**Kinds of Meaning**

Linguistic/

Conceptual Meaning

- Also called 'denotative', 'logical' or 'cognitive' meaning.

- This refers to the definition given in the dictionary.

- It is widely assumed to be the central factor in linguistic communication.

- Integral to the essential functioning of language.

- For example; '*man*' can be defined by the contrastive features [+Human], [+Male], [+Adult], as distinct from '*girl*', defined as [+Human], [-Male],   [-Adult].

- Any piece of language is structured simultaneously on more than one level – at least three levels are necessary for linguistic competence.

- Three Levels of Language necessary for Linguistic Competence

Listener

Phonology

Syntax

Semantics

Encodes

Decodes

Leech, 1981:11

Speaker
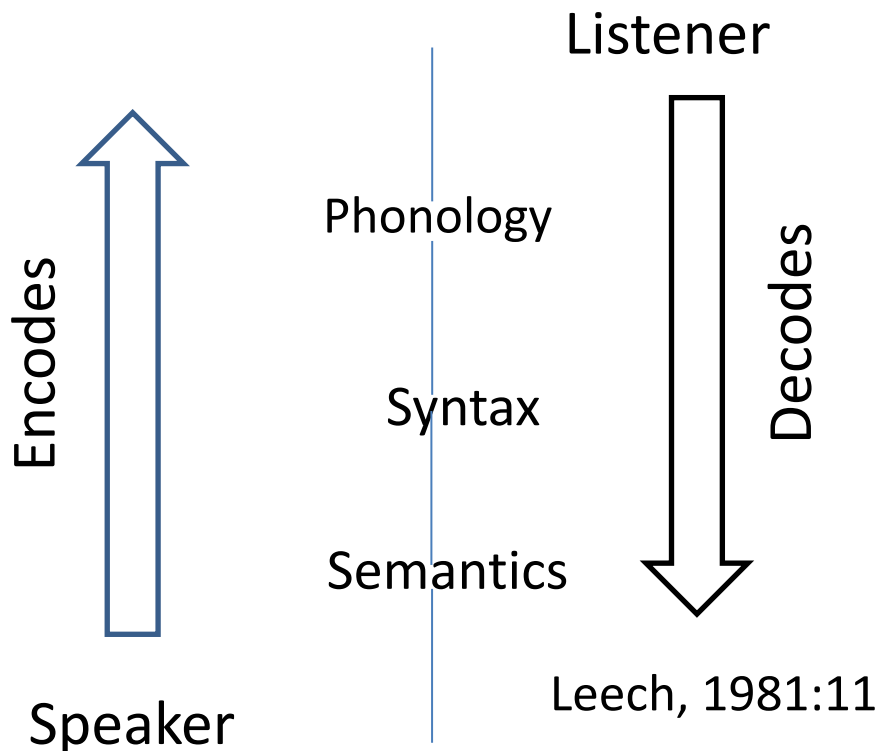
- These levels are necessary to generate or understand linguistic utterances.

- For the analysis of any sentence, we need to establish a phonological representation, a syntactic representation, and a semantic representation.

- One level may be derived from another at a certain stage.

- The aim of conceptual semantics/ meaning is to provide the semantic representation of a given sentence using the configuration of abstract symbols and contrastive features.

- This will help one to distinguish the particular meaning of a sentence from all other possible sentence meanings in the language.

- Therefore, conceptual meaning is an inextricable part of what language is (Leech, 1981: 11-12)

Connotative/ Referential Meaning

- Also termed as referential meaning by some theorists.

- This is the communicative value attributed to an expression, by virtue of what it refers to, over and above its purely conceptual meaning.

- To a large extent, the notion of 'reference' overlaps with conceptual meaning (Leech, 1981: 12).

- These are the features of the referent or a segment of the real world which are usually not included in the conceptual meaning.

- Example: the word 'woman' is defined conceptually by three features (+ Human, -Male, + Adult) or by the attributes of the referent

- However, there are some additional factors which 'woman' may have.

- These include not only physical characteristics but also psychological and social properties (sociability, maternal instinct).

- May also include the putative properties of the referent based on certain social viewpoints.

- E.g. women are known for their compassion, sensitivity and hard work

- In the past, they have been considered 'frail, cowardly, emotional, etc. by dominant males.

- Therefore, connotations may vary from age to age and from society to society (Leech, 1981: 12).

- Even from individual to individual within the same community.

- Consider the following sentence:

- 'you know the way women are'

- This may have different meanings for different individuals.

