JIGNASA

STUDENT STUDY PROJECT WORK

(ENGLISH)

GDC, BHAINSA

NIRMAL DIST, TG

Title of the Project:

Denotations and connotations;

A survey study on Perception of meaning

Subject: English

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INTRODUCTION

Communication plays an important role in the lives of living beings. All living things have some way of communication - Verbal, signal, or chemical. Animals use sounds and bodily gestures to communicate their feelings. Wagging of tail in dogs shows their love and affection and showing long and sharp canines of teeth by a member of canine family is the signal of its aggression and anger. In this way every species has its own kind of communication ability.

The species of human beings, which is the most advanced among all the living beings, has developed the advanced and sophisticated mode of communication – Language. Language is a system of words that people use to express feelings and thoughts to each other. Human language has the properties of productivity and displacement and relies entirely on social convention and learning. Its complex structure affords much wider range of expressions than any known system of animal communication. Different human societies have evolved in different places over the time in the world. And society has developed its own system of communication through language.

Word is the basic unit of any language. Evolution or invention of words in any language is specific to the geography and culture of the society which it evolves from. For example, a desert dwelling society may not have a word that indicates snow in or ice in its language as it never experiences the existence of those two things. Similarly, Indian languages do not have words for animals like reindeer and penguin because we don't have them in India.

Language is not innate. It is learned through practice and exposure. Hence, the socio cultural and geographical aspects of a particular society shape its language. The beliefs, value systems and traditions shape the language of a society and language becomes the primary representative of that society. And thorough the language, the values, beliefs and prejudices of the society are imparted to the people.

Proposition

A language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which a social group operates. And language is a medium to express national or local identity. The ideology of a particular society is communicated and spread through its language.

Our proposition is that language is not neutral. It is encoded and embedded with the ideology of the society it emerges from. Social patterns, hierarchies, gender discrimination, class differences, racial prejudices of a society exist in the words of a language or the way we use the words of a language. Languages are always designed or molded to suit the interests of the dominant groups of societies.

Our project aims to look at some selected words of English language to show gender, racial and caste assumptions portrayed through it. We examine the selected words for their Denotative and Connotative meanings. Denotation of a word gives its primary or literal meaning whereas connotation carries cultural and emotional associations or meanings of the word. It would be interesting to analyze why some words carry positive connotations and why some words carry negative connotations.

Execution

Through our project we tried to decipher how the connotative meanings project the biased world views of the societies. A survey study has been conducted on 30 respondents. A survey sheet is given to them with ten familiar words and they were asked to express positive/ negative connotations or perceptions associated with given words. The survey sheet is given below.

GOPAL RAO PATEL GOVERNMENT DEGREE COLLEGE, BHAINSA

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

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STUDENT STUDY PROJECT (ENGLISH)

Denotations and Connotations; a Survey Study on Perception of Meaning

Survey Sheet

    a. Carefully read the below given words and write the connotative meanings the words are associated with

<div align="center">or</div>

    b. simply write positive/negative against the word as per the feeling/emotion it invokes

