Aspects of Language

WORD LIST

archaic  argot  connotation  denotation  idiom  jargon  pidgin  semantics  standard  vernacular

English exists in many fascinating varieties. There is the formal Standard English we use when we write essays, and the vernacular we use with our friends. Different groups of people have their own colorful argot, or slang vocabulary. Different languages can be combined to make pidgin. Archaic words, such as thorp for “village” and dugud for “honor,” are found only in very old writings. This lesson deals with language in its many levels and forms.

1. **archaic** (ār-kāˈ̇l) 
   adjective from Greek arkhaios, “ancient”
   No longer used or applicable; ancient
   • The words thou and thee were once common, but are now archaic.

2. **argot** (ārˈgōt, ärˈgōt) 
   noun
   The informal, specialized vocabulary or expressions of a particular group
   • In the argot of editing and publishing, TK means “to come later,” and stet means “let it stand,” or “do not change as marked.”

3. **connotation** (kōnˈə-tāˈshān) noun from Latin com-, “together” + notare, “to mark”
   Ideas or meanings suggested by a word; associations that go beyond a word’s literal meaning
   • Whereas the word slender has a positive connotation, the word skinny has a negative one.

   connote verb The word throng connotes a large crowd that is moving toward something.

   connotative adjective Although the word speak has few connotative meanings, babble suggests talking on and on.

4. **denotation** (dēˈnō-tāˈshān) noun from Latin de-, “completely” + notare, “to mark”
   The most direct or specific meaning of a word
   • The denotation of the word apartment is “a residence located in a building where there are other residences.”

   denote verb A farm denotes a place where crops are grown or animals are raised.

   denotative adjective Although the denotative meaning of hearth is “a fireplace,” its connotative meaning suggests it is found in a home or a warm, comfortable place.
5. idiom (i’d-e-em) noun from Greek idios, “personal; private”
   An expression with a special meaning that cannot be understood from the meanings of the individual words; a nonliteral expression
   • English has many idioms that use the word *put*, including “to put up with,” “a put down,” and “to put across.”

   idiomatic adjective It is often difficult for people learning English as a second language to understand its many idiomatic expressions.

6. jargon (jahr-gan) noun
   a. A specialized vocabulary of a profession or trade
      • Expressions like *subgialid hematoma* and *split sagittal suture* are part of medical jargon.
   b. Nonsensical or meaningless communication
      • The state report on local taxes was just jargon to most readers.

7. pidgin (pij-an) noun
   A simplified form of speech developed from two or more languages
   • Tok Pisin is a pidgin of German, English, and native languages spoken in Papua, New Guinea.

8. semantics (si-man’tks) noun from Greek *sema*, “sign”
   a. The study of meaning and word interpretation
      • Writers and other people who work with words are usually interested in semantics.
   b. The exact meaning of a word
      • Let’s not argue over the semantics of the word *suburb*.

   semantic adjective The difference between a threatened species and an endangered species is mainly semantic because they are treated the same under the law.

   semanticist noun The semanticist told us that silly once meant “holy.”

9. standard (stahn’dard) from Latin sta-, “stand”
   a. adjective Conforming to the established language used by educated speakers
      • Standard English is used by practically all television news announcers.
   b. noun Something established as a measure of quality
      • The Pulitzer Prize sets the standard for high-quality journalism.

   standardize verb When dictionaries came into widespread use, they helped to standardize spelling.

10. vernacular (var-nak’ya-lar) from Latin *verna*, “native slave”
    a. noun Everyday language, rather than literary language
       • Expressions like “OK” and “bye-bye” are part of English vernacular.
    b. noun The native language or dialect of a country, place, or group
       • Mark Twain is well known for his use of Southern vernacular.
    c. adjective Commonly spoken by a region or group
       • The vernacular expression “Y’all” is common in the southern United States.
WRITE THE CORRECT WORD

Write the correct word in the space next to each definition.

1. everyday language
2. conforming to established usage
3. simple speech from combined languages
4. the study of word meanings
5. specialized words of a profession or trade
6. ancient
7. a specific meaning of a word
8. a nonliteral expression
9. the suggested meaning of a word
10. informal expressions of a particular group

COMPLETE THE SENTENCE

Write the letter for the word that best completes each sentence.

