

A Semantic Study on the Perception of EFL Learners of Conceptual versus Associative Meaning

Mohamad Awwad

PhD Applied Linguistics, Department of English, Lebanese University, Postal Code:
14/6573, Beirut, Lebanon

E-mail: drmohamadawwad2017@gmail.com

Received: September 5, 2017 Accepted: October 13, 2017 Published: October 15, 2017

doi:10.5296/elr.v3i2.11927

URL: <http://doi.org/10.5296/elr.v3i2.11927>

Abstract

Meaning is the heart of language and it is its ultimate purpose; without the capacity to express meaning language is rendered as sequences of sounds or letters, and only when those sounds are judged capable of having a meaning do they qualify as language. Perceiving meaning does not solely depend on scrutinizing the literal sense of words, but it also comprises recognizing the meaning beyond language. From here, it can be inferred that when tackling meaning of utterances, two perspectives must be rendered: conceptual meaning, the literal or the core sense of a word also referred to as the denotative meaning and the associative meaning, which refers to aspects of the meaning that do not contribute to the denotation or concept of an expression and that do not change the range of possible referents (Murphy & Koskela, 2010). As a matter of fact, though English as foreign language learners, at the Lebanese University, do relish a wide vocabulary bank, and do know many of the words' meanings they encounter throughout their studies, they are, unfortunately, incapable of transferring their linguistic competence into semantic perception of comprehending the stylistic connotations of what they read. This can be traced to Lebanese University students' unawareness of the stylistic features of discourse which, in turn, is rendered as an impediment obstructing language processing. In this respect, via a comprehensive questionnaire, the study is meant to reflect a practical investigation on the perception of post graduates preparing for their master's degree in English at the Lebanese University, fifth branch, of stylistic features of words. The results depicted that stylistic features are not well perceived by EFL learners. Implications and recommendations for teachers, students, and curriculum designers were offered in the light of the study's findings.

Keywords: conceptual, associative, stylistic features

1. Introduction

Language "is the system of human expressions by the means of words" (Mayor, 2009, p. 549);

and if words are the skeleton of a language, meaning is its heart (Davis, 2003). As a matter of fact, meaning is the ultimate purpose of language and without the capacity to express meaning, language does not only lose one of its most essential aspects but it is also characterized as pointless and futile. In this line, Riemer (2010) considers that “only when sequences of sounds or letters are judged capable of having a meaning do they qualify as language” (p.3). Therefore, in order to attain successful communication and ideas’ exchange among human beings, the meaning of what is conveyed by the speaker or the writer must be reinforced in all communication processes (Jackendoff, 2002). Yule (2006) converges with what Wardrough (1985) attempted to reveal in the fact that communication clearly depends not only on scrutinizing the conceptual meaning and the relationship between words, but also on recognizing what speakers mean by their utterances or the connotative meaning of utterances. From here, it can be inferred that when tackling meaning of utterances, two perspectives must be rendered: conceptual meaning, the literal or the core sense of a word also referred to as the denotative meaning and the associative meaning, which refers to aspects of the meaning that do not contribute to the denotation or concept of an expression and that do not change the range of possible referents to that expression (Murphy & Koskela, 2010).

Though English as foreign language (EFL) learners, at the Lebanese University, study English for ten or more years, and seem to excel at mastering conceptual or denotative meaning of words, they do not appear to have parallel skills in comprehending connotation of words, phrases, sentences, and texts, which presents a problematic issue in language processing. Thus, the study is meant to reflect a practical investigation on the perception of English post graduates preparing for their master’s degree in the Lebanese University of associative versus conceptual meaning. In this respect, the study addresses the following research questions:

- 1) How aware are EFL learners preparing for their master’s degree **students** at the Lebanese University of conceptual meaning versus stylistic meaning of words?
- 2) To what extent does the awareness of associative meaning help EFL learners in language processing?
- 3) What is the significance and linguistic function of perceiving the associative meaning of words and phrases?

