

# The Power of Words

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Words are a very powerful tool for  
both speakers and writers

Words can be used to:

- Create an **effect**
- Reveal an **attitude, point of view** and **personality** traits
- **Condition (influence)** the listener/speaker's reaction

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## Word usage

- Even though **synonyms** are said to be words with the same meaning, very **few words have exactly the same meaning**
  - Usage gives words special meanings

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## Denotation

- All words convey a literal meaning, the specific meaning found **in a dictionary**
- This is called **denotation**

Denotation refers to the literal meaning of a word, the "dictionary" definition.

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## Connotation

- Many words stir up emotions or suggest associations.
- This is called **connotation**.

Connotation refers refers to the associations that are connected to a certain word or the emotional suggestions related to that word.

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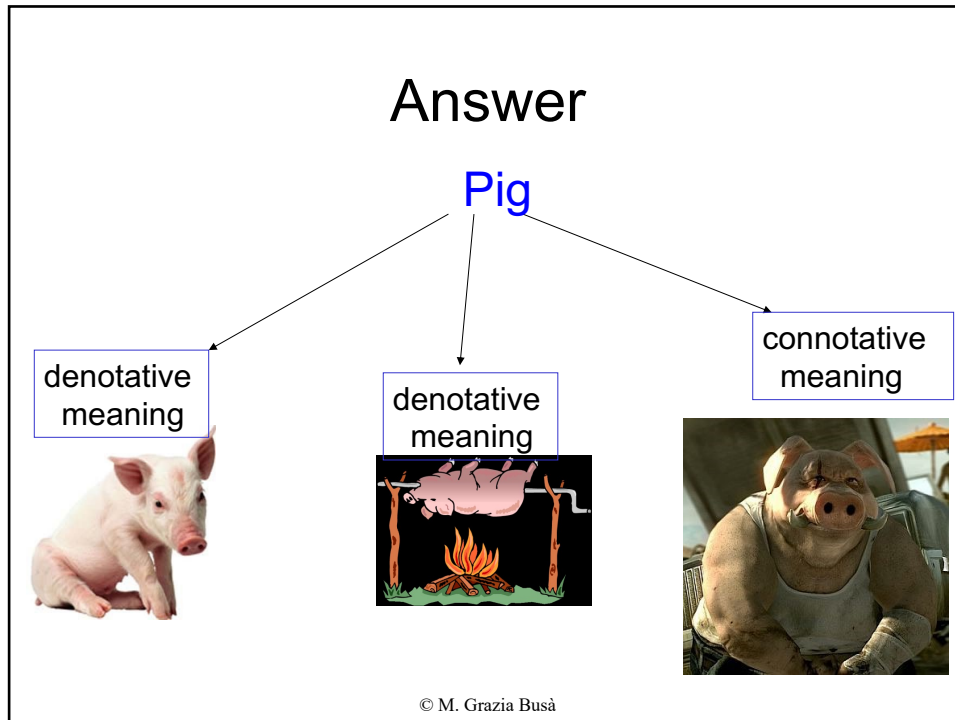
## An example...

- What are the possible meanings of the word

pig?

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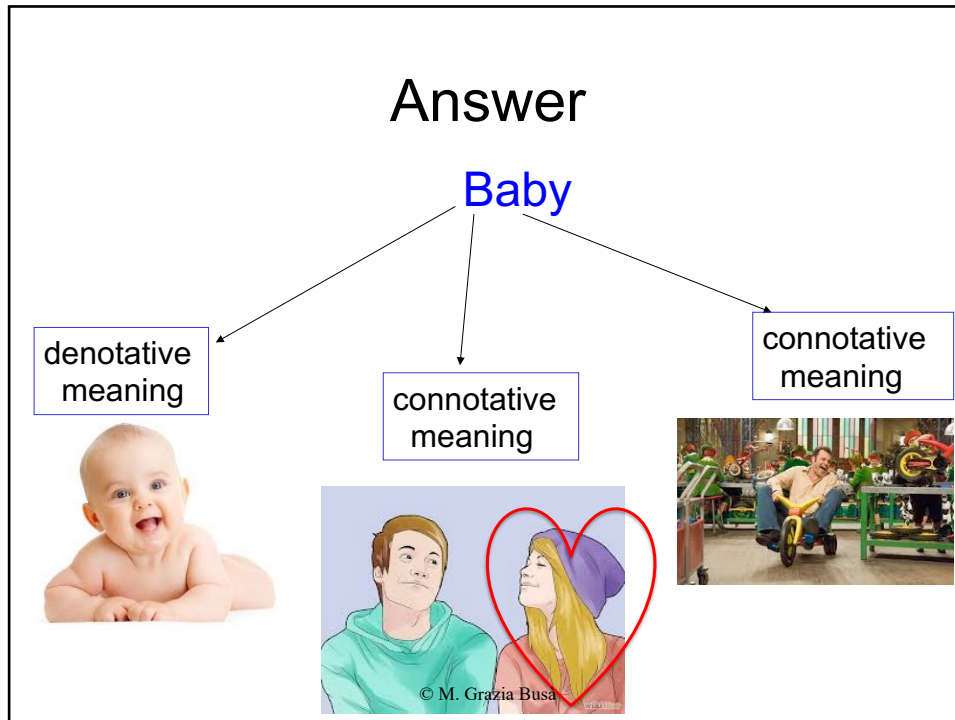
Another example...

- What are the possible meanings of the word

baby?