1. I’m glad _____ laws against going hatless in public are no longer enforced.
   a. standard  b. archaic  c. vernacular  d. pidgin
2. In the _____ of New Englanders, wicked means “very” or “extremely.”
   a. argot  b. standard  c. denotation  d. archaic
3. The term Super Bowl has _____ that go far beyond a mere game.
   a. vernaculars  b. denotations  c. connotations  d. idioms
4. The _____ of the word patriotism is “love of one’s country.”
   a. semantics  b. denotation  c. pidgin  d. standard
5. “Blowing smoke” is a popular _____ that comes from magicians who used smoke to conceal the way they did their tricks.
   a. denotation  b. argot  c. idiom  d. standard
6. NASA engineers frequently use complex _____ to explain space explorations.
   a. jargon  b. connotation  c. pidgin  d. archaic
7. Good writers must understand proper word usage and _____.
   a. pidgin  b. jargon  c. standard  d. semantics
8. The German boy and his Spanish friend developed a(n) _____ to communicate.
   a. semantic  b. pidgin  c. archaic  d. denotation
9. Most newspapers follow the grammatical rules of _____ English.
   a. Standard  b. pidgin  c. jargon  d. connotative
10. We often use the _____ form of English when speaking with friends.
    a. archaic  b. pidgin  c. vernacular  d. idiom

Challenge: _____ words, while rarely utilized in _____ conversation, are employed in the numerous works of literature that make up our heritage.

a. Connotative...jargon  b. Pidgin...idiom  c. Archaic...vernacular
Is It Really English?

“My mom was dead set against my going to the party, and I thought I’d have to bite the bullet. But then she did a 180. She’s letting me go, as long as Jerry also comes along to keep an eye on me.”

Do you understand the sentences above? (1) If not, it’s probably because they contain four idioms. (2) In our vernacular, idioms are commonly used. (3) But if you were just learning English as a second language, the semantics of these phrases would probably seem strange. You might wonder: Was the mother dead? Why did she bite a bullet? What is a 180? Will Jerry take out an eye and put it on her? (4) Even in standard language usage, all may not be what it seems. (5) Words may have a denotation that is usually well understood by the listener. (6) But that listener may be completely unaware of the word’s connotation. For example, the word gaunt means “thin and bony,” but it is often used to describe someone who is ill. It has developed a connotation of illness even though it is not part of the word’s meaning.

(7) Often, people in professional fields use jargon. A doctor who says “Marla suffers from a pruritic skin condition” means simply that Marla’s skin is itchy. A lawyer discussing jus cogens is talking about fundamental principles of international law.

(8) Some social groups also use their own argot. One thief might warn another that a “blue suit” (a police officer) is coming to “crack” (interrupt) a crime.

(9) Pidgins are colorful, but often difficult to understand. They evolve when different peoples who don’t speak one another’s languages come together and try to communicate. For example, a pidgin combining English and the native Hawaiian language is spoken by many Hawaiians today. In this pidgin, brok’ da mout means “delicious”; brah is a buddy; and bumbye means “when we get around to it.”

Have you read or seen Shakespearean plays? (10) Because his works were written almost four hundred years ago, many of the words and phrases in them are now archaic. Writers of long ago used words that seem like another language to us. “Dost thou rejoice when thou dost discovereth” the meaning of this sentence?

Although our own language may at times seem strange or even foreign, its diversity lends a wonderful richness to our culture. Jargon, argot, vernacular, connotations, and archaic words all make English an interesting language.

Each sentence below refers to a numbered sentence in the passage. Write the letter of the choice that gives the sentence a meaning that is closest to the original sentence.