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Though students in Lebanon learn English for more than ten years by the time they reach university, they still lack the adeptness to decode and encode a text effectively. Moreover, despite the tremendous approaches pursued by English instructors to ameliorate their students’ English level, EFL learners still confront a problematic issue: they are unable to interpret what is meant by an utterance which is reflected in their poor comprehension of passages and texts, and they are unable to encode or produce a precise writing that accurately embodies what they intend to state (Awwad, 2017). Paradoxically, EFL learners, in Lebanon, do relish a wide vocabulary bank, and do know many of the words’ meanings they encounter throughout their studies; however, they are incapable of transferring their linguistic competence into communicative competence even at the university level (Awwad, 2017). In a word, EFL learners know the words’ meanings, but they are unable to comprehend the stylistic

connotations of what they read, and they are unable to produce or encode a lucid passage or text. This can be traced to our learners' unawareness of the connotation or the stylistic features of words.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

It came to the researcher's attention while correcting students' assignments and exams ~~in Pragmatics and Semantics courses~~ ~~the that though the latter are preparing~~ for a master's degree in English, are still incapable of using expressions effectively in their precise contextual sense. The study aims at investigating the perception of conceptual versus stylistic meaning for EFL learners. Therefore, the purpose of the study is to shed light on the different types of associative meanings in the English language and the perception of students preparing for a master's degree in English of associative meaning which versus conceptual meaning of words. If the connotation of words is not perceived and thus not used properly, a reader might be lost during the reading process; a speaker might be lost while listening. From here, it becomes explicit that both learners and teachers must understand the concept of associative meaning and its types, and ways to use language with respect to connotation of words. Admitting the turning points made on English language teaching to fostering students' active construction of meaning, the researcher addresses this study to investigate EFL learners' awareness on the associative and stylistic meaning of words they encounter and use throughout their educational contexts.

1.3 Definition of Key Terms

The following definitions are offered to ensure proper terminology for the study:

- 1) Associative meaning: is the sense or associations that are not part of a word's basic meaning; associative meaning is based on an individual experience or the context of the sentence. In other words, it is the meaning of words that has connection to the relationship of word with the condition beyond the language; associative meaning is referred to as stylistic features of words (Leech, 1980).
- 2) Communicative Competence: This term was initially defined by Spitzberg (1988) as "the ability to interact well with others." (p. 68) He explains that the term refers to accuracy, clarity, comprehensibility, coherence, expertise, effectiveness, and appropriateness. Communicative competence can be best understood as a "situational ability to set realistic and appropriate goals to maximize **learners'** achievement by using knowledge of self, others, context, and communication theory to generate adaptive communication performances" (Friedrich, 1994, p. 9).
- 3) Conceptual meaning: is the lexical or literal meaning. It is also referred to as the denotational meaning which is offered by the dictionary (Leech, 1980).
- 4) Connotation: semantic associations that do not contribute to the denotation of an expression; connotation does not change the range of possible referents of the expression (Murphy & Koskela, 2010).
- 5) Denotation: the relation between an expression and the properties or concepts it refers to. A word's denotative meaning is the literal meaning that is directly presented in the dictionary of a word (Murphy & Koskela, 2010).
- 6) Linguistic Competence: In general, linguistic competence is the speaker's implicit, internalized knowledge of the rules of the language. Fernandez and Cairns (2011). A

corresponding definition was provided in the rationalist theory by Chomsky (1971), who admitted that the linguistic competence is our unconscious knowledge of language.

7) Referent: object which a word **stands** for on a specific occasion of use (Riemer, 2010, p. 17).

8) Semantics: the study of meaning in language. This is an independent level and has several subtypes, such as word, grammatical, sentence, and utterance meaning (Arunabbarathi, 1976).

9) Sense: the sense of a lexeme is the general meaning or the concept underlying a word (Riemer, 2010, p. 17).

