

## ENGLISH CONNOTATIVE SETS AND SEMANTIC CHANGE: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH AND AZERBAIJANI CONTEXTS

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### Summary

This article makes an attempt to analyze some linguistic demarcation lines between the denotative and connotative meanings of the phrases within the given context and tries to enlighten some causes of these connotative uses of phrases embodied in the content causing semantic change. It also tries to find out the reasons of usage of extra-linguistic factors pulling speakers to use connotative phrases. It was identified that among the speakers' preferred choices the factors – “to be closer to context”, to seem more logical” and “to seem more convincing” occupy the leading positions when communicators instead of their denotative meanings tend to use the alternatively transferred meanings. Consequently, similar situations affect changing the semantic extensions of words belonging to a given lexical stock of each nationality. Apart from this, the author deems the age category of speakers also be influential reason among the choices to be peculiar to use connotations instead of the initial lexical meaning of the words. It is because our experimental analyses showed that the frequency of connotation usage is situationally age and memory driven which were confirmed in the responses of people between 25 and  $\geq 81$ .

**Key words:** denotative and connotative meanings, positive-negative-neutral connotations, extra-linguistic factors, semantic change, natural process of using connotative phrases, process of speakers' connotative choice.

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### 1. Introduction

We usually use languages in variable ways because (*Ahmad, 2011*) generally discourse involves more individuals; (*Crystal, 2007*) communicators are axiologically different; (*Demuthova, Andrej, 2022*) speakers' feelings, cultural and thinking patterns about the similar context inevitably vary. This process is characterized by a number of linguistic devices. In fact, the reason of why different levels of speakers who always convey the same meaning in differing ways lies on an alleged fact that, communication rules are not the same for all- for native and second language users. It means, during the intercourse one may be more polite and respectful, whereas the other speaker may happen to be much rude or much informal to express the same context pejoratively in their communication behaviors. So, the same context may be expressed in divergent ways and patterns. In these situations, they sometimes associate the facts with the lexicological meanings (idiomatic, morphological, pragmatic, phraseological, etc.) rather than lexical expressions. Such explanations are not at all inappropriate.

The content analyses of the linguistic feature of connotation use suggests an association different from its literal meaning known as denotation and its meaning expression can be either (a) positive, (b) negative or (c) neutral. For example, in Azerbaijani: – *O, Koroglu kimi cəsurdur.* (*He is as brave as Koroglu*) – (*Koroglu is a national hero of Azerbaijan*) – we

have a positive meaning, but in Azerbaijani – *cəhənnəm odunda yanmaq* (transferred meaning) (*burning in the fire of hell*) we face-with the face of evildoers; thus it is in negative meaning or the set – *like a handy man* – depending on situation can be either positive, *a person famous for his many connections*, or negative – *intruding into forbidden places and showing courage*. Therefore, it can be considered that it would be more correct to call the neutral connotation as mixed connotative expression.

Generally, it is also not excluded that the similar context is expressed by means of figurative sets in both languages. For example: “*Respect your grandmother, because without her your mother would not have existed (Umbundu)*” (Haladyj, 2020: 1).

This saying is common for Angolo, Kongo and for some other English speaking countries, however, the similar context in Azerbaijani is expressed as: – “*Cənnət anaların ayaqları altındadır, onlara hörmət iinsanlığa hörmətdir*” which will literally mean as: (*Heaven/Paradise*) *is under the feet of mothers; respecting them is respecting humanity*)- where the similar context is expressed differently.

## 2. Literature review

Our aim in this research is comparatively introducing the two varying analyses about the speakers’ linguistic behavior in using connotative phrases -in English and in Azerbaijani languages and its interdependence on age peculiarities of people, and wherever possible bring examples to consolidate our scientific stands. It means that the usage of connotative sets usually differs from the viewpoint of structural language differences.

## 3. Materials and methods

For better comprehension of communication difference in using denotative and connotative semantics inherent for both languages and communicators we conducted *oral questioning* among 300 randomly chosen respondents and 100 higher school students to clarify the reasons and preferences of using connotation in communication instead of denotations. Besides this, *scientific analysis* of the responses also serves as important pillars in identification the choices between primary and transferred meanings used in paired languages.

By *comparing and contrasting the semantic features of denotative phrases* the author tried to illustrate the semantic changes in languages.

Finally, the *dependence of age peculiarities on the frequency of connotated usage* was also included into the subject matter of the article.