1. Witch
2. Wizard
3. Butcher
4. Soldier
5. Black
6. Fair
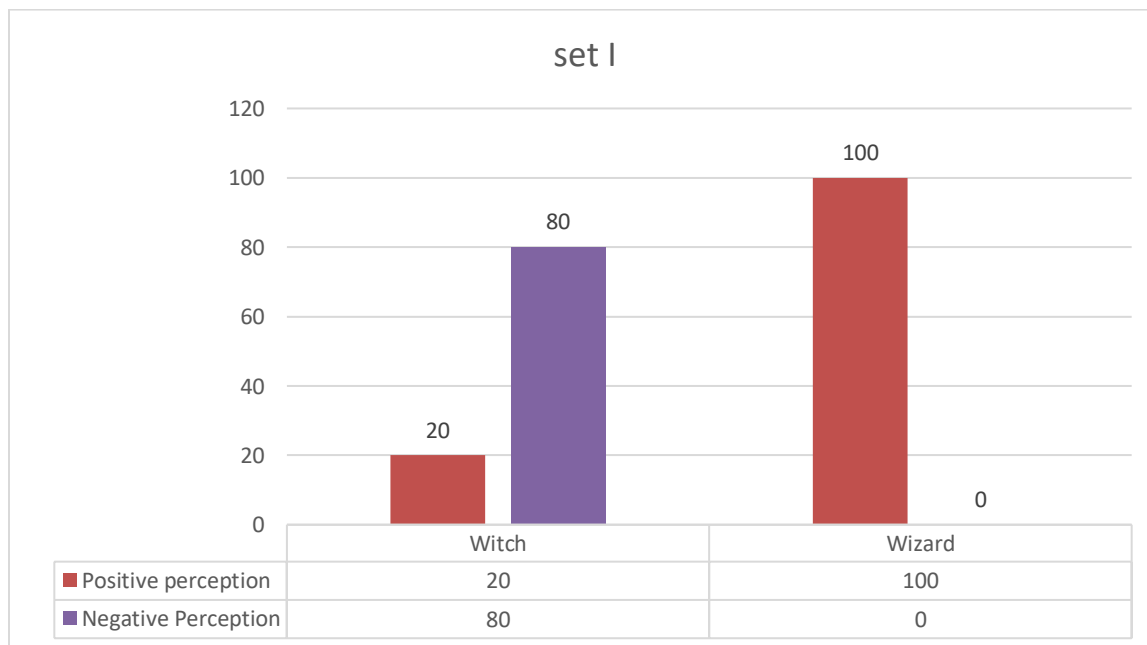7. Vulture

8. Dove
9. Tiger
10. Jackal

Name of the Respondent

Signature

Statistical analysis of the survey

The ten words given in the survey sheet have been divided into five sets, each set containing two words. These two words are chosen carefully to have similar denotative meanings, but with a possibility of contrasting connotative meanings.

There are two words in set I – Witch and Wizard. As per denotative meaning, WITCH is a woman with magical powers and WIZARD is a man with magical powers. Through our suvey we tried to decipher the connotative perceptions related to both the words. Below given is the graphical representation of the connotative perception (Positive/Negative) of the words. The data is presented in percentages.

set I

	Witch	Wizard
Positive perception	20	100
Negative Perception	80	0

As per the statistical analysis, the word WITCH incurred more than 80% negative connotations and the word WIZARD garnered 100% positive connotations.

Every human society has been a society dominated by men. The women were always considered inferior to men in terms intelligence, physical strength. Independence and knowledge was denied to women as they were expected to be dependent on men for protection and livelihood. And a woman empowered with knowledge is seen as a threat to the patriarchal patterns of the society. And an empowered woman becomes the symbol of all that is evil in the society. Hence, the word WITCH, which originally describes a woman with magic power, eventually turns out to be associated with negative connotations. The women who were branded as witches were hunted down and burned alive in medieval Europe and then newly found America.

The word WIZARD is a respectable word and we never ever heard the stories of wizards being hunted and killed. There is derivative word combination witch-hunt but not wizard hunt because it was normal for men to possess knowledge and power. And also it didn't go against the dominant patriarchal values. The popular folklore literature of Europe also portrays wizards in a positive light and witches in negative light. It is very intriguing to see how a perception of a profession changes with the gender.

