

The concept of connotation in modern English

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Rezumat

Prezenta lucrare urmărește scopul de a pune în discuție conceptul de conotație în limba engleză modernă. Acesta nu pare a fi dificil, la prima vedere, însă a generat numeroase discuții în lumea științifică. Ca și parte componentă a sensului lexical al cuvântului, conotația reprezintă latura emoțională a acestuia și are capacitatea de a evoca și de a exprima direct emoțiile oamenilor. Ea dă valoare stilistică cuvintelor și le oferă încărcătura emoțională. Studiarea conotației unui cuvânt este la fel de importantă ca și studiarea denotației acestuia.

Meaning is one of the most controversial terms in the theory of language. At first sight the understanding of this term seems to present no difficulty at all – it is freely used in teaching, interpreting and translation. The scientific definition of meaning, however, just as the definition of some other linguistic terms, such as word, sentence, etc., has been the issue of interminable discussions. So far, there is no universally accepted definition of meaning. [6]

The word is the unit of the vocabulary. [5] Any word has its certain sounding, its sound structure, that presents its sound form. The sound structure of the word is connected with a certain meaning. The meaning of the word correlates with a certain concept, and through the concept – with the phenomena and objects of the objective reality. Words are the names of things, phenomena, actions, qualities. Words as names consolidate in the process of communication of people, the creator and users of the language. One and the same word in different cases of usage may express either general or an individual or even a concrete notion.

When we examine a word, we see that its meaning, though closely connected with the underlying concepts, is not identical with them. To begin with, concept is a category of human cognition. Concept is the thought of the object, which singles out essential features. Being the result of abstraction and generalization all concepts are, thus, intrinsically almost the same for the whole humanity in one and the same period of its historical development.

In case of lexical meaning it becomes especially difficult to give an exact definition due to the complexity of the process by which language and human conscience serve to reflect outward reality and to adapt it to human needs. The more general opinion is well revealed in R. Jakobson's pun 'Linguistics without meaning is meaningless'.

Definitions given by the majority of authors, however different in detail, agree in one basic principle: they all point out that lexical meaning is the realization of the notion by means of a definite language system. It has also been repeatedly stated that the plane of content in speech reflects the whole of human consciousness, which comprises not only mental activity but emotions as well. [1]

Proceeding with the semantic analysis we observe that lexical meaning is not homogeneous and may be analyzed as including denotational and connotational components.

The notional content of a word is expressed by the *denotative meaning* (also referential or extensional meaning), which may be of two types, according to whether the word function is *significative* and evokes a general idea, or *demonstrative*, i.e. identifying.

As it was mentioned above one of the functions of words is to denote things, concepts and so on. Users of the language cannot have any knowledge or thought of the objects or phenomena of the real world around them unless this knowledge is ultimately embodied in words which have essentially the same meaning for all speakers of that language. This is the denotational meaning, which is *that component of the lexical meaning which makes communication possible*. To

denote, then, is to serve as linguistic expression for a notion or as a name for an actually existing object referred to by a word. The term *denotatum* or *referent* means either a notion or an actually existing individual thing to which reference is made.

There is no doubt that a physicist knows more about the atom than a singer does, or that an arctic explorer possesses a much deeper knowledge of what Arctic ice implies than a man who has never been in the North. Nevertheless, they use the words *atom*, *Arctic*, etc. and understand each other.

The second component of the lexical meaning is the emotional component of the word which is its capacity to evoke or directly express emotion. It is rendered by the emotional or the expressive counterpart of meaning also called emotive charge, intentional or effective connotations of words and the stylistic value of the words or what some other linguists call it – the connotational meaning of words.

Words contain an element of emotive evaluation as part of the connotational meaning: e.g. *a hovel* denotes a small house or cottage and, besides that, it implies that it is a miserable dwelling place, dirty, in bad repair and, in general, unpleasant to live in. When examining synonyms such as *large*, *big*, *tremendous* and *like*, *love*, *worship* or words such as *girl*, *girlie*; *dear*, *dearie* we cannot fail to observe the difference in the emotive charge of the members of these sets. The emotive charge of the words *tremendous*, *worship* and *girlie* is heavier than that of the words *large*, *like*, *girl*. This does not depend on the ‘feeling’ of the individual speaker but is true for all speakers of English. (Examples as well as the presentation of lexical meaning follow that of R. S. Ginsburg [2])

The same phenomenon can be observed if we consider the following range of synonyms as *alone*, *solitary*, *lonely*, *forlorn*, *desolate*. Their emotive charge varies a great deal.

Alone – lays stress upon the objective fact of being entirely by oneself;

Solitary – connotes a sense of isolation or remoteness;

e.g. ‘A mind forever voyaging through strange seas of thought alone’ (Wordsworth)

‘the notice ... has been delayed ... till I am indifferent, and cannot enjoy it, till I am solitary, and cannot impart it’ (Johnson)

‘I am to be left ... with Dora only. That will be rather solitary. However, I never am and never can be alone’ (F. E. Brown)

Lonely – is the one who feels oneself alone and longs for companionship; the word also applies to places which are unfrequented;

Lonesome – heightens the implication of dreariness;

Lone – is chiefly poetical;

e.g. ‘I wandered lonely as a cloud’ (Wordsworth)

‘Like one that on a lonesome road Doth walk in fear and dread’ (Coleridge)

‘her life is lone; he sits apart’ (Tennyson)

Forlorn is the one who is woe-begone and listless because of the separation from what is dear to him (usually from persons or a person), a place is forlorn that is remote, uninhabited, uncultivated and dreary;

e.g. ‘Repair me with the presence, Silvia; thou gentle nymph, cherish thy forlorn swain!’ (Shakespeare)

Lorn differs from forlorn in that it is chiefly literary, is not often used of places and often specifically implies love-long;

e.g. ‘Where was lorn Urania when Adonais died?’ (Shelley)

Desolate intensifies the implications of forlorn, implying a more irreparable loss, a more

poignant grief, as disconsolateness because of desertion or bereavement. As applied to places, desolate often implies bareness, dilapidation, etc.;

e.g. 'I cry in my sleep where is he! I demand of Heaven, will he not come to deliver me! No answer. Ah Monsieur ... I send my desolate cry across the sea' (Dickens) [7]

Judging by these examples we can state that the amount of information given in a set of synonyms is different. The denotation remains the same but the connotational sphere is widened and includes various components.

The notion *con-notare* that first occurred in the scholastic logic is not referred to synonymously. The well-known logician of the XIX century J. St. Mill was the first to introduce the opposition *denotation – connotation*. (qtd. in Goverdovski V.I [3]). He considered denotation to be the object to which reference is made and connotation – the characteristics of that object, our supposition as to what it is. Connotation is the characteristic features of the object that wholly constitute the meaning of the notion – not to have connotation means not to have any meaning. Denotation is the summary of the connotational characteristics. Strictly speaking Mill considers connotation to be the meaning of the word.

But as H.W.B. Joseph remarks the notion of 'connotation' is rather vague with Mill, for he refers all the nouns (length, virtue) to words that don't have any connotation and as a result that don't have any meaning and only point to the object, while such words as *long*, *virtuous* give connotation. [4]

L. Bloomfield was the first to single out the pure semantic connotations that refer immediately to the sphere consciousness. Besides, he distinguishes the group of connotations that have an emotional basis.

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