

Denotative and Connotative Meaning of Barnyard Verbs

MAHMOOD A. FARHAN

Department of English
College of Education Ibn Rushd
University of Baghdad, Iraq

Abstract:

Communication is a vital process that needs much more understanding and mutual background knowledge on the part of ESL learners in terms of grammar, meaning and context. Thus, the main aim of the current research paper is to identify and figure out the denotative and connotative meaning of barnyard verbs in English and practically analyzing these verbs to identify the dictionary meaning from connotative one.

The main problem of this study is attributed to the fact that ESL learners may not be able to identify and understand the connotative meaning of barnyard verbs since these verbs are onomatopoeic (i.e.) a word that phonetically imitates, or suggests the source of sound that it describes). Consider the following example: the verb "coo" has a denotative sense in that it refers to the sound of dove or pigeon, but when children "coo", that means they speak gently which is a connotative meaning.

Accordingly, the ESL learners may not know the connotative meaning of such verbs because these verbs have different associations and suggestions.

The paper falls into four sections. Section one is an introduction which sheds light on the definition and meaning of barnyard verbs. Section two deals with communication. Section three discusses the notion of meaning. Section four is devoted to analyzing the denotative and connotative meaning of barnyard verbs in English.

The most important conclusions that the paper has come to can be summarized as follows: firstly, denotative meaning of barnyard verbs has something to do with the use of words whose meaning suggests the onomatopoeic sense, whereas connotative meaning, has something to do with the meaning that is implied by a word a part from the thing which it describes explicitly, secondly, denotatively speaking, barnyard verbs are phonetically described, whereas connotatively speaking, they are semantically described. Consequently, it is somehow easy to figure out denotative meaning of barnyard verbs, but it is hard to identify and understand connotative meaning of these verbs due to the fact that they have different meanings with different contexts.

Key words: Barnyard Verbs, Human Communication, Animal Communication, denotative meaning, Connotative meaning

SECTION ONE: BARNYARD VERBS

The word "Verb" can be defined as a term used in the grammatical classification of words, to refer to a class traditionally defined as (doing) or (action). Thus, barnyard verbs are the set of intransitives that characterize animal communication, e-g-, baa, bray, cuckoo, gaggle, mew, yelp, etc. Their origin is usually onomatopoeic, (i.e.) within the constraints of English phonology. They occasionally take human subjects, in which case they metaphorically suggest that a human being is imitating or behaving in a fashion similar to normal subject that they do not usually have a human subject which is borne out by the fact that they do not allow reference to propositional content. (Crystal, 1985: 318).

For example, the verb "coo" has a denotative and connotative meaning- consider the following Sentences.

- 1-The dove *cood* softly.
- 2-The baby *cood* softly.

In the first sentence, the verb "coo" is an onomatopoeic verb whereas in the second sentence means "to talk softly and gently."

SECTION TWO: COMMUNICATION

Communication is simply the act of transferring information from one person to another or from one place to another or it is imparting or interchanging of thoughts, opinions, or information by using speech, writing or signs (Finch , 2000 : 112) .

2-1 Human Communication.

Human communication , on the one hand , is of four types:

- (1) Verbal communication which includes face to face, telephone, radio or television and other means.
- (2) Non-Verbal communication includes body language, gestures, facial expression, postures and eye-movement as well as loudness, pitch and stress.
- (3) Written communication: includes letters, e-mails, books, magazines, the internet or via other media.
- (4) Visualizations include graphs/charts, maps/logos and Others visualization can communicate messages.

(Fasold, 2009: 130).

2-2 Animal Communication

Animals use body language as well as sound and smell in order to communicate with one another. There are a large number of different types of animal communication including:

- (1) **Visual Signals:** animals like birds use visual signals because they are active and awake during the day. Visual signals come in the form of bright colours (like bird feathers) and specific body movement (like someone holding their hand up to say "stop"). Some animals even send a signal by changing colour during courtship or aggression. (Ibid, 131).

- (2) **Auditory Signals:** Most animals use auditory signals to defend a territory if they feel threatened. Other times, auditory signals are used in courtship displays or to invite mates into a territory. (Fromkin et al, 1988: 230).
- (3) **Chemical and Electrical Signals** Many animals use chemical signals, such as scents to mark territories. Chemical signals may also be used to communicate beneficial information to other members of the group. For example, when worker honey bees regurgitate it to communicate to the other bees what it tastes and smells like.
- (4) **Tactile Signal or Touch** Is an important form of communication for many animals-mother tigers like and nuzzle their babies, chimpanzees groom each other, and bear cubs wrestle with each other (Ibid, 231).

SECTION THREE: THE NOTION OF MEANING

The notion of meaning has been of central concern to semanticists and pragmatists through their search to determine why words would have the meaning they do have , Simpson states that human beings do not produce utterances for the sake of phonetics , phonological or grammatical features , utterances produced to convey meaning. Thus, meaning can be either denotative or connotative. (1995: 176).

3-1 Denotative Meaning refers to the literal meaning of a word. The dictionary definition for example , if you look up the word "snake" in a dictionary, you will discover one of its denotative meaning is "any of numerous scaly, legless, sometimes venomous, reptile" (Yule, 1996 : 130).

3-2 Connotative Meaning refers to the associations that connected to a certain word or emotions or suggestions related

to that word. Thus, the connotative meaning for the word "snake" could mean evil or danger.

SECTION FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS

This section is dedicated to collecting and analyzing some barnyard verbs in terms of denotative and connotative meaning.

These verbs have been selected from Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary.

(1) The Verb "Moo"

1-a The cow *mood* from the barn.

1- b The woman *mood* in a silly way.