In the present age where we no more believe in magical powers and witches and wizards these two words have acquired new connotative usage. WIZARD is used for someone who is genius and intelligent in any field. And sometimes it is gender neutral. , The word WITCH is used in its connotative sense to abuse any woman to be evil and bad
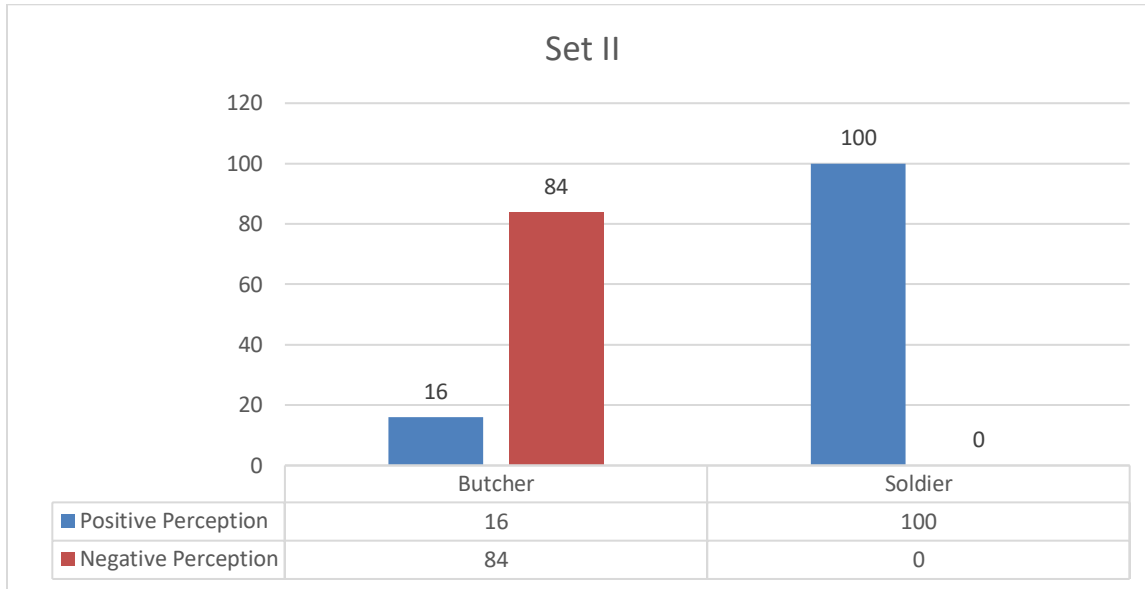
Example 1. Bill Gates is a computer wizard.

Example 2.

News

Mathematics wizard Shakuntala Devi passes away
PTI |Bangalore, April 21 | Updated On: Apr 21, 2013

Ironically enough, even intelligent women are also referred as wizards as witch has become an irreversibly abusive word.

Set II contains two words – Butcher and Soldier. As per denotative meaning, BUTHCER is a person a whose profession is cutting up and selling meat in a shop. SOLDIER is a person

whose profession is to fight wars and protect his country. The connotative perception of both the words can be seen in the below given graph.

	Butcher	Soldier
■ Positive Perception	16	100
■ Negative Perception	84	0

The word BUTCHER is perceived negatively by 84% respondents and the word SOLDIER attracted 100% positivity.

Butcher and Soldier – both are professionals discharging their duties towards the society. They do what is expected of them. Yet, the word BUTCHER is associated with cruelty and SOLDIER is associated with respect and honour. Act of violence by a butcher is frowned upon and the act of violence by a soldier is revered and honoured. The butcher kills animals as part of his profession and livelihood. He does not kill for pleasure. He kills animals only to meet the demand for meat generated from the consumers.The class demarcation of the society holds soldiers in high esteem and butchers are treated as people from lowly class/caste. The negative connotation for the word Butcher is the result of class descrimination

