



The Semantic Landscape: Denotative vs. Connotative Meanings in Language

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Abstract: This article analyzes the denotative and connotative meanings of lexemes and phrases. As linguistic units, words and phrases play a significant role in communicative processes. Words directly name objects through denotative meaning, while phrases often manifest as units carrying connotative and emotional meaning. The article examines the structural and semantic properties of phrases and lexemes, as well as the interrelations and differences between these linguistic units. The significance and role of lexemes and phrases in linguistics, along with their linguistic and extralinguistic characteristics, are highlighted.

Key words: denotative meaning, connotative meaning, lexeme, phrase, semantics, linguistics, linguistic unit, emotional meaning, stable units, phraseology.

Every language recognizes words and phrases as meaning-bearing units since all communicative interactions are based on lexical and phraseological units. The fundamental components of language possess distinctive structural and semantic characteristics alongside the universal meaning-bearing attributes mentioned above. This distinctiveness is evident in their quantitative representation (where phrases constitute a smaller group as secondary naming units compared to lexemes) and their structural-semantic frameworks.

According to recognized semiological principles, words possess a complex semantic structure and are always influenced by semantic, social, psychological, and linguistic pressures. The meaning of a word is expressed in the linguistic representation of the world



and is harmonious with the psychological state of the individual. Considering this situation, studying the semantic "universe" of words requires the involvement of several factors.

Phrases possess characteristics that differentiate their structural composition and semantics from that of words, being interpreted as secondary nominative units. Words are acknowledged as primary linguistic units with initial meanings, while phrases introduce new meanings based on existing words.

These stable units were researched and analyzed since the second half of the last century, notably in the works of academician V. Vinogradov (1947) regarding phraseological controversies and units; N. N. Amosova (1963) on phrases; V. L. Arkhangelsky (1964) on stable phrases; A. V. Kunin (1967) regarding phraseological units; and M. I. Umarxadjayev (1983) on phraseological units and phrases.

Despite some linguists labeling these units as "superfluous elements" in language, they are practical tools related to the principles of linguistic autonomy. It is essential to note that no element in the language system emerges in isolation; specific needs lead to the creation of new units.

The function of phrases as linguistic units expresses the subjective individual's positive evaluation and emotional attitudes toward a situation or object. The interplay of these factors enhances the emotional expressiveness and vibrancy of phrases. Such unique meanings or semantics contribute to the formation of the meaning of phrases. For instance, in Uzbek:

- **Toxirjon to'y kuni xat6 qildi.**
- **Toxirjon to'y kuni qovun tushirdi.**

Compare the sentence formed with the phrase "qovun tushirdi." Another example is:



- **Toxirjon Zuhraga uylanar emish.**
- **Toxirjon Zuhra bilan bir yostiqqa bosh qo‘yar ekan.**

In English:

- **He made a big mistake on that project.**
- **He really dropped the ball on that project.**

In Russian:

- **Он опытный человек.**
- **Он стреляный воробей.**
- **Он оплошал.**
- **Он ударил в грязь лицом.**

From these examples, it is evident that the primary meaning of phrases is centered around expressiveness, conveying emotions, evaluations, and positive-negative relationships.

The unique linguistic, extralinguistic, and linguistic-culturological characteristics of lexemes and phrases are not sufficient to determine their complete status as linguistic units. In our view, it is essential to compare all linguistic and structural-semantic features specific to phrases with those present in lexemes.

It is well known that lexical and phraseological units possess similar fundamental types of meanings, which become apparent within the realms of semantics, pragmatics, and cognitive linguistics.

The primary meaning of a word is the denotative (referential) meaning, which is defined in authoritative linguistic dictionaries. Denotat (from Latin *denotare* – to denote)



refers to the reality or object being named by a linguistic unit (word). For example, the Uzbek words "yuz," "bet," "aft," and "chehra" represent different names for the same entity (denotat). The denotative function serves to connect an object with its referent, regardless of its natural or distinctive properties. Denotation represents the primary meaning of a word and does not encompass feelings or thoughts that individuals can associate with it. Denotative meaning is the direct, essential meaning of a word or phrase, which specifically points to an object without additional feelings or implications. For instance, the denotative meaning of the word "gul" (flower) refers to a type of plant—the flower itself. This word simply describes the flower without adding any other meanings or feelings.

Thus, it is essential for a word to possess a "denotative" meaning. We will examine this through examples from Uzbek, Russian, and English.

- **Olov** – a gas that burns at a high temperature, flame, fire.
 - Example: "Olov juda baland yonmoqda." (The fire is burning very high.) Here, the word "olov" is used in a denotative sense, referring to the actual burning entity.
- **Дерево (derevo)** – a perennial plant with a solid trunk and branches forming a crown.
 - Example: "Во дворе растёт большое дерево." (A large tree is growing in the yard.) Here, the word "дерево" refers to the actual tree.
- **Book** – a set of pages that have been fastened together inside a cover to be read or written in.
 - Example: "I am reading a book." Here, the word "book" is used in a denotative sense, referring to the object "book."

