

## Unit 3

### The Use of Connotations

The most important words are the ones which touch the emotions of those who hear or see them. They are words that arouse people to positive or negative judgment--words that often stir them to action. *Communist* arouses deep-seated prejudices for or against the ideas that the word is said to represent. Mention of *Hitler* evokes sentiments, of very diverse quality, from both those who admired him and those who did not. *Draft* and *selective service* mean the same thing, but one term has a more unpleasant connotation than the other.

The images that many words inspire in our minds are immediately associated with emotional response, and often directly responsible for it. The most common type of image is the visual: that is, a given word habitually calls forth a certain picture to our minds. Mention of places we have seen and people we have known produce a visual recollection of them. How much we recollect these places or people is determined by the sort of experience we have had with the originals. It is not only words referring to concrete objects which have this power of evoking a visual response in the imagination. Our picture-making faculty also enables us to visualize abstractions in concrete terms. *Capitalist* is an abstract noun; it denotes a person who has a certain function in a certain kind of economic system. But to many people it connotes a definite picture, obviously derived from the cartoonist's stock figure, of a corpulent banker who is swinging a golf club or being driven around in his Mercedes; on his fingers are rings with huge stones, and around his wrist is a diamond-studded Rolex watch. Thus abstractions are made concrete, and our reactions to the words that represent those abstractions are patterned in terms of that visual image.

In addition to visual responses in the imagination, words evoke responses associated with the other senses. Many words have connotations that appeal to our sense of hearing: thunder, tick-tock, trumpet. Others appeal to our sense of touch--baby's cheek, ice-cold, soft. Another class attracts palatal responses--bitter, castor oil, spicy. The last group invites olfactory responses--garbage dump, perfume, rose petals. Many words appeal to two or more senses at once: rain, sea breeze, wine.

Since our sensory experience may be either pleasant or unpleasant, the words that evoke their imaginative equivalents have the power to sway us to accept or reject an idea. This persuasive power of words is often put to use in advertising and political discussion. Even though language may be manipulated for selfish purposes, the greater part of what people read has the sole purpose of informing or entertaining them--of giving them new knowledge, or fresh food for the imagination and the emotions. In this way language is used simply to heighten the effectiveness, the accuracy, and the vividness of the writer's communication.

### Connotations in Advertising

Skillful advertising copywriters know how to cultivate the customers' responses, always evoking pleasant pictures, making them yearn for what they lack without their being aware of it. They also have a list of taboos--words which must never be mentioned because they have negative connotations of one sort or another. The word *cheap* is never used to describe a product because of its negative connotation; *inexpensive* is a more positive substitution. In promoting a large-size package of their product, they call it the *economy* size--"You save when you buy it!" *Fat* is never used except in reducing-course ads; you can never persuade a woman

to buy a dress by calling her fat. Instead, there are dresses for the *larger figure* or the *mature* woman.

Advertisements always use words or phrases that arouse the interest of the readers, prospective customers, in one way or another. In the Thai Airways International's slogan "Smooth as Silk", the word "silk" brings to mind the fabric that makes Thailand famous, the Thai silk; thus, it is associated with Thailand. "Smooth", used to describe the texture of something to show its fineness and evenness, connotes freedom from obstacles or difficulties. The phrase "smooth as silk" suggests that when you fly THAI, the kingdom's official airline, your flight will be safe and comfortable without any problems. Look at the following ads by NIKE:

IT EATS CHALLENGE FOR BREAKFAST,  
AND ADVERSITY FOR LUNCH.  
HEY, THAT SOUNDS LIKE OUR MANAGEMENT TEAM.

There's a certain passion you'll find within every NIKE professional. A burning desire to win. A knowledge that second-best just won't cut in.

We're building a team in Thailand made up of dedicated, driven individuals who've experienced success and know what it takes to get there again and again.

If you share our thirst for excellence, we have one thing to say. Come and get it.

The words "challenge" and "adversity" which are abstractions are used here to refer to "food." Again, we have the word "thirst" which is also related to eating. But these words also have connotations: "dare," "misfortune," and "craving." The writer of the ads is suggesting that people

who work for NIKE hunger for excellence and are not satisfied with being second-best. They have to be the best, the winners. As we already know, NIKE is the company that manufactures sports goods; thus, it is appropriate to use such phrase as "A burning desire to win" in the ads which aim to make the readers aware of their own ability. If they are the kind of people who love to take chances and are not afraid of obstacles or difficulties, then they should join the staff of NIKE.

