

WRITING AND PRACTICE

写作与实践

1 DICTION

In writing, diction refers to the overall selection of language for your writing. It is the choice of one word over other alternatives. If your diction is good, that means that you consistently choose words which accurately fit your intended meaning and which are appropriate to the occasion. And if your purpose is to present your thesis and research so that your reader will find your position credible, then your diction should be appropriate—objective, concrete, and specific.

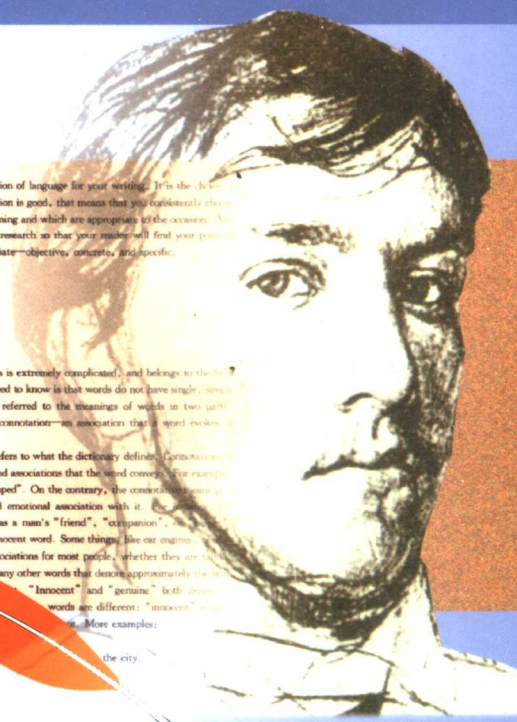
Denotation and Connotation

The relationship between words and meanings is extremely complicated, and belongs to the field of semantics. For now, though, what you need to know is that words do not have single, simple meanings. Traditionally, grammarians have referred to the meanings of words in two parts: denotation—the literal meaning of a word; connotation—an association that a word evokes, or what the word says or suggests.

As opposed to connotation, denotation refers to what the dictionary defines. Connotations of a word are based on the feelings, attitudes, and associations that the word conveys. For example, the denotation of "dog" is just "canine quadruped". On the contrary, the connotation of "dog" is this word is based on implication, or shared emotional association with it. The "dog" mentioned above might be described as a man's "friend", "companion", "enemy", etc. Another example, "green" is a completely innocent word. Some things, like our emotions, can be positive or negative associations for most people, whether they are "green" or not. About many other words that denote approximately the same thing, but their connotations are different. "Innocent" and "genuine" both denote the same thing, but their connotations are different. "Innocent" is associated with the absence of corruption, while "genuine" is associated with the absence of deception. More examples:

Negative: There are over 2,000 victims of the earthquake.

Neutral: There are over 2,000 people who died in the city.



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WRITING AND PRACTICE

写作与实践



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前 言

《写作与实践》(Writing and Practice)是我们仔细研究国家颁发的《非英语专业研究生英语》教学大纲后,根据我国硕士生英语水平迅速提高的发展趋势,以及学生们在英语写作方面的普遍要求组织编写而成。

该教材的编者均是长期从事非英语专业硕士英语教学的教师,在编写过程中既考虑到了教学目标,也考虑到了学生实际英语水平,针对性很强。本教材是一本切实可行的英语写作指导书籍。

我们尝试着用英文详尽地编写该教材,其目的是使学生的英语写作水平得到迅速的提升。

本书内容丰富、全面、新颖。全书共分 15 单元,每个单元之后都有配套写作练习。在书后还附有练习答案,以供参考。书中内容既有措辞、段落篇章和描写叙述、说明、议论文的写作,又有实用文体的写作训练,如科技论文、读书报告、信函、出国申请及相关文稿的写作等,相信通过对该书的学习,将使学习者得到满意的收获。

该写作教材作为课堂教学使用,在一学年内完成,时间可每两周一个单元,也可结合精读课教学进行。

该书不但适合硕士生课堂教学用,还可供其他有志于提高英语写作水平的学习者使用。

鉴于该书对每一项写作内容都有详尽的英语解说,使用者可先读说明文字,然后做练习检查。

在编写过程中,我们征求了不少专家学者及外籍教师的意见,参阅了国内外不少有关写作方面的书籍,还采用了部分学生的优秀习作。但由于此书内容覆盖面广,编写时间仓促,参考的书目不能一一列出,在此我们表示歉意!