2. Historical Background

The close link between language and thought or the study of meaning in language can be traced back to Plato who considered that “thought is the conversation that thought has with herself” (Plato as cited in Riemer 2010, p. 411). However, the word semantics was first used in the nineteenth century and it is derived from the Greek adjective *semantikos* which means related to signs (Davis, 1991). Morris (1938) was the first to acknowledge in his “Foundation of the Theory of Signs” that Semantics deals with the relation of signs to objects which they may denote; thus, semantics is the study of meaning and as Lyons (1984) puts it the main objective behind studying meaning is to understand each other. Linguists, such as Palmer (1984), emphasized the relation between language and thought by considering that language acquisition cannot be fulfilled unless the learner develops semantic categories or understands the meaning of the concepts he or she needs to speak or write about. Moreover, any attempt to delve into the nature of a language necessitates the researcher to closely examine the meaning of linguistic expressions. In its basic form, “meaning is a very vague term; it can refer to the idea or the intention lying behind a piece of language as *I don't quite understand what you are getting at by saying meat is murder; do you mean that everyone should be vegetarian*, or the thing referred to by a piece of language as *I meant the second street on the left, not the first one*; ,and the translation of words between languages as *Seiketsu means clean in Japanese*” (Riemer, 2010, p. 2). Leech (1974) divided meaning into two broad categories: conceptual and associative meaning and subdivided associative meaning into five types.

2.1 Conceptual Meaning

The conceptual meaning of a word is also referred to as the denotative meaning or the cognitive meaning of a lexeme. It is the concept that the word refers to apart from any context or affective factors. Those concepts are related to phonological and structural information of the word and are rendered as the central factor in verbal communication (Leech, 1974).

2.2 Associative Meaning

The associative meaning of a word refers to particular qualities beyond the denotative meaning; the associative meaning is unstable meaning and is varied according to individual experience and the context of a sentence. In other words, it is the meaning of words that has connection to the relationship of a word with the condition beyond the language. For instance, the word “jasmine” is associated with the meaning of holy; the word “black” is associated with the meaning of darkness and sadness; the word “red” is associated with the meaning of love (Yule, 2006); *cop* and *police* have the same denotation or dictionary meaning, but the stylistic meaning or the connotation of both terms is different. In the same line, “*child* and *kid* (in their human offspring senses) refer to the same range of people, but using one rather than the other

may lead to a different mental picture” (Lakoff, 1971, p. 65) ; a *kid* is associated with an outgoing active personality, while a *child* is viewed as a quiet and non- playful type. According to Leech (1974), associative meaning can be categorized under:

- a. **Connotative Meaning** : What is communicated by virtue of what language refers to (Leech 1974). Connotative meaning exceeds dictionary meaning and pinpoints at what is associated with the expression when this expression is used or heard. Thus connotative meaning is unstable and it changes from an era to another. For examples: the word “woman” conceptually is a *human, female, and adult*; however, woman is associated with skirt-or-dress wearing, being emotional, motherly....For example: the word “smile,” “smirk,” and “beam.” Purely, it overlaps with the conceptual sense so that they are all types of “smile” but in associative meanings, “beam” means a smile which connotes happiness and “smirk” means a smile which connotes gloating.
- b. **Stylistic Meaning**: What is communicated by the social circumstances of a certain utterance. The difference in tone, style, dialect or choice of words is part of the stylistic meaning. For example, the words *steed, horse, nag, gee* share the same conceptual meaning but have different stylistic usage. *Steed* is poetic in style; *nag* is slang and is normally used only in colloquial English; and *gee* is used with children. In other words, these terms are stylistically marked.
- c. **Affective Meaning**: What is communicated of feelings and attitudes of the speaker/writer. In affective meaning, language is used to express personal feelings or attitudes to the listener. In other words, affective meaning implies communicating emotions or feelings of the speaker. The affective meaning can be explained in the example “*excuse me, I think, it would be better if you open the window*” (Leech, 1974, p.14). That utterance is supposed to be a polite request; however, it can express sarcasm if the intonation used is stressed.
- d. **Reflected Meaning**: What is communicated through association with another sense of the same expression or the meaning which arises in case there are multiple conceptual meanings of a word. Therefore, one sense of a particular word affects the understanding and usage of all the other senses of the word. Leech (1974) also stated that reflected meaning is usually exploited in poetry.
- e. **Collocative Meaning**: What is communicated through association with words which tend to occur in the environment of another word. It refers to what is associated with a word due to its usual habitual co-occurrence with other words. For example, the word “pretty” and “handsome” represent collocative meaning. Whereas, “pretty” tends to collocate with “girl, woman, villages, garden, and flower”, “handsome” tends to collocate with “boys, man, car, and overcoat.”