The following is a car advertisement:

*THE IMAGE OF SUCCESS THAT EMBODIES*

*ULTIMATE LUXURY*

*One Car that Satisfies a Leader's Every Desire*

*COME, EXPERIENCE THE POWER AND LUXURY*

*RESERVED FOR THE DISTINGUISHED FEW!*

Here too abstraction is made concrete: from "image of success" we come to "car." This car is not just any ordinary car; it is a car designed to satisfy a "leader", a car that only the "distinguished few" may own. So, if you buy this car you are someone special; you belong to the class of selected people who are superior to others.

### Connotations in Political Persuasion

Public opinion is being formed wherever and whenever one person expresses his views on a topic to someone else. Unless the hearer or reader has already made up his mind and refuses to change it, he will be influenced by what he is told--and now there are two persons who believe in such views instead of one. In persuasion designed to make someone think thus-and-so about a public issue, the emotion-producing power of

words can bring about good or evil. Used in one way, they are a means of spreading and intensifying the most contemptible sort of prejudice; used in another, they are a means of stirring the human spirits to heights of nobility and courage. All of us are prejudiced; we dislike certain people, certain ideas, not because we have a logical basis for our dislike, but rather because those people or activities or ideas affect our less noble instincts. There are also positive prejudices, by which we approve of people or things--perhaps because they please our lower emotions or perhaps we have always been taught that they were "good" and never bothered to reason why. In either case, it is words which can and do arouse these prejudices and biases. Two principle means used to accomplish this are *name-calling* and the use of the *glittering generality*. Both means depend on the process of association, by which one idea (the specific person, group, or situation being discussed) receives emotional coloration from another idea placed close by.

Name calling is a means of arousing an unfavorable response by such an association. There are so many words that connote things unpleasant to most people: *alien*, *Communist*, *radical*, *leftist*, *dictator*, *reactionary*, just to mention a few. If a speaker or writer wishes to sway his audience against a person or party or principle, he will often use such terms in his persuasion. "The Democratic party is made up largely of *reactionaries* ." "The head of that political party is a *dictator*." These sentences contain words loaded with unpleasant emotional suggestion.

The glittering generality, on the other hand, involves the use of agreeable connotations. Most people automatically react favorably to such words and phrases as *freedom* , *democracy* , *national honor* , *patriotism* , *human rights* , *liberty* , *equal opportunity* , and *higher standard of living* . Words like these have pleasant connotations and show the positive side of the ideas with which they are associated. "The newly-found party is the

party of men and women united for the preservation *of* private enterprise and the *right* to earn a living." "The Democratic party is composed of practical idealists who are working for a better America--a land of *peace*, prosperity, and security. " The words used in the sentences just quoted are designed to make the reader feel good and convince him to accept the idea which the words so agreeably envelop.

There are other methods by which words can be used to condemn or approve without reference to evidence or logic, but the two methods discussed are very common and their unfairness can be so easily seen. So many people are ready, even eager, to condemn an individual or party or philosophy just by relying on a word alone, without knowing what it means, or with only a vague idea of its meaning, or with a positively wrong idea of its meaning. Take the word Communist, for instance, what does it mean to a listener? Plainly it has some strong and unpleasant connotation, but if he were asked to explain why he has such a disagreeable reaction against the word, he might have only the vaguest idea of what *Communist* stands for. So if he condemns a man he does not even know only because someone says that man is a Communist, he is being unthinking and unjust.

In the case of the glittering generality, the danger lies in the vagueness of the words used which may arouse different emotions and prejudices in different listeners. The same words or phrases can please anyone so long as *they* remain *undefined*. The simple test to apply to such agreeable word or phrase is to ask the following questions: What does it mean to the person who says it? Is the idea as beautiful in practice as it looks on paper? Would you agree with the idea if you know the specific **things** the speaker proposes to do?

While we were talking about the connotations of words like capitalist or Communist, we were actually discussing "stereotypes": that is, mental images of certain races, nationalities, social classes or professions that are

based on oversimplification, misunderstanding, and handed-down prejudices. Thus the mention of a certain group, or one of its members, automatically arouses in us a ready-made response. By being aware of the process by which a word can start illogical prejudice, we can help prevent the spread of ignorance.

### **Exercise 1 Connotation in Advertising**

A. How informative is the use of language in this advertisement? What are the good points of this soap? What group of people would be attracted by this soap? Would you buy this brand of soap after you have read this advertisement? Give your reasons.

