

Connotation vs. Denotation

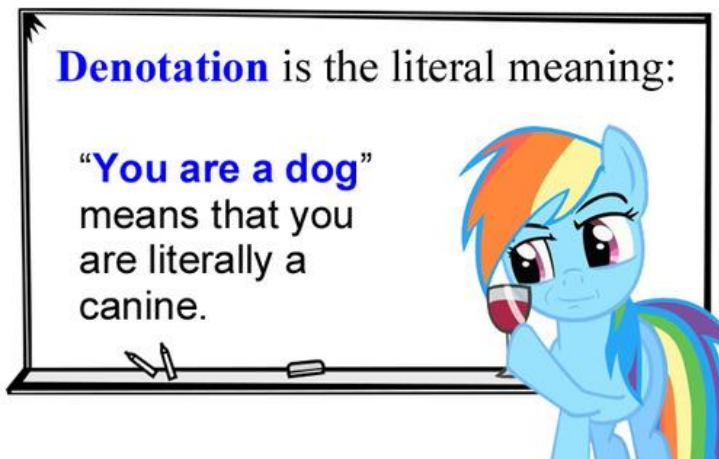
Almost every word has two kinds of meanings...

Denotation:
the straightforward dictionary definition

Connotation:
the ideas and feelings associated with
the word

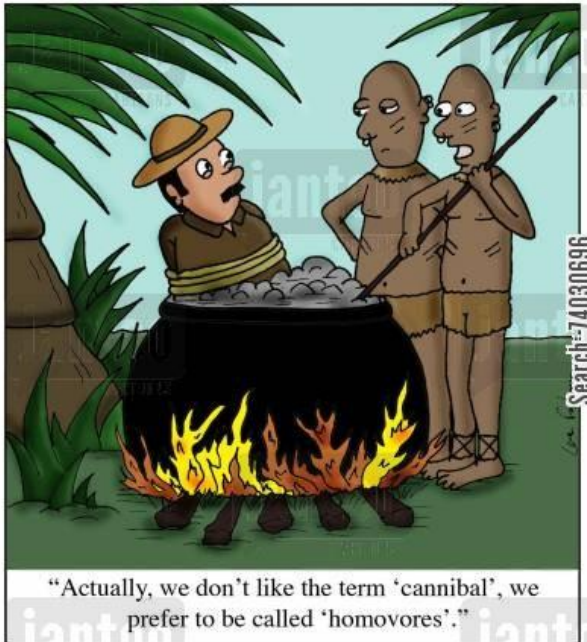
Denotation of Words

The literal meaning of a word or name. Although Paris might make you think of romance, its *denotation* is simply the city of old tribe called the Parisii.



The Latin word *denotare* means to mark, and *denotation* originally meant the act of marking or the expression of something through a sign. Now we tend to use *denotation* in opposition to *connotation*, which is indirect or symbolic meaning. The denotation of *rose* is a particular kind of flower, while the connotation is of romantic love; the denotation of *river* is a body of water, while its connotation might be the unending flow of time.

Connotation of Words



When you look up a word in the dictionary, you will find its literal (denotative) meaning. However, the emotions and associations connected to a word is known as its connotative meaning. Depending on our experiences, certain words have a positive, negative, or neutral connotation.

Importance of Connotation

Understanding a word's literal (denotative) and suggestive (connotative) meanings is important for every speaker and writer. There are certain circumstances when you might want to deliberately use a word that carries less than a positive connotation; however, you may want to avoid mistakenly using a word with a negative or misleading connotation.

Depending on the context, the connotation of a word choice can change the meaning of a sentence considerably. For example, using the words "[chick](#)" or "babe" to refer to a woman often carry a negative connotation, especially if women are part of the audience. Those same words, however, may not cause much offence amongst a group of men talking about Angelina Jolie.

Examples of Connotative Words

Connotation Exercise #1

Below are groups of words which are often used to describe people. What are the connotations of the words?

1. Childlike, Youthful, Childish, Young
2. Disabled, Crippled, Handicapped, Retarded
3. Relaxed, Laid-back, Lackadaisical, Easy-going
4. Slim, Skinny, Slender, Thin
5. Cheap, Frugal, Miserly, Economical
6. Young, Immature, Juvenile, Youthful
7. Inquisitive, Interested, Curious, Convivial
8. Confident, Secure, Proud, Egotistical
9. Lovely, Knockout, Beautiful, Stunning

10. Talkative, Conversational, Chatty, Nosy

Answer Key:

1. Childish and childlike implies that someone is immature, but youthful infers that someone is lively and energetic.
2. Crippled, handicapped, and retarded have negative connotations and are no longer used because they are considered offensive.
3. Lackadaisical means that someone is not interested and is lacking life.
4. Skinny implies that someone is too thin.
5. Cheap, frugal, and miserly infers that someone is not generous and is very stingy with their money.
6. Immature and juvenile suggest that someone is childish.
7. Inquisitive can mean that someone asks too many questions.
8. Proud and egotistical mean that someone thinks very highly of themselves.
9. Although knockout can be taken as a compliment, it can also be considered sexist when referring to a woman.
10. Talkative and chatty can mean that someone talks too much; and nosy that someone asks too many questions.

Connotation Exercise #2

Read the sentences below. Can you identify the words that have a negative connotation?

1. Bedford is an uppity neighborhood, but the rents are cheap.
2. On my flight to Los Angeles, I sat next to this babe. She was absolutely stunning.
3. Every morning my neighbor takes his mutt to the park. It always barks loudly when leaving the building.
4. You need to be pushy when you are looking for a job.
5. Bob is quite vocal at every staff meeting. He always speaks.

Answer Key:

1. Uppity; 2. Babe; 3. Mutt; 4. Pushy; 5. Vocal