_____ 1. If not, it’s probably because they contain four _______.
   a. nonliteral expressions  b. specific definitions  c. accents  d. alternatives

_____ 2. In our ________, idioms are commonly used.
   a. combined languages  b. everyday language  c. exact definitions  d. specialized vocabulary

_____ 3. But if you were just learning English as a second language, the _______ of these phrases would probably seem strange.
   a. simplified forms  b. word meanings  c. established use  d. combined languages

_____ 4. Even in ________ language usage, all may not be what it seems.
   a. ancient  b. specialized  c. average  d. established

4 Aspects of Language
5. Words may have a(n) ______ that is usually well understood by the listener.
   a. nonliteral use  b. vague idea  c. specific meaning  d. informal use

6. But that listener may be completely unaware of the word’s ______.
   a. spelling  b. rhythm  c. educated usage  d. nonliteral meaning

7. Often, people in professional fields use ______.
   a. a specialized language  b. ancient words  c. body language  d. literal meanings

8. Some social groups also use their own ______.
   a. established language  b. accents  c. informal language  d. stories

9. ______ are colorful, but often difficult to understand.

10. Many of the words and phrases in them are now ______.
    a. hard to read  b. out of date  c. specialized  d. foreign

Indicate whether the statements below are TRUE or FALSE according to the passage.

1. Pidgins and archaic expressions are no longer in use.
2. English from 400 years ago is hard for most modern students to understand.
3. Pidgin languages develop when people have difficulty communicating otherwise.

WRITING EXTENDED RESPONSES

Think of a show, which you watch or listen to, that features nonstandard language. Give an example from the program, showing the use of argot, jargon, or another type of language described in this lesson. In a persuasive essay, explain why this program’s use of language is effective or ineffective. You should give at least two reasons for your opinion. Your essay should be at least three paragraphs long. Use at least three lesson words in your essay and underline them.

WRITE THE DERIVATIVE

Complete the sentence by writing the correct form of the word shown in parentheses. You may not need to change the form that is given.

1. “What’s up?” or “What’s new?” are ______ expressions we use to learn the latest happenings in our friends’ lives. (vernacular)

2. Learning proper grammar helps us express ourselves in ______ English. (standard)

3. The two merchants had difficulty understanding each other, so they communicated in ______. (pidgin)
4. _____ study the meaning and interpretation of words. (semantics)

5. The high-tech industry is the source of much of the complex _____ we encounter today. (jargon)

6. “Seeing red,” and “hitting the roof,” are _____ expressions. (idiom)

7. The _____ meaning of the word heart is “an organ that pumps blood through the body.” (denotation)

8. _____ meanings of the word heart can suggest love, loyalty, the center, or faith. (connotation)

9. The linguist studied the _____ of more than a dozen cultures. (argot)

10. Lincoln's phrase “Four score and seven years ago” sounds _____ to us now. (archaic)

**Find the Example**

Choose the answer that best describes the action or situation.

_____ 1. An example of a musician's jargon
    a. tax relief  
b. B flat  
c. clarified butter  
d. maximum security

_____ 2. A vernacular expression used by train conductors
    a. How ya doin'?  
b. All aboard.  
c. G'day mate.  
d. Pleased to meet you.

_____ 3. The phrase that uses Standard English to express disbelief
    a. I don't believe it!  
b. No way!  
c. Get out of here!  
d. Get real!

_____ 4. Two people most likely to communicate in pidgin
    a. two family members  
b. a foreigner and a native  
c. an English person and an American  
d. two people from the same town

_____ 5. Something that is now archaic in most of the world
    a. jet airplane  
b. high-speed train  
c. motor boat  
d. horse-drawn carriage

_____ 6. The most likely time when a worker would use argot
    a. when talking with a neighbor  
b. when shopping for food  
c. when speaking to a colleague  
d. when ordering dinner

_____ 7. A word that has a positive connotation
    a. awkward  
b. mean  
c. gracious  
d. silly

_____ 8. An example of an idiom
    a. She's feeling sad.  
b. We're fired up.  
c. They were excited.  
d. He's disappointed.

_____ 9. The denotation of the word “peaceful”
    a. calm and tranquil  
b. full of pieces  
c. weak; without strength  
d. combative; warlike

_____ 10. The person most likely to be interested in semantics
    a. dancer  
b. writer  
c. painter  
d. drummer