Our famous Hard **Water** Soap is carefully compounded to the original formula brought from France more than fifty years ago by John Wanamaker. It combines premium fats and coconut oil with nourishing buttermilk, and is pure enough for a baby's tender skin. It is economical because it is hard milled, and usable right down to the last sliver. It gives a rich, creamy lather in either hard or soft water.

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B. The following coined terms are trademarks used in advertising campaigns. Point out the connotative value in each.

Absorba (baby diaper)  
Babi Mild (baby soap)  
Car-Glo (car wax)  
Cushionaire (tires)  
Foam-Ease (mattresses)  
Fab (detergent)  
Gardol ("decay fighter" ingredient in toothpaste)  
Impala (car model)  
Jiff (kitchen cleaner)  
Joy (perfume)  
Kleenfloor (floor cleaner)  
Kodomo (baby products)  
Lestoil (cleaning product)  
Lustre-Creme (shampoo)  
Luxury Lounge interiors (automobiles)  
Mr. Clean (cleaning product)  
Mustang (car model)  
Protex (soap)  
Roll-a-Matic (electric shaver)  
Spic-and-Span (kitchen cleaner)  
Sprite (soft drink)  
Sunlight (dish washing liquid)  
Supersorb (terry cloth)  
Vim (cleaning product)  
Wai Wai Quick (instant noodles)  
Zest (soft drink)

C. The following advertisement is designed to appeal to a certain well-defined audience. Can you tell who they are?

Are you the type that likes to breeze along the open road on a bright summer day with nothing above between you and the blue? Do you like the sound of ram against a snug fabric top? If so, the Chevrolet Convertible is for **you!** No question about it. For here's a car that's as young in spirit as you are--and looks it! Even the smart all-vinyl interior is made to live outdoors.

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But maybe you like a car that can carry anything from small fry to outboard motors with equal ease. That would be the "Two-Ten" Handyman Station Wagon (one of five Chevrolet wagons). Here's one car that's so versatile it practically makes you a two-car family **all** by itself. So low it sets a new height of fashion for station wagons! Practical? If the kids track sand inside, you can wash it out in a jiffy.

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On the other hand, if you go for hardtops--and **like'em** long, low and dashing--the **Bel** Air Sport Coupe is just your dish. It's a "show car" from the word go!

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## Exercise 2 Connotation in Political Persuasion

Read the following lines and answer the questions below.

My fellow citizens, strange as the words may sound coming from one which has no greater pride than that which springs from his life-long devotion to the ideals of the Democratic party, in a way it has been a blessing in disguise for us to be out of office. Now the country has had a bitter but **eye-**

opening taste of what Republican rule means. The events of the past few years has exposed with the pitiless spotlight of truth the emptiness and hypocrisy of the promises foisted on the people by the New York advertising men who have been the GOP's propaganda hirelings.

The babble, bangle, and muddle in Washington is incredible. Faithful public servants, career people who had long experience in administrating government affairs efficiently and economically with favoritism toward none, have been shoved out to make room for high-paid executives from our giant corporations. As you and I know well, you can't run a government the same way you run a big business. *It takes special talents of the sort that thousands of loyal Democrats possess* . But those talents aren't being used. No wonder we have government by confuse.

1. To which party does the speaker of these lines belong?

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2. What does he mean by "a blessing in disguise"?

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3. Explain how the word "ideals" can be used as the glittering generality.

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4. Is the Democratic party in power at the time the speaker is giving his speech?

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5. Two senses are involved in the phrase "a bitter but eye-opening taste," what are they?

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6. What is the connotation of "spotlight of truth"?

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7. What is the connotation of "propaganda hireling"?

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8. What do "babble," "bangle," and "muddle" connote?

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9. What does "Washington" connote?

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10. What does "with favoritism toward none" imply about the Democrats"?

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11. What kind of people are taking charge of administrating government affairs now?

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12. What does the speaker imply when he says the sentence in italics?

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13. Do you think the Democrats are really glad that they are out of office now? Give reasons for your answer.

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14. Give examples of name-calling used in the speech.

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15. What kind of image of the Republicans is conveyed through this speech?

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16. Is there any proof or evidence that the speaker offers to support his attack on the Republicans?

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17. Does the speaker sound prejudiced to you? Give reasons for your answer.

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18. Would an American audience believe everything the speaker says without hesitation?

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19. What kind of effect would the speech have on an audience who are not so well-informed about politics?

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20. If these words were spoken in our own country concerning two political parties, do you think they will have the same effect on the Thai audience?