

## A Brief Study of Words Used in Denotation and Connotation

Prof. V. Chandra Sekhar Rao ([csrv8@yahoo.co.in](mailto:csrv8@yahoo.co.in))

Professor in English, SITECH, Hyderabad

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### Abstract

This paper aims at ESL students and explains how denotative and connotative meanings of words used in English. People create new words when they need, and they give these words several meanings. Language is symbolic that is used to represent ideas, objects, and feelings. Connotation and denotation is a part of language and communication. They are two principal methods of describing the meanings of words. The connotation of a word or term adds elements of emotion, attitude, or color. The meaning or use of denotation and connotation depends partly on the field of study. Learning words of denotation and connotation is useful for ESL students to improve their writing style. Connotation and denotation play a vital role in learning language and comprehending literature. Words can be used for positive or negative connotations based on the context and need.

**Keywords:** Denotation and Connotation, ESL Students, Figures Of Speech, Emotional Feelings, Literal Meaning, Writing Style

### Introduction

Learning language is not simply a matter of learning words. It is a matter of correctly relating our words to the things and happenings for which they stand. It is the need of knowing how meanings of words vary from one cultural context into another.

In the course of communication, we use language which is symbolic to represent ideas, objects, and feelings. We can interpret any given statement in more than one way. Sometimes the difference is simply literal versus figurative interpretation.

We better understand that words are not limited to one single meaning. Most of the words do not simply express a thought, but also express feelings beyond the word's literal meaning. Denotation and Connotation are two principal methods of describing the meanings of words.

## Objectives

It is aimed at ESL Students to learn how to use connotation and denotation in English language as:

- Learning how to distinguish between the two as they appear in literature.
- Learning the concept or theory behind the terms.
- Learning to apply the concepts to writing and improving writing style.

## Definitions and Concepts

In English almost all the words can be used denotatively and connotatively. The denotation refers to the most basic or specific meaning of a word. On the other hand, a connotation is an idea that is suggested by or associated with a word. In literature, connotation paves way for creativity by using figures of speech like metaphor, simile, symbolism, personification etc.

## The Importance of Denotative and Connotative Words

Generally words can be used for positive or negative connotations depending on the contextual situation. The usage of words may be good or bad sense, impression, experience, feeling, etc. for example, politicians and advertisers may prefer words with positive connotations in view of expressing their message attractively. In case of unpleasant feeling, a word with negative connotations may be used to describe them.

## Review of Literature

**M.H. Abraham** says about **Connotation and Denotation**: *the denotation of a word is its primary signification or reference; its connotation is the range of secondary or associated significations and feelings which it commonly suggests or implies. Thus "home" denotes the house where one lives, but connotes privacy, intimacy, and coziness; that is the reason real estate agents like to use "home" instead of "house" in their advertisements. "Horse" and "steed" denote the same quadruped, but "steed" has a different connotation that derives from the chivalric or romantic narratives in which this word was often used.*

On considering the above cited statements and definitions, it has come to know that meanings of words are used differently in different cultural contexts. The words are used as a way of communication through the use of meaningful utterances in different contexts and different cultures.

### **Connotations and Figures of speech**

In literature, it is a common practice among writers to deviate from the literal meanings of words in order to create novel ideas and images, using figures of speech or figurative language. It is supposed to say that our textbook is our best friend; it is a figure of speech (metaphor). Figures of speech are different kinds, such as metaphors, similes, personification, hyperbole, understatement, paradox, and pun. Metonymy is another figure of speech that is a word or phrase used to stand in for another word. Here is the example taken from the Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar (Act III) for better understanding:

Mark Anthony says, "Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears." The connotation of the word "ear" is the idea of people listening to him carefully.

### **To Improve Writing Style and vocabulary**

ESL students are advised to study the use of connotation and denotation in order to improve their writing style. They have to learn how to distinguish between the two as they appear in literature and to learn the concept or theory behind the terms.

Naturally writers of literature use words to express ideas or feelings that convey more than exact, literal meanings, in which case they "connote" or suggest additional meanings and values not expressed in general dictionary definitions. Words that "denote" a core meaning are those that are generally used and understood by the users and the audience to represent an object or class of objects, an act, a quality, or an idea.

Denotation is a word's literal or dictionary meaning. Most common words in English have more than one denotation. For example, the word *pound* means or denotes a unit of weight, a place where stray animals are kept, a unit of money in the British system, and the verb to hit.

Two people may use the same word to mean, or denote, different things. For example, *risk* may be an economic term dealing with efficiency; for an environmentalist the word may denote health concerns.

Connotation plays a vital role in almost every type of communication and it is a word of associations and implications that go beyond the literal meaning. Many words carry connotations of approval or disapproval, disgust or delight. Connotation is the emotional and imaginative association surrounding a word. Connotations may be positive or negative, purely based on its context.

**Examples of Connotation in Common Speech**

Connotation of positive meaning	Connotation of less-positive/negative meaning
Those who live with loved ones and in happiness live in a <i>home</i> .	Those who are lonely and detached live in a <i>house</i> .
A <i>mom</i> and a <i>dad</i> are loving parents.	A <i>mother</i> and <i>father</i> have procreated.
Many <i>wise</i> men have made <i>plans</i> .	Many <i>cunning</i> scoundrels have devised a <i>scheme</i> .
His son’s behavior is <i>childlike</i> .	She looks <i>childish</i> .

**Study the following Connotation Pairs:**

<u>Positive</u>	<u>Negative</u>
Sagacious	Astute
Homeless	bum
Confident	Cocky
Prudent	Cowardly
Unwise	Foolish
Relaxed	Lazy
Statesman	Politician
Chef	Cook
Plagiarizer	cheater
Clever	shrewd
Journalist	reporter

Inexpensive	cheap
Invest	speculate
Purchase	buy

## Conclusion

Language is symbolic in that we use it to represent ideas, objects, and feelings. Connotation and denotation, a part of language and communication, are two more tools in order to distinguish the meaning of an unfamiliar term.

Denotation is a word's literal meaning or the "dictionary definition. But, Connotation is an idea that is suggested by or associated with a word that expresses rhetorical or emotional feelings.

Finally we understand that connotation and denotation play a vital role in learning language and comprehending literature. They help the ESL students understand and distinguish their explicit and implicit meanings as well as their emotional feeling and ideas.

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