Finch (1998) considers that the meaning of collocation is derived from the verb “collocate” which means “to go with”.

Eventually, Murphy and Koskela (2010) explain the difference between conceptual and associative meaning in the following example:

“a good child”

“a good job”

“a good land”

“a good life”.

The word “good” in the above examples have different associations. “A good child” refers to one who is respectful and generally obedient. “A good job” refers to a financially well to do salary, and a “A good land” is defined in terms of soil composition and water retention properties.

Though EFL learners do seem to have a good command of conceptual meanings, they are still behind understanding associative meaning of words which is reflected in their poor comprehension of texts in foreign language and inaccurate speaking and writing skills. For instance, university students still confuse *quiver* and *shiver* since they both have one conceptual meaning *tremble*, but whereas the first is associated with chillness, the second is correlated to fear. From here, words must be used with precision to express accurately the intended meaning of the speaker without triggering confusion in the hearer’s mind.

3. Methodology of the Research

3.1 Research Design

This research is a descriptive study, which is a type of non- experimental research that “describes the characteristic of existing phenomena” (Salkind 2012, p. 12). Descriptive research “describes achievements, attitudes, behaviors, or other characteristics of a group of subjects” (Mc Millan & Schumacher 2001, p. 283). The study investigates the perception of EFL learners preparing for their master’s degree in English in the Lebanese University, fifth branch of conceptual versus associative meaning.

The design is a mixed approach. It is qualitative since qualitative studies seek to understand people’s perception, attitude, and motivation, and it is quantitative because the data has been represented with numbers and graphs (Salkind 2012). Since questionnaires represent “ a system for collecting information to describe, compare, or explain knowledge, attitudes, and behavior (Salkind, 2012, p. 289), they are very useful in the study as they aid in collecting information to indicate the perception of conceptual versus associative meaning for the selected subjects.

3.2 Subjects

One hundred students preparing for their master’s degree in English at the Lebanese University, fifth branch, participated in the study. The subjects’ ages range between 23 and 42 years old. Two criteria **are** examined in the study: teaching experience versus no experience and bilingualism (English being the first foreign language for some participants) versus trilingualism (some participants have studied French as their first foreign language, and English as their second foreign language) in the light of perception of conceptual versus associative meaning.

3.3 Instruments

A questionnaire (Appendix A) was passed to the participants to test their perception of conceptual versus associative meaning. The questions used in the survey are collected from eclectic examples used by linguists as illustrations on different types of meaning in language. Students were asked to fill in their demographic information, and then respond to the questionnaire in a two period time.

3.4 Procedure

A two period time was allocated to answer the questionnaire. The students were asked to fill in the demographic information, and then instructed to answer all parts of the questionnaire (Appendix A). The study took place in the Fall of 2016- 2017.