## 4. Results and discussion

In order to achieve syntactically semantic intensity by connotation, we face with some differences in Azerbaijani and English languages; for example, in order to provide the power of communication, we usually use the intensifier – such as */lap/, /ən/* in Azerbaijani and – (*very*) – (*very highly*), (*most*) or (*top*) as their English counterparts. Or when processing of numerical words such as */kilotons/pounds/metric tonnes/*, for example, *kilotons of alternative energy* in Azerbaijani, along with the form of *kilotonlarla*- we may also use the hyphenated words */ton-ton/, /kilo -kilo/* implying increasing semantic expressivity. Therefore, when teaching this field of semantics to national students, it would be better to start with specific examples and further make generalizations, rather than theoretical presentation.

We wanted to make some deep practical analyses of the speakers' language behavior and the preferred situations by them to use connotative sets rather than denotative.

In their analyses scientists from Finland has described that, “*exploring information with interactive intent modeling is based on two principles: visualizing current search intent and direction; and balancing exploration and exploitation of user feedback. The user's cognitive effort is thus reduced, as it is easier to recognize items instead of having to remember them when reformulating queries*” (Pereira, 2013: 88).

Firdaus indicates: “*The literal meanings, the denotation, are direct, realistic, and often found in the dictionary. What the word suggests or implies, the connotation, is symbolic, culturally constructed, and often influences the interpretation of poetry or literature*” (Dribniuk, 2007: 4).

A group of Japanese scientists analyzed the processes of utterance of English connotations in Japan and found out some challenging points referring to the communication process. They wrote: “*Even though their (connotations'-S.F.) accurate use is crucial to make communication precise and to sound like a native speaker, learning them is one of the most difficult tasks for second language learners*” (Koshelov, 2012: 52).

We completely agree with this argument because during Natural Language Processing (NLP) if the Azerbaijani speaker actually curses or damns somebody, he/she connotatively say: *Səni qırmızı geyib göy çalasan* – the literal meaning of which is: (*I wish*) *You wear red and play blue*). It will absolutely be incomprehensible to understand this literal translation for Native English Speaker (NES). From another side, while we refer to colors in Azerbaijani the word notion “*çalmaq*” is not equal to “*playing*”- in its contextual meaning. It has got the transferred meaning within the content of this which means *give the shades of color* (here – *blue* as color is the representation of *göy* in Azerbaijani which is different in its original semantic meaning; it will mean the word *greedy*, “and *göy* in another context which is in other context *gömgöy göyərək*- meaning – *look ill or painful*, etc.)

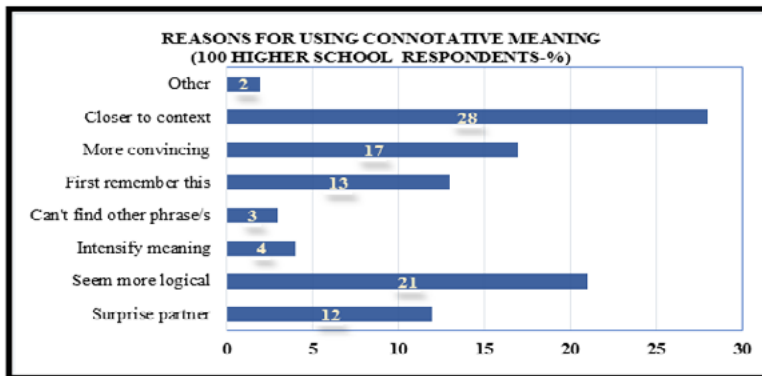
However, it is quite possible to express the similar context by denotations. For example, “*I deeply damn you!*”. Then, in this case, of course, though the contexts may be closer, however, the semantic shades of the meanings will separately be much different. There arise a number of questions, then: *Which domain is the starting-point for preferring connotatives and why?*, *What are the reason/s that we tend or prefer using connotation, instead of denotation?*, *What are the pull or push factors for avoiding denotative meaning?* Probably, it will not be so easy to give an exhaustive answer to the similar questions because, as mentioned before, depending on various individual cases the answers may be different.

While speaking about avoidance behaviour in second language learning of using words the Iraqi scientists wrote that “*the structural linguistic differences in the first language and second language and the psychological states of the learners are considered to be important factors behind avoidance*” (Ahmed, 1432: 7).

