

# 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.



archaic language

1. **archaic** (är-kä'ik) *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** (är'gō, är'gät) *noun*  
The informal, specialized vocabulary or expressions of a particular group  
• In the **argot** of editing and publishing, *TK* means “to come later,” and *set* means “let it stand,” or “do not change as marked.”

*Argot*, a French word, originally referred to the language of thieves.

3. **connotation** (kōn'ə-tā'shən) *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** (dē'nō-tā'shən) *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** (ɪd'ē-əm) *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** (jār'gən) *noun*

a. A specialized vocabulary of a profession or trade

- Expressions like *subgaleal 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** (pīj'ən) *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** (sĭ-măn'tiks) *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** (stăn'dərd) 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** (vər-năk'yə-lər) 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.

*Jargon* refers to words used in a profession. In contrast, *argot* is usually informal slang.

By convention, *standard* is capitalized when used in the phrase *Standard English*.



**WRITE THE CORRECT WORD**

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

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



## READING COMPREHENSION

### 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 rejoiceth 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



- \_\_\_\_\_ 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.  
a. Jokes                      b. Ancient words                      c. Combined languages                      d. Word meanings
- \_\_\_\_\_ 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                      c. an English person and an American  
 b. a foreigner and a native                      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                      c. when speaking to a colleague  
 b. when shopping for food                      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                      c. weak; without strength  
 b. full of pieces                      d. combative; warlike
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. The person most likely to be interested in *semantics*  
 a. dancer                      b. writer                      c. painter                      d. drummer