- A misogynist may interpret it negatively (women as emotionally weak or irrational) and a feminist may take it positively (sensitive, compassionate).

- connotative meanings are concerned with the real world experiences one associates with the expressions one uses or hears.

- The boundary between the conceptual and connotative meaning is based on the distinction between 'language' and the 'real world'.

- Connotative meanings are peripheral.

- These are relatively unstable as it varies according to culture, historical periods and experience of the individual.

- Connotative meanings, compared with conceptual meanings, are indeterminate and open ended.

- May belong to any characteristics of the referent, real or imaginary.

Social Meaning

- Social meanings are those which a piece of language conveys about the social circumstances of its use.

- We decode the social meaning of a text through our recognition of various dimensions and levels of style within the same language.

- We recognize some words or pronunciations as being dialectal – specific origin.

- Tell us about the geographical or social background of the speaker.

- Other features of language may disclose something concerning the social relationship between the speaker and the hearer.

- About the scale of 'Status' usage – from formal and literary to colloquial, familiar and eventually slang.

- A sentence may differ from its conceptual meaning due to some social force.

- The usage of language by the society which determines its meaning based on multiple individual and social factors – e.g. social class of users, the degree of formality, etc. Domicile (Very Formal), Residence (Formal), Abode (Poetic), Home (General)

- Researchers have recognized, among others, the following dimensions of socio-stylistic variation.

- Dialect (The language of geographical region or of a social class)

- Time (The language of the eighteenth century, etc.)

- Province (Language of law, of science, of advertising etc.)

- Status (Polite, colloquial, slang, etc., language)

- Modality (Language of Memoranda, lectures, jokes etc.)

- Singularity (The style of Dickens, of Hemingway, etc.

- Social meaning can include illocutionary force of an utterance.

- E.g. may be interpreted as a request, an assertion, an apology ….

- The function of an utterance may be only indirectly related to its conceptual meaning.

- E.g. the sentence, 'I don't have a pen' appears to be an assertion.

- Yet in social reality (e.g. if it is said to a class fellow), it can be considered as a request such as, 'please give me a pen'.

Affective Meaning

- Reflects personal feelings of the speaker; including the attitude to the listener or to the content of the talk. (Leech, 1981)

- Affective meaning are often explicitly conveyed through the conceptual or the connotative content of the words used.

- Look at the following statement:

- 'you are a great cricket player, and I love you for this!'

- Feelings of the speaker are clear, direct and loud here.

- However, there are situations in which affective meanings may be conveyed less directly. E.g. when we wish to be polite….

- 'I am sorry to interrupt, but I wonder if you would be kind enough to lower your voices'

- 'Will you please open the door'

- In these statements, the speaker has conveyed his feelings indirectly to carry an impression of politeness.

- These situations/ meanings may be culture specific.

- Social norms of politeness may vary from society to society.

- Other factors (e.g. intonation, tone of voice) may also be crucial in the making of these meanings.

- Affective meanings are largely a parasitic category in a way.

- In order to express our emotions, we rely upon the meditation of other categories of the meanings – conceptual, connotative or stylistic.

- Emotional expression through style comes about when we adopt and impolite tone to express displeasure as in 'will you open the door' or when we adopt a casual tone to express friendliness.

- Further we can use some other elements of the language to express our emotions, e.g. interjections, like Aha! And Yippee! Whose chief function is to show the emotions.

- While using these elements, we communicate feelings and attitude without the meditation of any other kind of meaning.

Reflected and Collocative Meaning

- The meaning when we associate one sense of an expression with another.

- Meaning which arises in cases of multiple conceptual meaning, when one sense of a word forms part our response to another sense (Leech, 1981).

- 'An ambassador is a person who lies abroad for the sake of his country'.

- One sense of a word seems to 'rub of' on another sense when it has a dominant suggestive power either through relative frequency and familiarity or through the strength of its associations.