限于编写人员的水平,本书难免有不足之处,恳请使用本教材的教师和同学批评指正。

编 者

2004 年 8 月

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1

DICTION

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Denotation and Connotation

The relationship between words and meanings is extremely complicated, and belongs to the field of semantics. For now, though, what you need to know is that words do not have single, simple meanings. Traditionally, grammarians have referred to the meanings of words in two parts: denotation—the literal meaning of a word; connotation—an association that a word evokes or what the word says or suggests.

As opposed to connotation, denotation refers to what the dictionary defines. Connotations of a word are based on the feelings, attitudes, and associations that the word conveys. For example, the denotation of “dog” is just “canine quadruped”. On the contrary, the connotative meaning of this word is based on implication, or shared emotional association with it. For instance, the “dog” mentioned above might be described as a man’s “friend”, “companion”, or “helper”. Another example: “greasy” is a completely innocent word. Some things, like car engines, need to be greasy. But “greasy” contains negative associations for most people, whether they are talking about food or about people. Often there are many other words that denote approximately the same thing, but their connotations are very different. “Innocent” and “genuine” both denote an absence of corruption, but the connotations of the two words are different: “innocent” is often associated with a lack of experience, whereas “genuine” is not. More examples:

Negative: There are over 2,000 vagrants in the city.

Neutral: There are over 2,000 people with no fixed address in the city.

Positive: There are over 2,000 homeless in the city.

All three of the above expressions refer to exactly the same people, but they will invoke different associations in the reader's mind: a "vagrant" is a public nuisance while a "homeless" person is a worthy object of pity and charity. Presumably, someone writing an editorial in support of a new shelter would use the positive form, while someone writing an editorial in support of anti-loitering laws would use the negative form. In this case, the dry legal expression "with no fixed address" quite deliberately avoids most of the positive or negative associations of the other two terms.

Many of the most obvious changes in the English language over the past few decades have had to do with the connotations of words that refer to groups of people. Since the 1950's, words like "Negro" and "crippled" have acquired strong negative connotations, and have been replaced either by words with neutral connotations (i. e. "black", "handicapped") or by words with deliberately positive connotations (i. e. "African-Canadian", "differently-abled").

Levels of Diction

Generally speaking, diction may be divided into several levels: formal, informal, colloquial, slang, jargon, cliché, and idiom.

Formal It uses no words that depart from standard dictionary definitions. Use few, if any, idiomatic expressions. A foreign speaker of English with a grammar book and a dictionary could read it in hand. Its audience are all speakers of English in the world. Look at this example: "Ultimately every successful character represents a fusion of the universal and the particular and becomes an example of the concrete universal."

Informal It refers to the level of usage found in the relaxed but polite and cultivated conversation. For instance, "Let's go to a movie tomorrow night" rather than the formal, "Would you like to attend the cinema with me tomorrow evening?"

Colloquial It refers to everyday usage and may include terms and constructions accepted in that group but not universally acceptable. For example, people will say "How y'all doing?" instead of "How are you all doing?"

Slang It refers to a group of newly coined words that are not yet a part of formal usage. "That the movie was the bomb" indicates that it was a good movie.

Jargon Jargon is occupational language. Its audience must be limited to people who know the

vocabulary of a particular occupation or hobby. Look at the example: "The third type of verdict is the special verdict, in which all of the factual issues in the case are submitted to the jury as questions without instructions as to their legal effect."

Cliché It refers to any expression so often used that its freshness and clarity have worn off. The reader or speaker of the expression pays no attention to the real meaning of the words. Phrases such as "goes without saying, beyond the shadow of a doubt, believe it or not, putting the cart before the horse, or a bird in the hand" all fall into the category of cliché.