Clearly, it will not be so easy for NES to understand the connotative meaning of the phrase “*göy çalmaq*” and from this point we may agree with the claims that various language structures shape different language behaviors in communication, especially in oral one because the speakers usually try to use the short cut phrases either from their own, or from the second language. For example Azerbaijani and English speakers successfully use the similar connotative phrases as *puppet government* – *kukla hökumət*. It is the same in another combination as *baş vurmaq* (*to head*)- it will vary from the first case because we have the similar meaning in English as well. For example: “*Before leaving for a long day trip, he wanted to head his native village and say farewell to his relatives*”.

However, in another example when English speakers (Indians) say: “*There are a lot of managers, but no indians*”; then its Azerbaijani version will be expressed in different semantics- “*Sən ağa, mən ağa -bəs, inəkləri kim sağa*” which literally means as (*You are the master, I am the master – so who milks the cows*).

What is the weight or balance of linguistic and extralinguistic factor in expressing the similar situations? We may pose a number of more questions referring to the procedures of speakers’ choice. Evidently, while using connotative phrases, we face with multifaceted semantic processes implied within the context. Nevertheless, we tried to experimentally question people and find out the closest reasons for that. The results of the interviews conducted with people are depicted on picture 1.



**Pic. 1. Reasons for using connotative meaning (results of questionnaire conducted among 100 Azerbaijani Higher School students)**

As it can be seen from the picture, the students gave the highest preference to the reasons of being “closer to context” (28%) and “seem more logical” (21%), respectively. Next, they called the reasons of using connotative phrases in Azerbaijani media “*other, can't find other phrase/s* and *intensifying the meaning*” negligently less important. It shows that among the linguistic aspect for choosing connotation people immensely highlight the semantic aspect rather the others levels as morphological, phonetic and so on.

On the other hand, while commenting on the gaps between denotation and connotation in the translation, polish scientists B. Kochman-Haładyj and R. Kiełtyka write that, “*the process of semantic deterioration, otherwise named semantic pejoration (change of the semantic write meaning for the worse-S.F.), within this lexical category exhibits a higher degree of frequency in comparison with semantic amelioration...*” (Kochman-Haladyj, Kiełtyka: 1965: 159-160). They also noted that, “*word pairs such as lord/lady or master/mistress are striking examples and epitomize this all-pervading sexism. They are examples of changes in meaning according to their sex assignment and follow a pattern which Miller and Swift (1976:57) call semantic polarization*” (Kochman-Haladyj, 2011: 157).

The scholars from London School of Economics have conducted significant reseraches referring to representations of meaning and they stated that: “*Word and passage meaning representations derived by LSA have been found capable of simulating a variety of human cognitive phenomena, ranging from developmental acquisition of recognition vocabulary to word-categorization, sentence-word semantic priming, discourse comprehension, and judgments of essay quality (Landauer, 1998: 261).*”

By the way in some instances the It is well known that studying phraseological units was one of the developed branch of Lexicology and according to their different features phraseological units were classified by famous linguists like Vinogradov, Smirnitsky, Arnold and Kunin also analysed a set of meaningful units and paid much attention as to the structure, as well as their consciously usage (*Tatsiana, 1922*).

For example, Smirnitskiy called the process of semantic change and noted that, meaning of a word was a well-known representation of an object, phenomenon or attitude in the consciousness. Joint Italian and Russian contrastive research states: “*It is worth noting that there is no clear boundary between the classes of phrases (Langer 2005, 188; Benigni, Cotta Ramusino 2011, 11) and it is sometimes quite difficult to determine the exact status of a particular expression*” (*Firdaus, 2015:16*).

By contrast, the other scientists noted the lexical meaning to be essential in connotation: “*Lexical category exhibits a higher degree of frequency in comparison with semantic amelioration...*” (*Kochman-Haladyj, Kieltyka, 2023: 43 – 44*).

Azerbaijani scholar Veysalli stressed the role of context in the discovery of semantic meaning. He rightly noted that, regardless of other factors in our discourse each “*element is loaded with meaning in the context*” (*Ruotsalo, 2015: 216*).

Nowadays connotative meanings are widely used in contrastive linguistics. It has already become one of the common features for Azerbaijani users while they transfer the meanings of numerals. Today, there are countless forms and methods of connotative plural in both Azerbaijani and English languages. For example in English: “*Nobody or no one can cope with these works*” – although the word *nobody* (in Azerbaijani – *heç kəs* – grammatically singular but semantically plural) is singular as an indefinite number, it is contrastively plural and will simultaneously refer to multiple entities in person; so it can refer to the reference plural, which means that “*semantic descriptions of sentences are built on the basis of the semantic representation of words*”. Thus, using connotative phrases is more personal and semantic-situational rather than lexical.