- We can find reflect meaning working in the following piece of poetry.
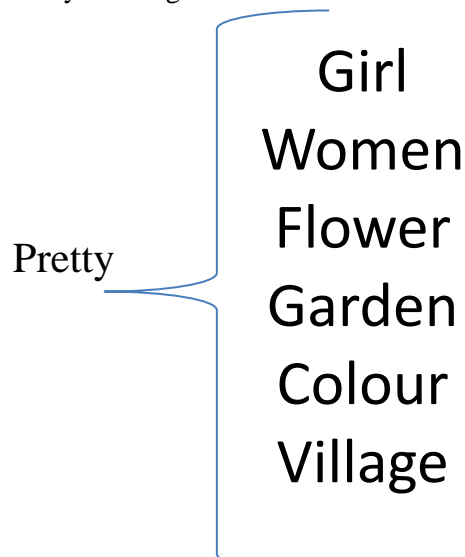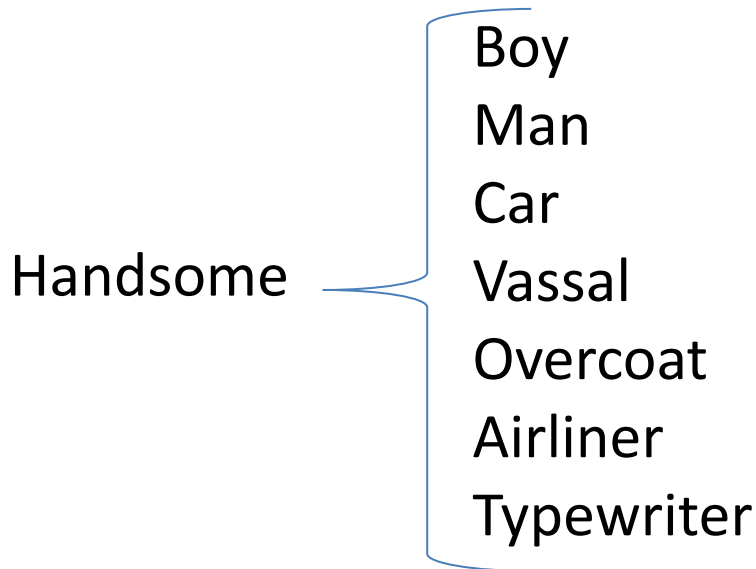
Are limbs, so dear-achieved, are sides

Full-nerved – still-warm – too hard to stir?

- In these lines, Wilfred Owen overtly uses the word 'dear' in sense 'expensive(ly)', but also alludes, one feels in the context of the poem, to the sense, 'beloved'.

- The case where the reflected meanings intrude through the sheer strength of emotive suggestion is most strikingly illustrated by words which have a taboo meaning. (Leech, 1981: 16)

- Popularity of taboo sense of certain words results in the dying-out of their innocent or non-taboo sense.

Collocative Meaning

- consists of the associations a word acquires on account of the meaning of words which tend to occur in its environment.

- E.g. 'pretty' and 'handsome' share the similar ground in the meaning, 'good-looking' but may be distinguished by the range of nouns with which they co-occur or collocate.

Pretty

Girl
Women
Flower
Garden
Colour
Village

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                    Boy
                    Man
                    Car
Handsome            Vassal
                    Overcoat
                    Airliner
                    Typewriter
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- The range may overlap: handsome woman and pretty woman both are acceptable, although they suggest the different kind of attractiveness.

- Further examples are quasi-synonymous verbs such as 'wander' and 'stroll' (cows may wander but not stroll)

- All the differences in potential co-occurrence are not to be explained as collocative meaning: because some may be due to the stylistic difference and some due to the conceptual differences.

- Collocative meaning may simply be an idiosyncratic property of individual words.

Thematic Meaning

- What is communicated by the way in which a speaker or the writer organizes the message, in terms of order, focus, and emphasis (Leech, 1981).

- Sentences with similar conceptual meanings may have different communicative values based on their contexts of organization.

- Example - Compare the following sentences:

- (1) **The young man** donated the kidney voluntarily.

- (2)**The kidney** was donated by a young man voluntarily.

- The active sentence seems to answer an implicit question, 'Who donated the kidney?'

- While the passive seems to answer, 'what was donated by a young man?'

- Thematic meaning is mainly a matter of choice between alternative grammatical constructions as in:

    - A man is waiting in the hall

    - There is man waiting in the hall.

    - They stopped at the end of the corridor.

    - At the end of the corridor, they stopped

- In other cases, it may be stress and intonation rather than grammatical construction that highlights the information in one part of a sentence.

- Example: If the word 'electric' is given contrastive stress in the following sentence:

- Bill uses an *electric* razor.

- The kind of razor that Bill uses is an electric one.

- The effect is to focus on that word as containing the new information, against a background of what is assumed to be known, viz. that Bill uses a razor.

- The sentences cited here may have, in a sense, 'the same meaning', but their communicative value may be different; not equally appropriate within the same context. (Leech, 1981)