

## The Domestication of Meaning

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**ABSTRACT:** *This work deals with the domestication of meaning. First, the meaning of 'meaning' is explained and the seven types of meaning are critically examined. These are; conceptual meaning, connotative meaning, social or stylistic meaning, effective meaning, reflected meaning, collocative meaning and thematic meaning. Meaning is domesticated through these means. After careful examination of these types of meaning, it is observed that meaning is elusive in nature. The research methods include the library and research questions. The library is where books and other information are kept. Research questions are further used as a guide to the work.*

**KEYWORDS:** Meaning of meaning, domestication of meaning; types of meaning; research questions.

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### INTRODUCTION

In order to give an adequate detail on how meaning is domesticated, it is pertinent to define and explain the meaning of the word, 'meaning'. When the meaning of 'meaning' is understood and the types of meaning are elucidated, then the domestication is applied.

#### The Meaning of 'Meaning'

According to Ndimele (1997), "meaning is a chameleon of a word that can change the colour of its effect with a change of speaker, hearer, context or setting". As Akwanya (1996), puts it, "to be meaningful is to participate in the nature of signs, namely to point to something else." Meaning is therefore, bond up with the knowing of things.

In semantics and pragmatics, meaning is the message conveyed by words, sentences, and symbols in a context. Fitch (2010) points out that semantics is a branch of language that consistently rubs shoulders with philosophy as regards to meaning (2024). Meaning is an idea or a concept which

can be transferred from the mind of the speaker to the mind of the hearer by embodying it as it were, in the form of one language or another. A scholar in examination of Ogden and Richards theory of meaning, *the meaning of meaning* (1923) asserts that the picture theory of meaning is a serviceable theory whose serviceability depends partly upon the use, which it is put. He concludes that the notion of a one-to-one correspondence between individual symbol and the basic entity it is built into is what justifies the "objective" use of the term 'picture'. The limitation of this assertion has in the fact that not all things conjure a mental picture of what we say, since meanings may not correspond to entities referred to on a one-to-one isomorphic basis.

Consequently, Ogden and Richard (1923) listed as many as twenty-two definitions of meaning and seven are selectively outlined below.

- 1 - the connotation of a word;
- 2 - an intrinsic property;
- 3 - that which the speaker of a symbol actually refers;
- 4 - that which the interpreter of a symbol refers;
- 5 - that which the speaker of a symbol ought to be referring;
- 6 -believes himself to be referring;
- 7 - believes the user to be referring.

All the definitions above are prone to misunderstanding because of lack of agreement and the limitation inherent in each of them. For instance, connotation is simply a meaning in addition to the original meaning, if we say, the colour 'red' connotes danger. The question one may ask is, how dangerous is 'red'? Or what makes 'red' red? Moving further, how does one know that which the user of a symbol actually referred, when one does not actually know their mind.

## **METHODS OF RESEARCH**

The method of this research is most importantly through research in the library where books and other information are kept. Also research questions are used as a guide to the study. Since the work deals on meaning itself, there could be no theory of meaning to apply, as meaning is extensively dealt with in the paper.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions are a guide to the work in this research.

1. What is the meaning of meaning?
2. How is meaning domesticated?
3. Is meaning a one dimensional thing?
4. Can an object, or a thing be identified with different meanings?
5. How does the meaning of two related items differ from the other?

### Domestication of Meaning

Attempt to domesticate meaning is bound to be a problem. This is because, meaning is elusive to capture. It cannot be pinned down to a precise definition. Despite its elusiveness, meaning remains central to communication. We search for accurate words to express our meaning. We often ask others to tell us what they mean. We use languages to express and elicit meanings. Meaning indeed, cannot be a one-dimensional thing. In other words, there cannot be just "meaning" but different types of meanings. Seven types of meanings could be identified according to Geoffrey Leech (1974). An account of these will be illustrated on how meaning can be domesticated. The seven types of meanings are listed below;

1. -Conceptual meaning
2. - Connotative meaning
3. - Social or stylistic meaning
4. - Affective meaning
5. - Reflected meaning
6. - Collocative meaning
7. -Thematic meaning.