In the given context, let us examine a few lines from an article published recently in the New York Post
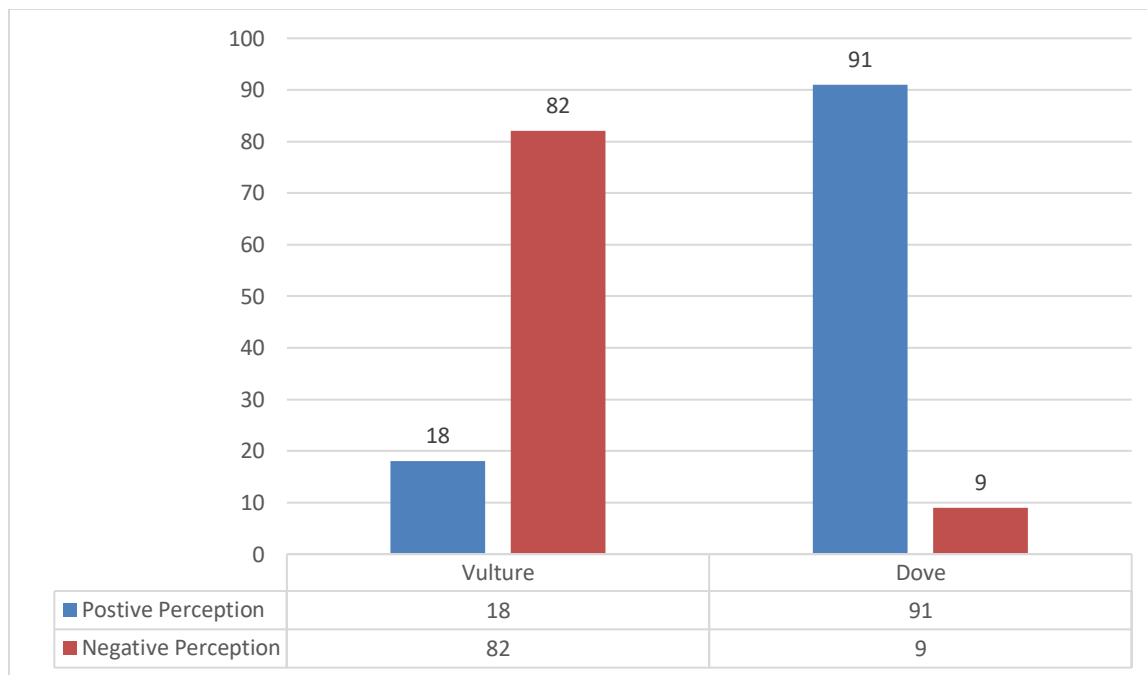
Who is the 'Butcher of Syria' leading next phase of Russia's Ukraine war?

By Ben Kesslen

April 11, 2022 4:31pm. The new general tapped to **lead Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine** has been dubbed the "butcher of Syria" — sparking concern that the war that has already left tens of thousands dead will only get more gruesome.

Look at the irony of the headline above. The cruel soldier is being compared to a butcher so as not to malign the honour attached to the word soldier.

The third set of words contains – Vulture and Dove. Both are members of bird family. Below graph shows the connotative perceptions of these words.

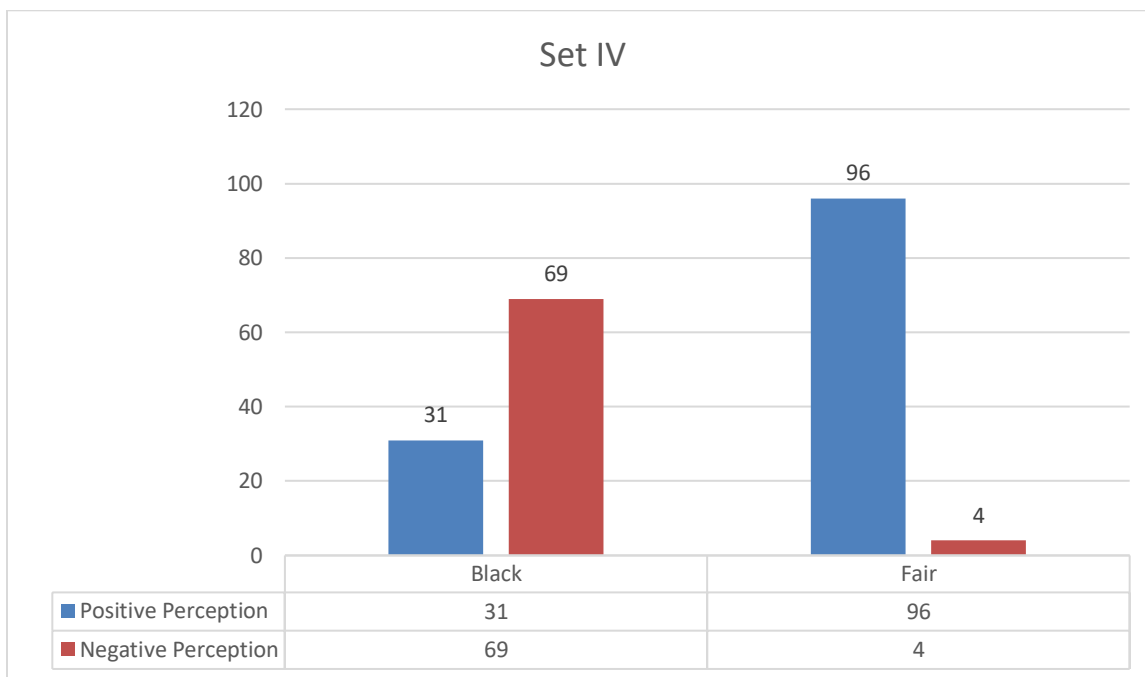|	Vulture	Dove
■ Postive Perception	18	91
■ Negative Perception	82	9