The verb "moo" in sentence (1-a) has a denotative meaning in that it signifies the sound that most cows use naturally, whereas in sentence (1-b) the verb "moo" has a connotative meaning which indicates that woman keeps nagging .

(2) The Verb "yelp"

2.a The dog *yelped* loudly.

2.b The boy *yelped* in Pain.

In sentence (2.a) the Verb "yelp" has a denotative meaning (i.e,) onomatopoeic since it indicates the dog's sound but in sentence (2.b), it has a connotative meaning which means that the boy is crying in pain.

(3) The Verb "cluck"

3.a The Chicken clucks.

3.b The teachers clucks sympathetically.

In sentence (3.a) the verb "cluck" has a dictionary meaning in that it refers to the sound of chicken whereas in sentence (3.b) has a connotative meaning in that it indicates that the teacher feels sad and sympathetic .

(4) The Verb "roar"

4.a The lion *roared* angrily.

4.b The fans *roared* their approval.

In sentence (4.a) the verb "roar" has a phonological sense in that it indicates the lions sound, whereas in sentence (4.b), it has an associative sense since the fans are so enthusiastic and noisy.

(5) The Verb "gaggle"

5.a The geese *gaggle*.

5.b Tourists *gaggle* on the beach.

The verb "gaggle" in sentence (5.a) has a sound while in sentence (5.b), the verb "gaggle" indicates that the tourists make a lot of noise.

(6) The Verb "buzz"

6.a The bees *buzzed* lazily.

6.b The doctor *buzzed* for the next patient to come.

In sentence (6.a), the verb "buzz" refers to bees' sound, whereas in sentence (6.b), it means "to call somebody to come."

(7) The Verb "chirp"

7.a The bird *chirp* loudly .

7.b Mrs. Allen *chirp* in a lively way .

In sentence (7.a), the verb "chirp" indicates the birds natural sounds while in sentence (7.b) , it means to talk in a cheerful way".

(8) The Verb "woof"

8.a The dog *stared* to *woof*.

8.b The boss was *woofing*.

In sentence (8.a), the verb "woof" means the dog's natural sound whereas in sentence (8.b), it means to say something in a boastful or aggressive meaning.

(9) The Verb "quack"

9.a The duck *quack* loudly.

9.b The doctor *quacks* when he checkup patients.

In sentence (9.a), the verb "quack" means the duck's sound whereas in sentence (9.b) the verb "quack" means that the doctor dishonestly claims to have knowledge or skills.

(10) The Verb "Screech"

10.a The monkeys were *screeching* in the trees.

10.b The teacher *screeches* at his students.

In sentence (10.a), the verb "screech" mean, the monkey's sound where as in sentence (10.b), the verb "screech" means to rebuke or reprimand.

(11) The Verb "Chatter".

11.a Squirrels *chatter* loudly.

11.b Children *chatter* foolishly.

In sentence (11.a), the verb "chatter" has a dictionary meaning whereas in sentence (11.b), it means "to talk quickly and continuously".

(12) The Verb "Coo".

12.a Pigeons cooed Softly .

12.b The babysitter cooed gently .

In sentence (12.a), the verb "Cood" has a dictionary meaning because it refers to the pigeon's sound whereas in sentence (12.b) it means "to speak gently".

(13) The Verb "Bleat".

13.a The lamb was *bleating* faintly.

13.b The woman was *bleating* awkwardly.

In Sentence (13.a), the verb "bleat" has a denotative meaning in that it indicates the lamb's sound whereas in sentence (13.b), it means complaining.

(14) The Verb "Whine"

14.a The dog *whined*.

14.b Tom, stop *whining*.

In sentence (14.a), the verb "whine", has dictionary meaning which indicates dog's natural sound whereas in sentence (14.b), it means complaining.

(15) The Verb "Neigh"

15.a The horse neighed.

15.b The child neighed.

In sentence (15.a), the verb "neigh", has dictionary meaning which indicates the horse's sound while in sentence (15.b), it means to grumble.

(16) The Verb "bang"

16.a He *banged* his fist angrily on the table.

16.b He banged a girl.

In sentence (16.a), the verb "bang" means "to hit something" whereas in sentence (16.b), it means "to have sex with a woman".

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has come to the following conclusions:

- (1) The concept of barnyard verbs can be difficult to understand without being exemplified.
- (2) It is easy to figure out denotative meaning of barnyard verbs but it is hard to understand connotative meaning of these verbs because it has different meaning with different contexts.
- (3) Connotative meaning of barnyard verbs carries the colloquial meaning which is very difficult from formal ones.
- (4) Denotative meaning of barnyard verbs carry the dictionary meaning or literal meaning or it indicates onomatopoeic meaning.

- (5) Barnyard verbs are phonetically described in terms of denotative meaning whereas they are semantically described in terms of connotative meaning.
- (6) People use meanings of words differently in different cultural contexts. People use words as a way of communication.
- (7) The most noticeable feature that distinguishes human communication from animal one is human ability to communicate with each other in different situations.
- (8) Animals can communicate in immediate environment and they do not have sense of past and future.

REFERENCES

1. Crystal, D. (1985). *A Dictionary of Linguistic and Phonetics*. London: Basil Blackwell.
2. Fasold, R. (2006). *An Introduction to Language and Linguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
3. Finch, G. (2000) *Linguistic terms and concepts*, London: Macmillan press Ltd.
4. Fromkin, V & Rodman, R. (2003), *An Introduction to Language*, Thomson Heinle.
5. Simpson, H.A. (1995) *Meaning and Communication*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
6. Yule, G. (1996) *Pragmatics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press