4. Results

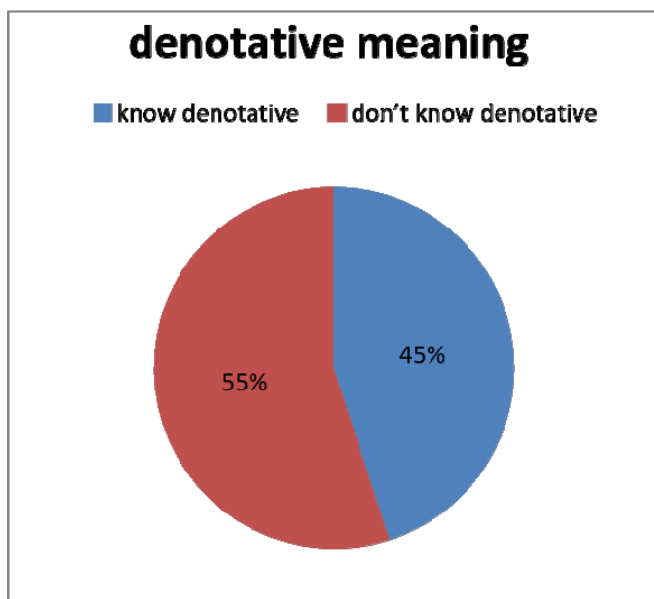


Figure 1. Denotative meaning

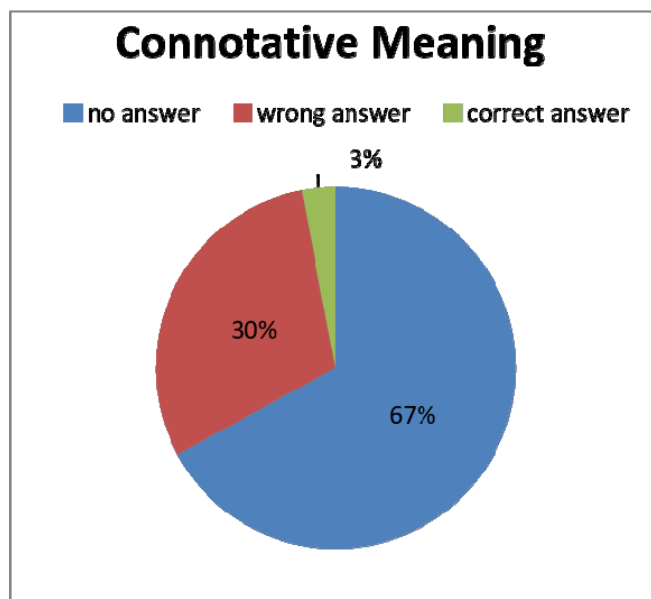


Figure 2. Connotative meaning

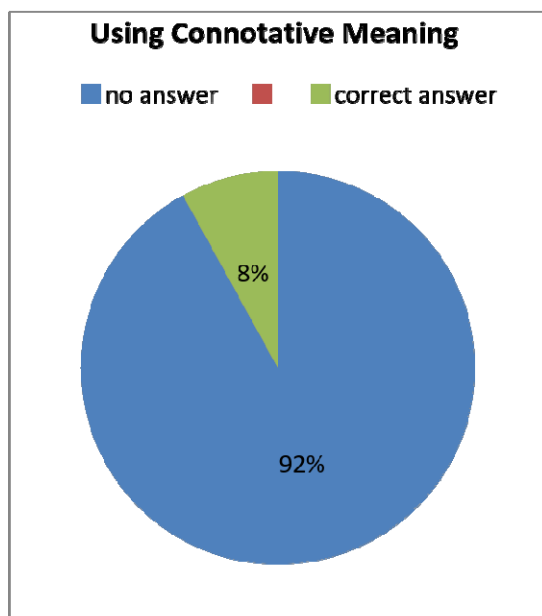


Figure 3. Using connotative meaning

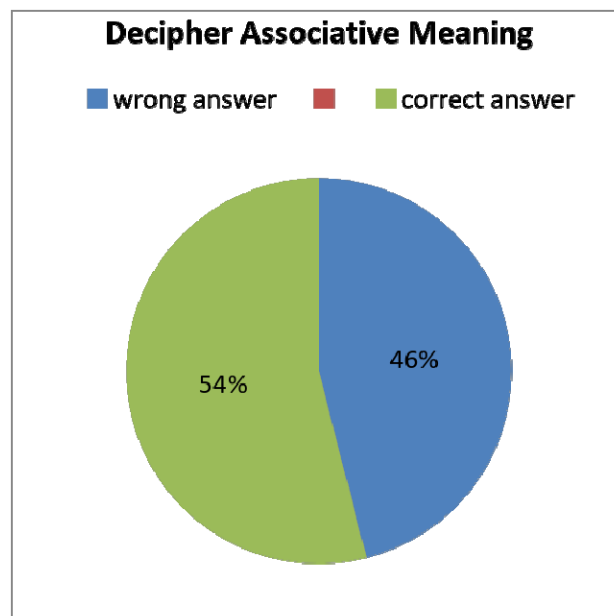


Figure 4. Deciphering associative meaning

The collected data revealed that participants struggled to perceive the stylistic features of

words; Figures 1 and 2 represent the participants' answers in question 1 where they were required to provide the general denotation of the words then number the words from the most positive connotation to the most negative connotation. 45% were able to provide the general denotation of the words, but 3% were able to list the items correctly from the most positive to the most negative connotation. 67% did not answer the part related to listing the words according to the connotation. The yielded percentage reveals that though EFL learners can work through knowing the conceptual meaning of words, they are unable to figure out precisely the associative senses of those lexemes.