This can be described as a universal phenomenon across languages. Despite the dominance of connotative and emotional meanings in phrases, they also possess their denotation.



For example, in Uzbek, "archilgan tuxumday" means clean and beautiful; "yeti o'lchab bir kesmoq" means to think thoroughly before acting.

In English: "Break the ice" – the denotative meaning of this phrase is the breaking of ice, meaning the actual ice breaking. However, in a connotative, metaphorical sense, "to break the ice" refers to breaking an uncomfortable silence or establishing a warm relationship in a new acquaintance.

For instance: "He told a joke to break the ice at the meeting."

In Russian: "Как огурчик" – meaning "just like a cucumber," refers to being healthy, lively, or looking good (connotative meaning: liveliness and vigor).

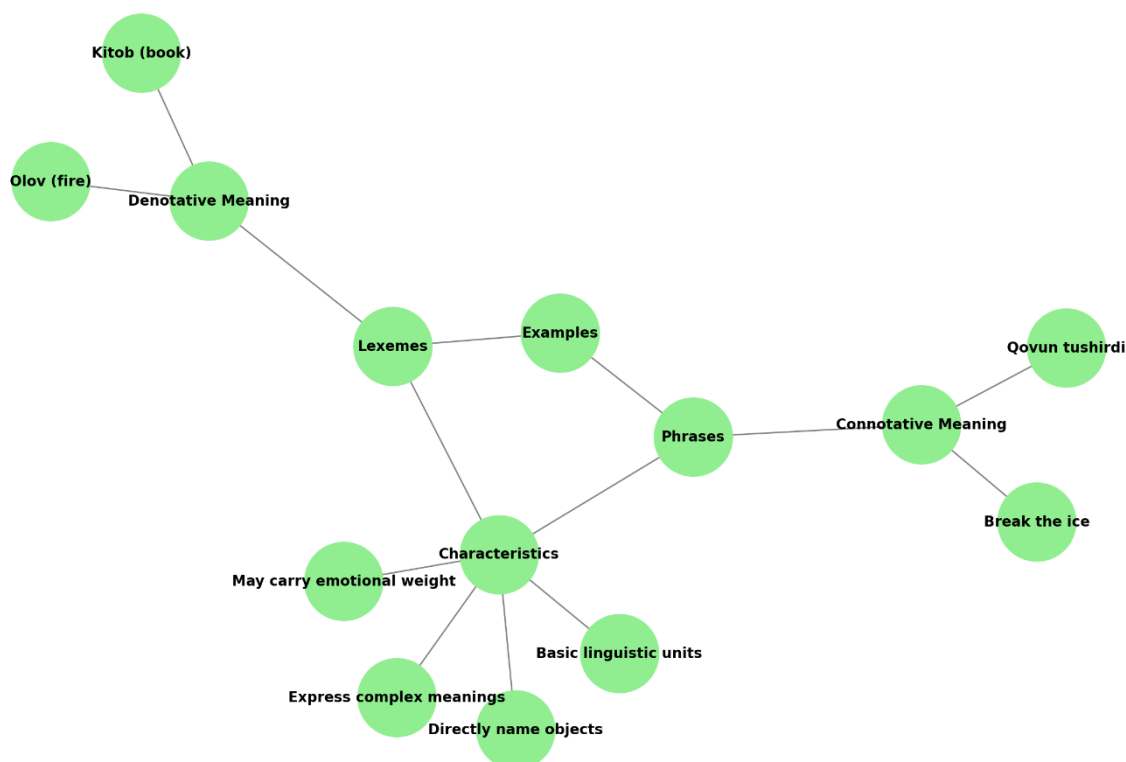
The connotative meaning indicates that a person is in a good, lively state.

From the examples, it is evident that phrases, despite consisting of two or more components, possess a denotative meaning as a whole unit.

One common characteristic of both words and phrases is their connotative meanings.



Semantic Network of Lexemes and Phrases



We have discussed the fundamental linguistic characteristics of lexemes and phrases concerning denotative and connotative meanings.

It should be emphasized that the status of a word and a phrase as the primary linguistic units serves as a foundation for emphasizing their linguistic status. They are not only nominative units but also essential connotative tools present across all languages. Alongside the denotative and connotative aspects discussed above, they also possess semantic, structural, and functional characteristics. For instance, the emotive meaning, evaluative meaning, their participation in contextual and discursive acts, metaphorical and metonymic peculiarities, lexical and phraseological meaning integrity; the involvement of lexemes in the formation of phrases; and the semantic paradigms of lexemes and phrases,



including polysemy, synonymy, antonymy, and the “degree of inane” of phrase components, will be elaborated upon in our future articles.

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