

## GEOFFREY LEECH'S SEVEN TYPES OF MEANINGS

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### **Abstract:**

*Geoffrey Leech (1936-2014), one of the famous British language philosophers, published a very useful book on language study titled 'Semantics: A Study of Meaning' in which the classification of meaning is made from the semantic point of view. He neatly expounded the theory of meaning and advocated seven types of meaning according to the functional role of the lexical items put together to form sentences. The fact of the matter is that meaning cannot be studied in an isolated manner. It has to be studied considering various sociolinguistic factors. Apart from conceptual meaning of the lexical items, phrases and sentences can have different meaning. While propounding the theory of meaning, Leech classified meaning into seven types such as denotative meaning, connotative meaning, social meaning, affective meaning, reflected meaning, collocative meaning and thematic meaning. While studying the native English language he came to realize that the native speakers of English have meanings in their minds depending on the form of the words. Here, he makes a distinction between sentence meaning and utterance meaning. As far as this article is concerned, the classification of meanings into seven types is associated with sentence meaning.*

**Key Words:** *Language, meaning, semantics, classification, sociolinguistic, lexical items, denotative, connotative, thematic, reflected, collocative, affective,*

### **Introduction**

There are different views on meaning such as structuralist, componential, truth conditional, generative and contextual (functional). In other words, meaning of the lexical items, phrases and sentences can be understood and interpreted with the help of some fundamental approaches in semantics. According to structural linguists, meaning can be understood by the structures of the language. The structures of a language are hierarchal in nature such as phonology, morphology and syntax. They believed that the purpose of language study involves describing the hierarchal structures. The promoter of the structuralist school was Ferdinand d Saussure, an American linguist. His students compiled the notes of his lectures in the form of a book entitled 'Course in General Linguistics' (1916). Leonard Bloomfield, another structuralist carried forward the works of Saussure between 1930 and 1950. The European school such as Prague school was highly influenced by the structuralist approach to language.

The last two decades have seen the linguistic erudition of the linguists and the sociolinguists to probe deeper into various aspects of meaning. From structuralism to generativist school of language philosophers have studied meaning from various perspectives. G. N. Leech, a British language philosopher and linguist of a great repute, contributed to the field of linguistics. In his famous book on language study titled 'Semantics: The Study of meaning' (1981), Geoffrey Leech throws light resolving the difficulties in understanding the meaning of words and expressions. The term 'meaning' has been defined and illustrated by Leech with the help of seven types of meanings. He classifies 'meaning' into seven types as given below:

1. **Conceptual/Denotative Meaning**
2. **Connotative/Additional Meaning**
3. **Social Meaning**
4. **Affective Meaning**
5. **Reflected Meaning**
6. **Collocative Meaning**
7. **Thematic Meaning**

Let us illustrate the above types of meanings one by one.

### **1. Conceptual/Denotative Meaning**

In this type of meaning emphasis is given to the logical meaning or cognitive meaning. This type of meaning is the basic meaning which can be found in a dictionary. Therefore, it is considered as the central meaning in linguistic communication whether written or oral. According to G. N. Leech, there are two principals involved in conceptual or denotative meaning of a word or expression- structure and contrast. Leech demonstrates the principle of structure as building larger units out of smaller units of a language. He thinks that in order to understand an utterance one has to understand three levels of structural formations such as phonological, syntactic and semantic. He thinks that the first thing in understanding the meaning of a word is to know the phonological structure followed by syntactic and semantic structures. Here, the process of encoding and decoding is involved. As far as the contrastive principle is concerned, the word, Leech thinks, can be understood by its binary opposition via the positive (+) or negative (-) signs. For instance, the word 'man' can be understood in terms of +human+male-female+adult. These are the semantic features of the denotative or conceptual meaning. In a nut shell, denotative meaning is the factual or dictionary meaning which is pivotal at getting the root meaning of a word or linguistic expression.

### **2. Connotative/Extended Meaning**

According to G. N. Leech, connotative meaning is the extended meaning the word in the context gets. In other words, it is the 'real world meaning' that can be understood in the context in which it is used. It is the extended meaning associated with the cultural aspects of the interlocutors in communication. Therefore, it is an open-ended meaning which can be understood in the cultural

context. For example, the sentence in Raja Rao's novel *Kanthapura*, "The leaf is laid" can be only understood in the south Indian context. Here, the meaning of the word 'leaf' is not to be taken as a leaf of a tree but as 'food'. The entire sentence means "The food is being served on a banana leaf". Therefore, the difference is made between denotation and connotation. Denotative meaning is the explicit meaning a word gets whereas; connotative meaning is the implicit meaning associated with a word. Therefore, both the meanings are helpful for the interpreter of a literary text. For instance, the word 'mother' in terms of denotative meaning is a female who has given birth to a child. However, the connotative meaning of the same word could be affection, love, compassion, warmth, protection etc.