The word VULTURE generated 82% negativity and DOVE generated 91% positivity. The reason for such negativity towards vulture may lie in the class/caste system of our society. We try to impose our patterns of social hierarchy on animal kingdom too. Our society considers scavenging as a lowly profession without any dignity. The same outlook we adopt even while understanding animal world. VULTURE, being a natural scavenger of the animal world feeding on the Caracas's of dead animals, gets a negative connotation while domestic DOVE is associated with peace and innocence. In reality both are just birds living their lives according to their natural instincts and abilities

Journalists abused, called 'vultures' for reporting on COVID-19 cremations in India

The above given heading of a news article compares journalists to vultures in a highly negative manner.

Positive/negative perceptions of the respondents for the words BLACK and FAIR are represented graphically in the below given table.

	Black	Fair
Set IV		
Positive Perception	31	96
Negative Perception	69	4

Black is traditionally associated with darkness and night. Human beings are diurnal beings, always afraid to venture into night and darkness. Black is the colour of the night. Hence, the Word Black has negative connotations. Even the nocturnal animals, which come out at night time, like bats, owls and wolfs, are associated with evil.
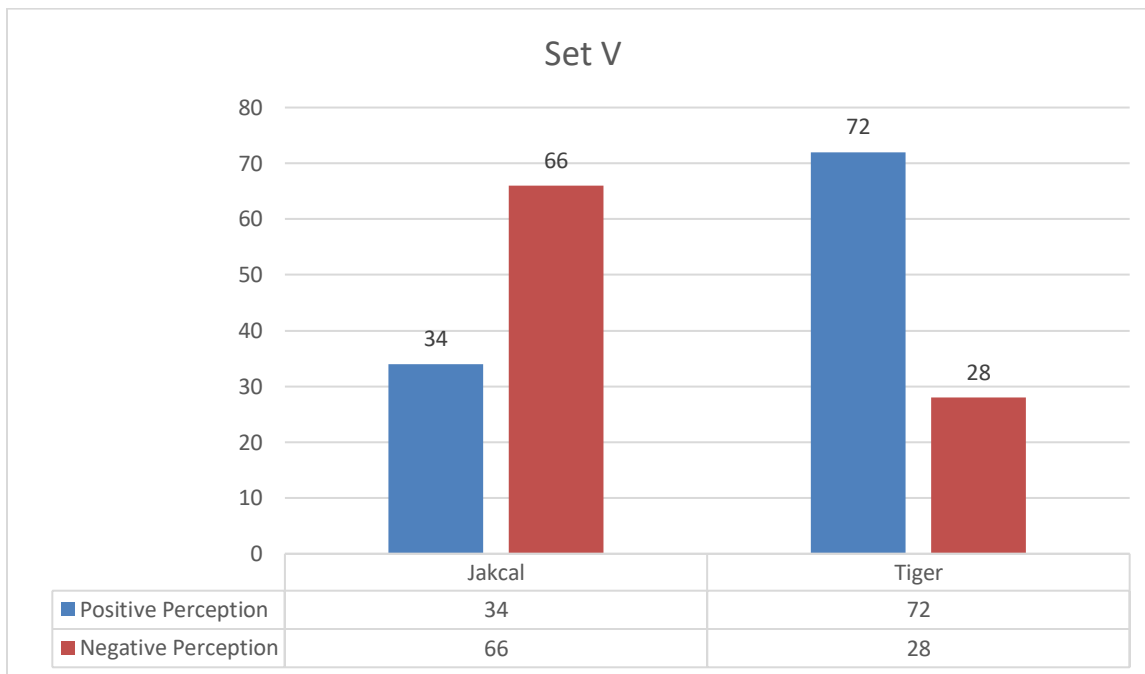
This perception is further strengthened by the white colonial rulers. They, being fair skinned, associated the word FAIR with justice and beauty and BLACK came to be synonymous with injustice and ugliness. And English characteristically is the language of fair people who considered themselves honest and treated other people who are not fair to be bad and wicked. The words like black sheep and dark horse which are associated with black colour have negative connotations. Hence, in our survey, 69% people perceived the word BLACK to be negative. The word FAIR generated 96% positive responses.