Figure 3 represents the summary of the second question, where participants were required to use the words in sentences to reveal the different connotative meaning the same denotative words may carry, only eight participants were able to answer this question; however, even the eight responses were not complete. The participant with the highest correct responses left six items with no constructed sentences. The above data revealed that EFL learners fall behind using words according to their precise associative meaning with precision.

Figure 4 shows that context clues aid EFL learners to decipher associative meaning of words since when they were required to read the excerpts and explain the word/ words that represent an associative meaning beside the conceptual meaning, 54% were able to identify the words with associative meaning. Many participants were able to correlate the word wall with an obstruction; slumber was associated with lack of energy; players were associated by role taking. However, in the second part of the question where participants were required to identify the type of associative meaning each example represents (stylistic, affective, connotative, colloquial, or reflected); only 4% were able to correctly categorize the associative meaning of words.

5. Discussion

The study was a descriptive and an analytical one that investigated the perception of EFL learners preparing for a master's degree in English of the conceptual meaning versus the associative meaning. Through a close examination of learners' perception of the conceptual versus the stylistic meaning, the researcher shed light on the features of the English language and hindrances triggered by the lack on the associative meaning. The notion the study attempted to depict was that by perceiving the associative meaning of words, learners would be more flexible at perceiving and using terms and structures in English (Yule, 2006). The study brought to light the difference between the conceptual and associative meaning. The contrast between the conceptual meaning and the associative meaning is that the conceptual meaning covers the basic components of meaning that are conveyed by a word. Conceptual meanings are offered by all dictionaries while associative meanings include certain connotations attached to the words but not part of the word's conceptual entity Leech (1980). For instance, the conceptual meaning of the word *needle* "is a thin sharp steel instrument" (Webster, 2011), while the associative meaning of needle is *pain, blood...*; the associative meaning is not found in the dictionary but is represented in the human mind and is inherent to the conceptual meaning of the word. This association does not affect the word's sense, but have to do with secondary factors as emotional force (Yule, 2006). The study aimed to shed light on the problematic dilemma that though English as foreign language (EFL) learners at the Lebanese University English have studied English for ten or more years, and seem to excel at mastering

conceptual or denotative meaning of words, they do not appear to have parallel skills in comprehending connotation of words, phrases, sentences, and texts.

It can be inferred from the results that the lack of awareness on the stylistic features and connotations of words is considered an impediment obstructing language processing for learners since as (Donlevy, 2005) puts it “language learning is an extremely exacting endeavor” (p. 7). Furthermore, the results of the study emphasized what Cushing (1997) claimed that the lack of awareness on associative meanings of words can result in imprecise or rather wrong conclusions formulated by the listener in the speaker-hearer communicative situation which can lead to a communication breakdown between the speaker- hearer or the writer- reader. The lack of clarity at certain examples demonstrated that students would have been less confused. Nevertheless, the question of published material was a limitation and a potential by itself, because it enabled students to be comprehensibly aware of all possible intentions that might be hidden behind a certain utterance and realize the variance of meaning that could influence their word choices and their interpretation with different lexicon-grammatical or phonological cues.

The subjects of the study were able to provide the general denotation of the words, but they showed lack of adeptness in listing words according to their connotation. Moreover, the analyzed results depicted that even when learners were able to figure out the denotative meaning of words, they still lacked the skill to construct sentences that show how different stylistic features influence the connotation context. For instance, in the first exercise, from the eight correct responses, none was able to use notorious in a negative sense. This implies that the participants were not able to associate the term notorious with negative fame. Besides, it can be inferred that context clues are rendered a milestone in aiding learners of a foreign language how the same denotative items can have different connotative sense. In addition, learners who knew languages other than English and their native language did not show better results in recognizing associative meanings than their peers who were bilingual. On the other hand, the perception of the associative meaning was directly correlated with teaching experience, for learners who had more than five years teaching experience were more skilled in recognizing the stylistic features of words. This implies that with more exposure and practice learners attain the adeptness to interpret what is meant by an utterance.