### Conceptual Meaning

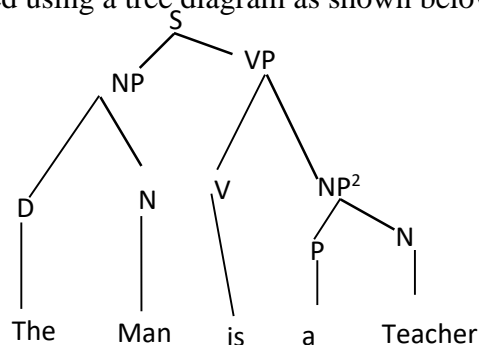
The conceptual meaning of a word is the denotation of that word. It is the plain meaning of a word in its context. It is the literal and central meaning of a word. Conceptual meaning is also known as meaning, which assumed to be central and integral to the functioning of language.

According to Leech (1974) the conceptual meaning of a word may be specified in terms of contrastive features. For instance, the conceptual meaning of 'man can be specified as, + HUMAN-FEMALE + ADULT.

The conceptual meaning of a word is relatively stable and for communication to be possible between two persons, they must share similar if not the same conceptual meaning. The conceptual meaning of a word is not open ended and indeterminate.

The theory of distinctive features can be used to explain the meaning of words, like bachelor, as+ HUMAN + MALE + ADULT - MARRIED and spinster as + HUMAN + ADULT MALE + NOT MARRIED. For female the theme line of demarcation is simply that of gender.

In an utterance such as "The man is a teacher". We may follow the principle of structure where larger segments are built up from smaller units. Syntactically moving from immediate constituent through a hierarchy of sub- divisions to its ultimate to its ultimate constituent. This is better explained using a tree diagram as shown below;



In explaining the above, one has to know the selectional axis as well as the syntagmatic or the combinatorial angle of the entire linguistic structure. The NP<sup>1</sup> is made up of ‘the man’, which is made to select an NP<sup>2</sup>, “a teacher” as complement.

### **Connotative Meaning**

Ogunsigi (2000) submits that “if conceptual meaning is regarded as the central of a word, connotative meaning will be the peripheral meaning of a word. The connotational meaning of a word is its emotional meaning, that is the meaning people associate with that word. In fact, connotative meaning can be said to be communal or cultural meaning because it relates to the peoples’ cultural background and philosophy or ideology of life.

Furthermore, connotative meaning refers simply to the additional value to be ascribed to the conceptual concept of meaning. For instance, if the conceptual meaning of a woman is +HUMAN + ADULT – MALE. But in a male dominated environment, some attributes, such as ‘frail’ ‘prone to tears’, and ‘emotional irrational’ may be additional value infer to a woman, and this is making connotative meaning from the word ‘woman’.

Connotative meaning may also be regarded as personal. According to Crystal (1971) “connotation are the individual feelings we have about words”. That is, the associations they are used in individuals mind. For example, while the word ‘mother’ in terms of its conceptual meaning will refer to one’s female biological parent. It may connote love affection, care or hatred. Depending on whether one has a loving affectionate and caring mother or a hateful and wicked mother.

To domesticate meaning in a connotative sense, the acquired connotation of a word will depend on some factors, major among which will be common usage. That is the way and circumstances in which a word is usually used by the majority of the native speakers. To Wallwork (1969) "the ability to choose words with appropriate connotation is mandatory for one to claim any substantial degree of mastery over a language." Moreover, poetry, religion, advertisement and politics openly exploit the connotative dimension of language. The dimension in which words are used not only to refer to physical or mental facts, but also to suggest the feelings, which accompany the facts.

### **Social Meaning**

Social meaning is also known as stylistic meaning. It is considered in relation to the situation in which an utterance takes place. That is to say that stylistic meaning is what a language expresses or communicates about the social circumstances of its use. In this sense, language is not a monolithic entity - it varies according to some factors: geographical locations, subject matter: medium (spoken or written) and sex. For instance, one may decode the social meaning of a text (or discourse) through recognition of different dimension of level of style within the same language. The tribe of a person can be known through the in a conversation, person's accent and use of words in a conversation. For example, the Igbo man always talk about 'container', 'goods' and 'ego' (money). The Hausa man is concerned with trailer of malu (cow). And when one hears about oil spillage, one will think about Niger Delta region.

The notion of social meaning reminds one about the concepts of dialect and register. Dialect, a variety of language according to users while register is a variety according to use. Let us examine the variety of language use in Igbo and Ukwuani languages/dialects.