Crystal described the power of words as following: “*We need to understand when and why words change their meanings in different cultural contexts*” (*Crystal, 2007: 127*). In another instance Slovakian scientists write: “*One of the ways to observe a notion in a natural language is through the analysis of its connotations words which are most often linked to the particular notion* (*Demuthova, Andrej, 2022: 2*).

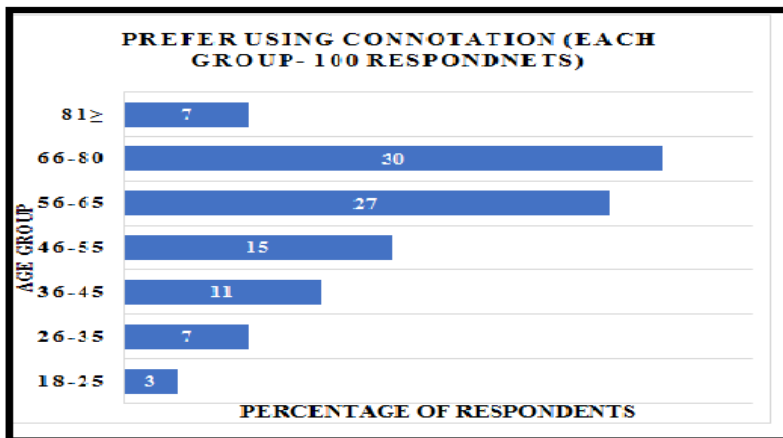
Nowadays it is not so popular to advise agism to speakers because scientists, especially psychologists claim that this may evoke negative or biased stereotypes. However, there are the evidenced facts that connotative phrase usage frequency is connected with age peculiarities of speakers.

700 Azerbaijanis out of 7 age groups covering of 100 respondents in each (50 from males and 50 from females) and ranging between 18 and  $\geq 81$  were involved in our experiment to find out the interdependency rate of frequency of using connotations on peoples’ ages.

To start with, before conducting the questionnaire among people of different ages, we assumingly thought that by the time past, people become much frequently using connotative phrases (it is a common sense that in most cases aged people are much inclined using metaphorical – transferred meanings of the words or phrases because of their rich life experience). However, in some instances our expectations turned down. For example, though it was expected people of  $\geq 81$  to demonstrate the highest frequency using connotative phrases, it manifested only 7% out of 100 people from both genders. Considering the empirical difficulties, the posed question was simplified and was addressed only in the way to easily comprehend it: “*Would you prefer using real or figurative meaning within your communication in your daily life?*”

Interestingly, there was not a single case or dichotomy in their choices and all respondents did not feel any difficulty to make their own choices between the real and transferred meanings. Thus, 30% of people of 66-80 mostly chose the connotations. Next, respondents aging 56-65 and 46-55 caught up this by 27% and 15%, as an appropriate. The least number of connotative choices belonged to younger people of 18-25 which indicated only 3% out of 100 persons.

The results of our analyses showed that the frequency of connotation usage is situationally age and memory driven which were confirmed in the responses of people between 1–25 and  $\geq 81$ . The results are shown on picture 2.



**Pic. 2. Breakdown of interdependence of Azerbaijani peoples' age groups on the frequency of using connotative meaning**

Source: Individual plan of the author

## 5. Conclusions

Assuming different approaches to the comparative use of connotative phrases we may draw the following conclusions:

1. Denotation is the actual, direct definition or dictionary meaning of a word or term, connotative meaning or plural is more associative, emotional, figurative meaning attached to a word, and cognitive. Therefore, although the connotative plural is ontologically expressed by the lexosemantic, lexicographical method, it is similar in the function of semantic interpretation by representing the implicit plural in both languages.

2. The meaning of the denotative sets is used in both languages as a means of expression and as a method of description in limited frameworks, forming both similarity and individuality.

3. Connotative expression of the situations in both languages are similar in that they depend on mood, emotion, experience, specific situation, age, reasons and have different sets of images.

4. The expression of by the connotative method is similar in terms of expressiveness, presupposition, subject-oriented and structural-oriented in both cases.

5. Denotative meaning is what actually exists, and connotative meaning is pragmatic, implied.



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