Idiom It is a use of words, a grammatical construction peculiar to a given language, or an expression that cannot be translated literally into a second language. Here are some examples: "shoot yourself in the foot", "don't put all your eggs in one basket", etc.

Problem Words and Phrases

By mastering the spelling and meaning of these confusing words and phrases, you will take care of many of your problems in diction.

accept/except *Accept* is a verb and means "to receive willingly".

I *accept* an apology or an invitation.

Except means "excluding" or "but".

I answered all *except* the last question. (all but...)

advice/advise *Advice* is a noun while *advise* is a verb.

I *advise* you to go.

I need some *advice*.

affect/effect *Affect* is a verb and means "to influence".

Her opinion will *affect* my decision.

Effect means "result". If *a*, *an*, or *the* is in front of the word, then you'll know it isn't a verb and will use *effect*.

Her words had an *effect* on my decision.

appraise/apprise *Appraise* means to estimate the value of; *apprise* means to inform, to give notice.

He *appraised* the estate at three million dollars.

The supervisor said that he was not *apprised* of the agendas in time to study them.

awhile/a while The adverb *awhile* means for a short time. The noun *while* means a short time or an understood time. A *while* is usually preceded by a preposition.

The committee discussion lasted *awhile*.

The chemist discussed the results of the experiment for *a while*.

The chairman returned in *a while*.

behalf: in behalf of/on behalf of *In behalf of* means in the interest of; *on behalf of* means in place of or as the agent of.

They pleaded for contributions *in behalf of* the homeless, starving poor.

The lawyer pleaded *on behalf of* the three defendants.

brake/break *Brake* means “to slow or stop motion”. It’s also the name of the device that slows or stops motion.

You *brake* to avoid an accident.

Break means “to shatter” or “to split”. It’s also the name of an interruption, as “a coffee break”.

You *break* a dish or an engagement or a record.

coarse/course *Coarse* describes texture, as coarse cloth.

The sofa was upholstered in *coarse* cloth.

Course is used for all other meanings.

Of *course* I enjoyed that *course*.

company/concern/firm/corporation *Company* is used for a group of people associated in a business or industrial enterprise. It may also be used for individuals whose names do not appear in the title of the business: “Webb and Company”. A *concern* means a business or manufacturing unit, not a professional organization. A *corporation* is a legal entity and must be chartered under the laws of incorporation. A *firm* is a partnership of two or more persons; it is usually

unincorporated and is not a legal entity.

complement/compliment The one spelled with an *e* completes something or brings it to perfection.

His blue tie *complements* his gray suit.

The one spelled with an *i* has to do with praise.

He *complimented* her on her well-written paper.

conscious/conscience *Conscious* means “aware”.

I was not *conscious* that it was raining.

The extra *n* in *conscience* should remind you of NO, which is what your *conscience* often says to you.

My *conscience* told me not to cut class.

continual/continuous *Continual* means close recurrence, as in “*continual* showers”. *Continuous* means uninterrupted, as in “*continuous* rain”.

dessert/desert *Dessert* is the sweet one, the one you like two helpings of.

We had chocolate cake for *dessert*.

The other one, *desert*, is used for all other meanings.

Don't *desert* me.

The camel moved slowly across the *desert*.

disinterested/uninterested A *disinterested* person is unbiased and has no selfish interest in the matter being considered. *Disinterested* is also used, especially in the United States, to mean *uninterested*.

The judge, who had invested most of his savings in the corporation on trial, could hardly be described as *disinterested*.

Some *uninterested* students complain that their professors are boring.

does/dose *Does* is a verb.

He *does* his work well.

A *dose* is an amount of medicine.

That was a bitter *dose* to swallow.

eminent/imminent/immanent *Eminent* means distinguished, outstanding; *imminent* means about to happen, threatening; *immanent* means having existence or effect only within the mind or consciousness, inherent.

The *eminent* scholar expected to win the Nobel Prize.

The *imminent* storm caused the speaker to end her Commencement address abruptly.

His busy life never even suggested his *immanent* plans.

fourth/forth The number *fourth* has "four" in it.

This is our *fourth* game.

If you don't mean a number, use *forth*.