### 3. Social Meaning

Social meaning of an utterance, according to Leech, can be understood in the context of social circumstances in which it is used. Many social factors such as social class, ethnicity, caste, region, modality, rank and time period are taken into consideration while arriving at authentic meaning. Leech also thinks that an illocutionary force of the utterance determines the meaning of an utterance in the context. The illocutionary force of an utterance can be invitation, apology, order, request, threat etc. For instance, the officer says to his subordinate, "Bring that file immediately" using the falling intonation, naturally, the illocutionary force of the linguistic expression is a command in this context. Therefore, social hierarchical order plays an important role in understanding the social meaning of the words or linguistic expressions of the interlocutors in an ongoing-conversation. The following are some of the glaring examples of social meaning:

1. How are you?
2. Sorry I'm late.
3. 'Happy new year-2023.
4. Congratulation on your becoming a member of BOS in English.
5. I am glad to see you this lovely morning

### 5. Affective Meaning

This type of meaning, according to Leech, is closely related to the social meaning because of its emotional appeal. Personal feelings of the speaker including his/her attitude towards the hearer of the utterance are taken into account while comprehending the meaning. For instance, a college boy says to his girlfriend, "You are a pearl in my heart." Here, emotional feelings are evoked by the word 'pearl' which contains affective meaning. It means the girl in the context is as precious as a pearl to the boy who uttered the above linguistic expression. Here, tone of voice and gestures of the addressee play a pivotal role in getting the realistic meaning.

### 5. Reflected Meaning

In order to understand reflected meaning one has to consider multiple conceptual meanings. G. N. Leech thinks that one sense a word is expected to influence another sense. He illustrates two examples in this case such as 'The Comforter' and 'The Holy Ghost'. The reflected meaning of

the word 'The Comforter' according to G. N. Leech is 'warm and comforting whereas 'The Holy Ghost' stands for 'awesome'. In short, such words have suggestive power. Most Christian people all over the world take the 'The Holy Ghost' as the Holy Spirit. It stands for the almighty who is the giver of life. The expression 'The Comforter' also stands for the God who can eliminate our fears and give us hope in life.

## 6. Collocative Meaning

Collocative meaning is obtained when the association of a word acquires meaning with the help of the words in the immediate vicinity or environment. Leech illustrated the collocative meaning with the help of two adjectives such as 'pretty' and 'handsome'. The adjective 'pretty' will generally go with a girl or feminine nouns whereas; the adjective 'handsome' will go with a boy/man or masculine nouns. For instance, one can say, "Sunaina is a pretty girl". One cannot say, "Sushant is a pretty boy" as the proper noun Sushant is linked to masculinity. Similarly, the word 'handsome' will with a boy/man as in "Rajesh Khanna was a handsome actor in his youthful days." One cannot say, Rajesh Khanna was a pretty actor in his youthful days." Further, Leech illustrates another example of collocative meaning. He thinks that the main verbs 'to wander' and 'to stroll' are to be used in association with certain words. For instance, the sentence "The cows are wandering in the forest" is absolutely correct in terms of semantics. One cannot say, "The cows are strolling in the forest". In the latter case, collocation is wrong because the verb 'to stroll' cannot come in association with the word 'cow'. The fact of the matter is that human beings stroll (walk slowly for pleasure). Similarly, the adjective 'golden' is being used in association with the noun 'opportunity'. One can say, "Mayuri got a golden opportunity to study in a good college in Pune." It would be wrong on the part of the speaker to say, "Mayuri got a silver opportunity to study in a good college in Pune." There are several types of collocations such as verb collocation, noun collocation, adjective collocation, and phrasal collocation that help the user of English language to enhance and ornament his/her communication skills. Particular set of words sound naturally correct in conversations that take place in ordinary speech situation.

## 7. Thematic Meaning

G. N. Leech is of the opinion that thematic meaning is related to the organization of the linguistic message in the context. He illustrates his point with the help of sentences containing active voice and passive voice. For instance, the sentences, "She gave me a big smile" and "A big smile was given to me by her" are thematically different. Leech thinks that thematic meaning is a "matter of choice between two grammatical constructions" (1981:19). In addition to this, the stress and intonation also play an important role in dealing with thematic meaning.

## Conclusion

All the seven types of meanings as illustrated above are categorically important at getting the core and associative meanings of the words and expressions in our day-today communication. The difficulty in understanding the meanings of the words in sentence constructions is resolved by G.

N Leech through the classification of 'meaning' into seven types. However, the categorization of meaning as suggested by G. N. Leech is not the final one.

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