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For example:

What is the difference between  
**trip** and **vacation**?

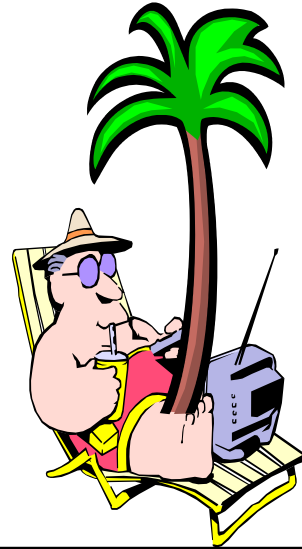
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**What is the difference between  
trip and vacation?**

- Both words have similar denotations, but **vacation** has an extra level of meaning.
- **Vacation** makes us feel a sense of **freedom, relaxation, and fun.**



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Can you tell if the following words  
have a positive or negative  
connotation?

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difficult ----- challenging

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difficult ----- challenging

negative

positive



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economical ----- stingy

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economical ----- stingy

positive negative



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stubborn ----- determined

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stubborn ----- determined

negative

positive



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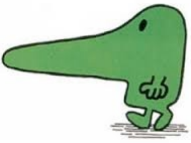

curious ----- nosey

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curious ----- nosey

positive negative



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previously owned ----- used

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previously owned ----- used

↑  
positive

↑  
negative



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Many words can be scaled according to their positive/negative value

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### Some examples



- Young      Youthful      **Childish**
- Disabled
- Thin      Slim      **Skinny**
- Thrifty      **Cheap**
- Beautiful Lovely Stunning      **Knockout**

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## Other examples

+

-



- |              |          |
|--------------|----------|
| • Officer    | Cop      |
| • Sufficient | Adequate |
| • Clever     | Sly      |
| • Cultured   | Snob     |
| • Injection  | Shot     |

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## Test

Can you tell if the words in the following sentences have a positive or negative connotation?

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## Which is positive?

- The boy seemed very youthful.
- The boy seemed very childish.

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## Which one is positive?

- The boy seemed very youthful.
- The boy seemed very childish.

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Which one is positive?

- The outside air is chilly.
- The outside air is refreshing.

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Which is positive?

- The outside air is chilly.
- The outside air is refreshing.

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Which is positive?

- M y s h o e s a r e d i r t y .
- M y s h o e s a r e f i l t h y .

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Which is positive?

- M y s h o e s a r e d i r t y .
- M y s h o e s a r e f i l t h y .

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Which is positive?

- He looks rather weird.
- He looks rather unusual.

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Which is positive?

- The hotel looks rather weird.
- He looks rather unusual.

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Which is more negative?

- The hotel looks old.
- The hotel looks antiquated.

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Which is more negative?

- The hotel looks old.
- The hotel looks antiquated.

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## The power is in the words

An emotional response in the listener/reader can be created through the words that are used

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## Emotive language

- The use of emotive language influences the interpretation of speeches and texts:
- Examples:
  - The **shameless** boy
  - The **hopeless** request
  - The **unappetising** Christmas turkey

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## Naming conventions

- Naming people is an important aspect of social conventions
- Naming strategies also carry positive and negative implications
- Using the wrong name to call a person may be a cause of insult, offence or discrimination

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## Peoples' names (groups)

North Americans	Yankees
Asians	Orientals
Australians	Aussie
Mid westerners	Red Necks

....



positive

....



negative

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# The evocative power of words

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- Vanessa Van Edwards 3.15-5-58

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- Mentioning means evoking to the listener's mind.....
- Mentioning something means creating the thought in the listener's mind...

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## Example



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## Wrong things to say

- I don't want to offend you
- Don't look down or else you'll fall
- Come on! Try not to lose!
- I don't want to insult you with this presentation

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- ALSO.....

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## Do not express concepts in negative terms

- When we negate something, we evoke what we want to negate

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## If you say...

- This speech will sound non interesting but...
- You'll think I'm a bore ...
- I know you don't want to listen to me...

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## If you say...

- **You create a negative association with you and what you are saying**

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## Compare.....

- **I'm about to tell you a very important story**
- **This speech will give you a new perspective about...**
- **I am going to present some interesting facts about...**

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## Compare.....

- 
- 
- 

The effect is to give value to what you are saying and create expectation

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## An example (from Italian)

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## An example (from Italian)

I've been invited here even though I'm one of those clients of the banks that don't understand anything about finance...

... So I don't have much to say, actually I have nothing to say about your work...

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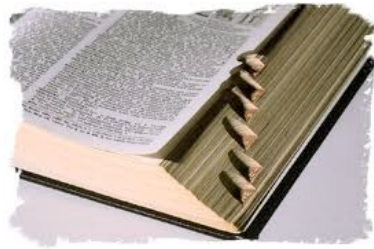
- ALSO.....

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## The choice of words

- Your speech must be simple and clear for everybody
- Use:
  - simple words
  - concrete words
  - vivid immagini
  - repetitions
  - metaphores
  - ....



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## Also...

- Don't use words that create distance:
  - sophisticated words,
  - foreign expressions
  - obscure quotations
- Use words that everyone can understand

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## Simple words please!

- People think that in presentations they should use *pompous* or *technical words* ....
- Difficult words may not be understood by everybody
- → where possible, it is best to use *simple, common words*

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## Task:

- Briefly tell what your area of expertise is to
  - An audience of experts in the field
  - An audience of non-experts in the field

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