The below given example of a news heading reflects how the word BLACK connotatively conveys negative meaning.

Pakistan: Shehbaz Sharif Compares Imran Khan To Hitler; Calls April 3 'a Black Day

The set V of our suvey contains two words – Jackal and Tiger. The graphical representation can be seen below.

Set V

	Jakcal	Tiger
Positive Perception	34	72
Negative Perception	66	28

Paris court upholds life sentence for 'Carlos the Jackal' in 1974 grenade attack

We as human beings tend to look at the world through the coloured glasses of ideological frame work. We always try to impose human social structures in the animal world also. Animals do not have any form of hierarchy based on their species or colour. But we, human grade them according to hierarchy. The human social constructs like honour, valour, respect and self esteem etc are absent in animal world. They live by their basic instincts like hunger and fear.

In human society, the blood thirsty kings who conquered kingdoms with the brute strength of sword are revered, respected and are held in high esteem as heroes. Tiger is an apex predator. It hunts and kills other animals for its food requirement. It terrorizes entire jungle with its mere presence. Hence, like all the human kings who rule the mobs with their physical prowess, Tiger is also given the title - king of the jungle. It is attributed with the supposed royal qualities like ferociousness, honour and valour. Jackal is small animal, which cannot hunt on its own most of the times and is dependent on the scrapes left over by the tigers for its suvival. Hence, it is associated with cunningness and stealthy behavior and greed.

Our survey also shows the same results. The word JACKAL is perceived negatively by 66% of the respondents and Tiger gains more positive connotations (72%). It strengthens our claim that we, human beings have constructed a class/caste system in the animal kingdom also. We have created a social pyramid of animals with hierarchy. A tiger is not a mere animal for us but a symbol of our own social prejudice which cannot see all human beings equally. Does this discrimination exist in the animal world? No. It actually exists in our mental landscapes where everything has to be categorized according to wealth, colour, caste, creed and power.

The man is a tiger. He will rule someday. (Positive)

That jackal waiting for time (negative)

Conclusion:

After analyzing the selected words of the English language for their connotative perceptions, we came to a conclusion that, language is not neutral. It bears the burden of the society it evolves from. Cultural practices, beliefs, value systems of society are expressed through its language. If we strive towards the creation of an equal society which respects and represents all the people irrespective of class, caste or gender, the language of such society should also be free of any prejudices and discriminations. Until then we have to choose our words carefully.