She walked back and *forth*.

grateful/gratified *Grateful* means thankful; *gratified* means satisfied and implies the fulfillment of an *expectation* or wish.

He was *grateful* for her help with his report.

She was *gratified* that her report led to a change in a faulty company policy.

incredible/incredulous *Incredible* means unbelievable; *incredulous* means skeptical or unbelieving.

Her teaching was *incredible*.

He was *incredulous* when they reported seeing an unidentified flying object.

job/position/post/situation/occupation These words have essentially the same meaning, the difference being mainly in connotation. *Job* was once considered colloquial but now is generally used to describe any work or the specific duties of an employed person. *Position* is a more formal term and is generally used in applying for employment. *Situation* is rather old-fashioned, although it remains in classified advertisements: "Situations Wanted". *Post* meaning position is used mainly in British English. It is used in the United States to designate a diplomatic assignment. *Occupation* signifies an activity that may or may not be compensated: doctor, student homemaker, carpenter, and so on. Information on one's *occupation* is often requested on

forms for personal data.

lightening/lightning *Lightening* is the present participle of the verb “to lighten”, meaning to remove a burden or to cheer or gladden or to make or become brighter. *Lightning* is the flashing light produced by atmospheric electricity discharging; the adjective *lightning* means with the speed and suddenness of *lightning*.

After a depressing meeting his antics were aimed at *lightening* our spirits.

His *lightning* decisions about hiring and firing were criticized by the other supervisors.

loose/lose *Loose* means “not tight”. Note how that word is formed, it has plenty of room for two *o*'s.

My shoestring is *loose*.

The other one, *lose*, has room for only one *o*.

They are going to *lose* that game.

media/medium/mediums *Medium* is the singular and *media* is the plural for a channel of communication. *Medium* is also a person who claims to be a link of communication between the spiritual world and the earthly; the plural of this *medium* is *mediums*.

If discussion is restricted to the *medium* of radio, the candidates must omit the *media* of television and print.

Both *mediums* wore filmy white gowns with long wide sleeves and moved their arms languorously.

moral/morale *Moral* has to do with right and wrong.

It was a *moral* question.

Morale is “the spirit of a group or an individual”.

The *morale* of the team was excellent.

personal/personnel *Personal* means “private”.

That was his *personal* opinion.

Personnel means “a group of employees”.

She was in charge of *personnel* at the factory.

precipitant/precipitate/precipitous As an adjective *precipitant* means hasty, speedy; as an adjective *precipitate* means rash, without deliberate care, excessively hasty, sudden, or abrupt. *Precipitous*, an adjective, means very steep, like precipice. *Precipitate* usually modifies actions; *precipitous*, physical characteristics.

Precipitant dismissal from the program was the first result she met.

Her *precipitate* attempt to flout the warning by climbing the steepest section caused an accident.

Those who had heart trouble were told to avoid the *precipitous* climb.

In science *precipitate* may be a noun or a verb, and *precipitant* is a noun. Anything *precipitated* from a solution is the *precipitate*; anything causing the precipitation is the *precipitant*.

The *precipitate* obtained from the first experiment was more satisfactory than that from the second, but the *precipitant* used in the second experiment was less expensive.

The meteorologist predicted that a cold wind arriving late in the day would cause the clouds to *precipitate* snow or sleet before morning.

principal/principle *Principal* means “main”.

The *principal* of the school spoke.

The *principal* problem is financial.

A *principle* is a “rule”.

She had high moral *principles*.

prescribe/proscribe *Prescribe* means to write or give medical prescriptions, to lay down as a guide or rule, or to name as a remedy. *Proscribe* means to forbid as harmful or unlawful, to prohibit.

She *prescribed* a low-salt diet.

The doctor *proscribed* visitors, TV, and other excitement.

specie/species *Specie* means money in coin; in *specie* means in the same or similar form and in coin. *Species*, both the singular and plural form of the noun, means a class with common attributes or a division of a class or category. The word also has other meanings, especially in biology.

It is difficult to assess the *specie* found in ships that sank hundreds of years ago.

Her study showed that at least one *species* of gorilla has made remarkable progress in communicating.