (This man is my teacher)-5ways.
- ▶ **Periodic or loose sentence** style-periodic (last structure is important), loose (1<sup>st</sup> structure is important. In periodic sentences, in a clause, the focus is in the main and the subordinate is the **anticipatory constituents**. In loose sentences, the subordinate clause is the **trailing constituents**.