

UGRC 150: CRITICAL THINKING AND PRACTICAL REASONING

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UNIT 2

DEFINITIONS

OBJECTIVES

- ❑ To understand and identify six types of definitions
- ❑ To appreciate the distinction between ‘well-defined’ words and ‘open-textured’ words
- ❑ To identify and diagnose some problems arising with definitions

CONNOTATION VS DENOTATION

- Definitions presents the meaning of a word.
- There are two aspects of a definition
- The word's **connotation**
- And the word's **denotation**

CONNOTATION

- A word's connotation is the characteristics or features or properties associated with it.
- **For example**, the standard connotation for a chair is: a type of furniture that is produced for one person to sit upon with a back support.
- **NB**: Most words have more than one connotations

DENOTATION

- Given the connotation for a chair as: a type of furniture that is produced for one person to sit upon with a back support,
- The denotation of chair is the collection of all the things in the world that are correctly picked out by this definition.
- **BASIC DIFFERENCE:** Connotation describes while denotation identifies which item items fit the description.

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UNIT 2 SECTION 1

TYPES OF DEFINITION

DEFINIENDUM VS DEFINIENS

- A standard definition has two parts, namely **definiendum** and **definiens**.
- **DEFINIENDUM**: is the word being defined (the subject of the statement).
- **DEFINIENS**: are the rest of the sentence which gives the word's connotation.

THE SIX TYPES OF DEFINITIONS

1. **Lexical definition**
2. **Ostensive Definition**
3. **Operational Definition**
4. **Theoretical Definition**
5. **Stipulative Definition**
6. **Ideal Definition**

LEXICAL DEFINITION

- This is simply the definition offered by a dictionary.
- This is the most common and simplistic source of information about the meaning of the word.

ACTIVITY TIME

- Try Activity 2.1 in your reader.

OSTENSIVE DEFINITION

- A definition that is provided by a demonstration in real life, not by using other words, is called an ostensive definition.
- Colour words like blue or red are best defined by pointing to them.
- Similarly, words that describe actions are sometimes difficult to define using other words. Example, pounding fufu, agbadza, etc.
- This definition can be very limiting since demonstrating it with one or two instances may not be enough to capture all of the various possible denotation of the word.

OPERATIONAL DEFINITION

- To give an operation definition is to give a list of instructions or to describe a sequence of steps or an operation or procedure which, when followed, will reveal or demonstrate how the word is used correctly.
- For example, If a foreigner should ask you, what is gari soakings. And your reply is: Take a cup of gari, add two table spoons of sugar, add peanut, add milk. Then stir the mixture until you have an even mix. Then finally add water while stirring.

THEORETICAL DEFINITION

- These are meanings that come from theories that have been accepted in specific fields of scientific knowledge, and from social studies or the humanities.
- The use of these definitions is based upon the theory achieving general acceptance.
- Example, Water is H_2O is a theoretical definition of water acceptable in Chemistry
- NB: Some everyday words can have different definitions under different topics.

ACTIVITY TIME

- Try activity 1.4 to help understand this further.

STIPULATIVE DEFINITION

- These are definitions that have been agreed upon within a certain context or subject matter to serve a practical purpose.
- For instance, for the purpose of debate or analysis or policy making, it can be useful to establish explicitly that you agree upon a specific definition for the course of the exercise, debate, discussion or essay.
- These are important for open-textured words such as development, justice and beauty.

IDEAL DEFINITION

- These are definitions that capture the real or essential meaning of the word. Hence, it is also known as **real definition**, **ideal definition** or **essential definition**
- Philosophers are noted for seeking the real meaning of concepts in a process called abstraction.
- Ideal definitions are difficult to attain or may not even be attained at times, but it is a helpful exercise if we are, for instance, debating whether the judges in the election petition were fair or not.

IDEAL DEFINITION

- Ideal definitions are, however, achievable for words that are **well-defined**.
- This type of ideal definition is also called **an eliminative definition**.
- **Examples:**

An even number is a whole number that is divisible by two.

A sister is a female sibling.

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UNIT 2 SECTION 2 & 3

WELL-DEFINED TERMS & OPEN CLASS CONCEPTS

WELL-DEFINED TERMS

- Well defined terms are terms or words that can be given an ideal or essential definitions.
- Their meanings are not contestable.
- Almost all the words in mathematics are well-defined.
- Outside of pure science like mathematics, it is difficult to find well-defined words.

OPEN CLASS CONCEPTS

- While it is difficult to find well-defined terms outside of mathematics, open class concepts are all over the place.
- These are words or terms that cannot be well-defined. They are open because they can have **different connotations** under different circumstances.
- They are also referred to as **open-textured words** or **essentially contestable concepts**.
- **Examples**: democracy, modernity, justice, equality, etc. Their meanings are contestable.

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UNIT 2 SECTION 4

DIAGNOSING PROBLEMS WITH DEFINITIONS

PROBLEMS ARISING WITH DEFINITIONS

1. Too narrow
2. Too broad
3. Vague
4. Circular

NB: A given definition may be flawed in more than one way.

TOO NARROW

- The definiens do not cover all the things that correctly belong in the extension or denotation of the word.

Example: A book is any collection of paper material that is meant to be read.

This definition of a book is too narrow because by the connotation, we are unable to denote other books that are not made with paper (e-books), and books that are not meant to be read.

TOO BROAD

- The definiens cover things that do not belong in the denotation of the word.
- **Example:** A pencil is any material that you can write with. This is too broad because by the connotation offered, we can denote a lot of things that usually are not considered pencils.

VAGUE

- The definiens do not specify adequately to determine what belongs to the word's denotation.
- This is a criticism that applies to definiens that are so imprecise that it is not clear what sort of things they denote.
- **Examples:**
 - **A soil is a heap of a sand that works.**
 - **Religion is that which permeates and transcends the soul**

CIRCULAR

□ The definiens repeat the definendum. It is also called **begging the question**.

□ **Example:**

Morality is doing what is morally right

UNIT 3 SECTION 1

**VERBAL DISPUTES
VS.
SUBSTANTIVE DISPUTES**

VERBAL DISPUTES

- A verbal dispute is a disagreement which rests upon an inconsistency in the way the disputants are using the same words.
- Once the meaning of key words is clarified or a stipulative meaning is given so that both sides of the disputes are relying upon the same meanings, the dispute is often resolved or there is progress.
- **Example:** The student is using a pen to write.
No, you are mistaken that is called a marker.

SUBSTANTIVE DISPUTES

- A substantive dispute is one that exists because each side of the disagreement has in view different facts or subscribes to contrasting values.
- This can only be resolved on logical grounds and not merely by stipulative definition.
- **Example:** J. J. Rawlings was not a Ghanaian because his father is Scottish.
- No, he was a Ghanaian since he was our president who had a Ghanaian mother and a held a Ghanaian passport.



- Respond to Activities 3.1 on pages 51 & 55 of your reader.
- Discuss your answers with your Teaching Assistant on SAKAI.

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END OF SLIDES