Consider these sentences;

<u>Igbo</u>	<u>Ukwuani</u>
Hapu m.	Satu m.
(Onitsha dialect) Rapu m.	
English meaning	- Leave me

In the Igbo language, when someone is called 'asa', it means that person is very beautiful. 'Asa' is a kind of fish that is very delicious and does not have tough bones. Also, in Ukwuani language èbié is a term used to describe or qualify a beautiful person especially a woman. Èbié, is the female cricket, which is smooth and oily.

In addition, in domesticating meaning, it should be noted that there is no through synonyms, exception of 'Adder' and 'viper' in the English language. Two or more words may have similar conceptual meaning but different social meaning or effects.

**Consider the following examples from Leech (1974).**

1. a. Cast (Literary, biblical)  
b. Throw (General)  
c. Chuck (Casual, slang)
2. a. Domicile (Very formal, official)  
b. Residence (Formal)  
c. Abode (Poetic)  
d. Home (General)

The first set of words which are verbs are synonymous but different social domestication. In the same vain, the second set of words, nouns have different social use even when they are synonyms.

### **Affective meaning**

This is also known as attitudinal meaning. How language is used to reflect the personal feelings or attitude of the speaker towards its subject matter, and or audience. Through the use of language for example, identify the degree of politeness.

In spoken discourse, intonation may express the speakers' feelings or attitude for instance, the utterance, 'hello' if made with a rising intonation may express excitement or warmth, but if made with a falling intonation may express tiredness, unhappy, moody, and so on.

### **Reflecting Meaning**

This type of meaning is often associated with lexical items in which there may be a multiple conceptual meaning as a result of one word forming part of ones response to another in that sense. According to Leech "reflected meaning occurs as a result of multiple conceptual meanings in which case one sense of a word determine ones response to another sense". This implies that the one sense of a word tends to 'ruboff on another sense, probably because of its dominant suggestive power which may arise as a result of relative frequency or strength and its associations.

In other words, this is when one of the several meanings of a word becomes directly associated with the word to the extent that we tend to forget the other uses of the word. Such is the case of 'intercourse', 'erection', 'ejaculation' - their use often conjures in people's minds several actions. The instance of reflected meaning can lead to taboo meaning for example in some traditional societies, the foregoing words given may not be expected from women or children because of the sexual associations which they conjure up. Other examples include sienna utility vehicles. Sienna has taken, the names of other space the of other types of space vehicles over in the present day usage in Nigeria.

### **Collocative meaning**

Collocative simple means the "placing together" of words and phrases. when two or more words go together, we say they collocate. Then, collocative meaning is the meaning which a word has in relation to the other words or express in a particular context.

One can say that one of the meanings of 'night' is its collocability with 'dark'. Part of the semantic specification of 'bright' is its collocability with 'day'. While we can normally talk of 'powerful man' the expression 'powerful tea' will be some what odd. Expression like 'burning hot', pouring 'rain', intrinsic value' rainy days', 'long stick', and 'tall man' show normal collocations.

### **Thematic meaning**

This is what is communicated by the way in which a speaker organizes his utterances either for emphasis or otherwise. If we take the active/passive sentence structure as a case in point, we may have the same conceptual content but with different communicative values because of the fact that there may be suggestion of different context. For examples;

- a. The pastor delivered the sermon (active)

b. The sermon was delivered by the pastor (passive)

The active sentence seems to answer the implicative question; 'what did the pastor deliver?' while the passive seems to answer the question', who delivered the sermon?

Thematic meaning is mainly a matter of choice between alternative grammatical constructions. As in the following examples.

a. A girl is waiting in the hall.

b. There is a girl waiting in the hall.

c. She likes Danish cheese best.

d. Danish cheese she likes best.

Sentence 'a' and 'b' are the same, and also 'c' and 'd', but they differ in focus and emphasis.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has focused on the way meaning is domesticated. It has involved the examination of how types of meaning can help one to understand how meaning can be domesticated. Meaning is domesticated in several ways; these include: society, ethnicity, religion, personal and cultural values.

From the analysis, it has been portrayed two that meaning is elusive and arbitrary. Hence one must rely on what is said and perhaps time and circumstance under which it is said. This further explains that meaning could be fully understood in the discourse context and pragmatic point of view.

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