The results of the study cannot be compared with similar research in the domain since the literature of the associative versus the conceptual meaning lacks empirical evidence on how learners’ awareness of associative meaning is directly correlated to better encoding and decoding of English language.

6. Conclusion

Via a comprehensive questionnaire (Appendix A) , the study reflected a practical investigation on the perception of post graduates preparing for their master’s degree in English at the Lebanese University, fifth branch, of stylistic features of words. The results revealed that even when EFL learners have studied English for quite sometime, and they do relish a wide vocabulary bank, they are still incapable of transferring their linguistic competence into semantic perception; that is they lack the potentials to comprehend the stylistic connotations of what they read. In light of the findings, recommendations for learners, teachers and curriculum designers have been issued. This answers the first research question which reveals that EFL

learners are unaware of the stylistic features of words. Perceiving the associative meaning of words aids in language processing since it sheds light on what is precisely communicated behind one's utterance; this aids in communicating with accuracy, clarity, comprehensibility, coherence, expertise, effectiveness, and appropriateness. Furthermore, the linguistic function of comprehending the associative meaning of words boosts EFL learners' communicative competence, which in turn, develops learners' ability to set realistic and appropriate goals to maximize their achievement by using knowledge of self, others, context, and communication theory to generate adaptive communication performances (Friedrich, 1994).

7. Recommendations

EFL learners fall behind achieving communicative competence when they need to express their ideas whether in conversations or in writing tasks; since mastering linguistic forms is fruitless if learners do not understand the connotative meaning or stylistic features of those forms. Besides, due to time constraints and the overloaded objectives and lessons teachers need to cover, they might not always have enough time to provide the associative meaning of words, and their role becomes restricted in providing the conceptual meaning of word entries. Therefore, teachers should bring to light words that have same denotative meaning but different connotative horizons and reveal how they are used differently. An appropriate approach can be by listening to native speakers' conversations and analyzing their written prose. For instance, whereas both cops and police have the same denotative function, they do not share same stylistic features. Teachers must be aware of the importance of stylistic features and they must implant this awareness in their students.

EFL learners should indulge themselves with more real life communication procedures which aid them in perceiving how words are used and the different connotations of lexemes. This will help them develop precise communication performances. Furthermore, curriculum designers must include exercises that illuminate connotative meaning or associative meaning versus conceptual meaning as part of the speaking and writing skills of EFL learners.

8. Limitations of the Study

Of the most apparent limitations in this study was the time consumed for the investigation of the associative meaning versus the conceptual meaning in a thorough approach. The nature of the topic tackled in this paper uncovered a crucial gap in the limited materials and lectures that need to further highlight the learners' communicative and discourse associative aspects of learning via integrating more the socio linguist and pragmatic areas of English teaching. One more limitation is the tool that assessed the subjects' perception of the conceptual versus the associative meaning. The assessment of this communicative competence of realizing words' associations would have been more precise had audio and video materials been used to record how the subjects use words in a foreign language context.

The worth to wrap up this piece of work is a belief to have all points, raised above, be taken into consideration as a stimuli that initiates other thoughts and undoubtedly contributes largely to studies on language and communication in almost all schools and universities, and the Lebanese educational registers more precisely.

References

Arunabharathi, N. (1976). Glossary of Linguistics, English- Tamil. Madrs : Tamil Nuulagam

- Awwad, M. (2017). Perception of Linguistic Ambiguity. *European Scientific Journal*, 13(20).
- Chomsky, N. (1971). *Deep Structure, Surface Structure, and Semantic interpretation*: Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cushing, S. (1997). *Fatal Words Communication Clashes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Davis, S. (1991). *Pragmatics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Davis, W. (2003). The quest for meanings. *Meaning, Expression, and Thought*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Donlevy, C. (2005). A Human Response to Ambiguity in Meaning: A *Psycholinguistic Analysis*.
- Fernandez E., & Cairns H. S. (2011). *Fundamentals of Psycholinguistics*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Finch, C. (1998). Towards an operational semantics for a parallel non-strict functional language. In *Symposium on Implementation and Application of Functional Languages* (pp. 54-71). Springer Berlin Heidelberg. Retrieved May 1, 2017 from http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/3-540-48515-5_4
- Friedrich, G. W. (1994). Lecture notes, University of Oklahoma, Norman.
- Jackendoff, R. (2002). *On Conceptual Semantics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lakoff, G. (1971). Presupposition and relative well-formedness. *Semantics: An interdisciplinary reader in philosophy, linguistics, and psychology*, 329-340.
- Leech, G. N. (1974). *Semantics, Harmondsworth*. Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., England.
- Leech, G. N. (1980). *Principles of Pragmatics*. London: Longman.
- Lyons, J. (1984). *Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mayor, M. (2009). *Longman dictionary of contemporary English*. Pearson Education India.
- McMillan, J. H., & Schumacher, S. (2001). *Research in education . A conceptual introduction*. 5th edition. New York: Longman.
- Morris, C. (1938). Foundations of the theory of signs. In O. Neurath, R. Carnap, & C. Morris (Ed.), *International Encyclopedia of Unified Science I*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, (pp. 77-138). Reprinted in C. Morris 1971, *Writings on the general theory of signs*, The Hague: Mouton.
- Murphy, M. L., & Koskela, A. (2010). *Key terms in semantics*. London: Continuum International Publishing Group.
- Palmer, F. (1984). *Semantics*. London: Penguin.
- Riemer, N. (2010). *Introducing semantics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Salkind, N. (2012). *Exploring Research*. New York: Pearson.
- Spitzberg, B. H. (1988). Communication Competence measures of perceived effectiveness. In C. H. Tardy (Ed.): *A handbook for the study of human communication*.
- Wardhaugh, R. (1985). *How Conversation Works*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Webster, M. (2011). *Unabridged Dictionary* (11th edition). UK: Library of Congress.

Yule, G. (2006). *The study of Meaning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Appendix A

Part One: Demographic Information

1. Age:
2. Gender:
3. Native language:
4. Languages you know other than English
5. Years of teaching English:
 - a. less than 3 years
 - b. 3 to 5 years
 - c. more than 5 years

Part Two:

A. Each of the following sets has the same denotation (conceptual meaning) but different connotation (associative meaning) Provide the general denotation for each group; then number the words in each group from the most positive connotation to the most negative connotation.

1. a. House
 - b. home
 - c. residence
 - d. dwelling
2. a. stingy
 - b. thrifty
 - c. beggarly
 - d. economical
 - e. avaricious
3. a. lean
 - b. skinny
 - c. slim
 - d. slender
 - e. bony
 - f. anorexic
5. a. bulky
 - b. plump
 - c. chunky
 - d. obese
6. a. beam
 - b. grin
 - c. smirk

- d. simper
7. a. mare
b. stud
c. stallion
d. steed
e. nag
8. a. quiver
b. shiver
c. tremble
d. shudder
e. throb
9. a. captivated
b. thrilled
c. chirpy
d. mirthful
10. a. popular
b. notorious
c. trendy
d. selling

B. Use the above sets of words in sentences to show their associative meaning.

C. Read the following excerpts; explain the word/ words that represent an associative meaning beside the conceptual meaning. What type of associative meaning does each example represent (stylistic, affective, connotative, colloquial, or reflected)?

1. “And on a day we meet to walk the line
And set the wall between us once again.
We keep the wall between us as we go.
To each the boulders that have fallen to each.”
2. “A slumber did my spirit seal;
I had no human fears—
She seemed a thing that could not feel
The touch of earthly years.
No motion has she now, no force;
She neither hears nor sees;
Roll’d round in earth’s diurnal course
With rocks, and stones, and trees.”
3. “All the world’s a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;

They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts,”
4. “In the spring, I asked the daisies
If his words were true,
And the clever, clear-eyed daisies
Always knew.
Now the fields are brown and barren,
Bitter autumn blows,
And of all the stupid asters
Not one knows.”

Copyright Disclaimer

Copyright reserved by the author(s).

This article is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>).