

(“pig” as a “domesticated mammalian . . . , and its denotation (pig, pigs, pigs . . .). But some terms have a definition, yet lack denotation: for example, a “mermaid” exists by definition only (“a creature half woman and half fish”). The term has no denotation because an extensional mermaid is not to be found. Terms in mathematics which have “logical existence” but no extensional reference can also be said to have informative connotations, but no denotation.

Denotations would seem to offer few problems of interpretation, since we are dealing here with words apart from the personal feelings that they may arouse. But such is not the case, because the same word may denote different things to people in different occupations or in different parts of the world. An English “robin” is an entirely different species from the American bird of that name. Many different and unrelated kinds of fish are denoted by the word “bream” (pronounced “brim” in the South). Belgian hares, we are told, are “really rabbits,” while the American jackrabbit is “really a hare.” The term “crocus,” as popularly used, refers in different parts of the country to different flowers. The English sparrow is not a sparrow at all, but a weaver finch. House finches are often called linnets. The linnet is a European bird not found in North America.

Such differences in popular and regional terminology are among the reasons for establishing scientific names for plants and animals—names that are accepted and used by the entire international scientific community.

Affective Connotations

The affective connotations of a word, on the other hand, are the aura of personal feelings it arouses, as, for example, “pig”: “Ugh! Dirty, evil-smelling creatures, wallowing in filthy sties,” and so on. While there is no necessary agreement about these feelings—some people like pigs and others don’t—it is the existence of these feelings that enables us to use words, under certain circumstances, for their affective connotations alone, without regard to their informative connotations. That is to say, when we are strongly moved, we express our feelings by uttering words with the affective connotations appropriate to our feelings, without paying any attention to the informative connotations. We angrily call people “pigs,” “rats,” “wolves,” “skunks,” or lovingly call them “honey,” “sugar,” “duck,” and

"sweetie pie." Indeed, almost all verbal expressions of feeling make use, to some extent, of the affective connotations of words.

All words have, according to the uses to which they are put, some affective character. There are many words that exist more for their affective value than for their informative value; for example, we can refer to that man as "that gentleman," "that individual," "that person," "that gent," "that guy," "that hombre," "that fellow," or "that nerd"—and while the person referred to may be the same in all these cases, each of these terms reveals a difference in our feelings toward him. Dealers in knickknacks may write "Gyfte Shoppe" over the door, hoping that such a spelling carries, even if their merchandise does not, the flavor of antiquity. Affective connotations suggestive of England and Scotland are often sought in the choice of brand names for men's clothing—"Regent Park," "Bond Street," "London Fog"—and for real-estate developments—"Coventry West," "Hyde Park." Sellers of perfume choose names for their products that suggest France—"Mon Désir," "Indiscret," "Evening in Paris"—and expensive brands come in "flacons," never bottles. Consider, too, the differences among the following forms of address:

I have the honor to inform Your Excellency . . .
 This is to advise you . . .
 I should like to tell you, sir . . .
 I'm telling you, Mister . . .
 Cheez, boss, git a load of dis . . .
 Listen, punk . . .

The parallel columns below also illustrate how affective connotations can be changed while extensional meanings remain the same:

Finest quality filet mignon.
 Cubs trounce Giants 5-3.
 McCormick Bill steamrolled through
 Senate.
 Japanese divisions advance five miles.
 French armies in rapid retreat!

The governor appeared to be gravely concerned and said a statement would be issued in a few days after careful examination of the facts.

First-class piece of dead cow.
 Score: Cubs 5, Giants 3.
 Senate passes McCormick Bill over strong opposition.
 Japs stopped after five-mile advance.
 The retirement of the French forces to previously prepared positions in the rear was accomplished briskly and efficiently.
 The governor was on the spot.

Slanting

Not all forms of judgments are as direct as the ones discussed above. In the course of writing reports, despite all efforts to keep judgments out, some will creep in. An account of a man, for example, may read like this:

“He had apparently not shaved for several days, and his face and hands were covered with grime. His shoes were torn, and his coat, which was several sizes too small for him, was spotted with dried clay.”

Though no judgment has been directly stated, one is obviously implied. Let us contrast this with another description of the same man:

“Although his face was bearded and neglected, his eyes were clear, and he looked straight ahead as he walked rapidly down the road. He seemed very tall; perhaps the fact that his coat was too small for him emphasized that impression. He was carrying a book under his left arm, and a small terrier ran at his heels.”

In this example, the impression about the man is considerably changed, simply by the inclusion of new details and the subordination of unfavorable ones. Even if explicit judgments are kept out of one's writing, implied judgments will get in.

How, then, can we ever give an impartial report? The answer is, of course, that we cannot attain complete impartiality while we use the language of everyday life. Even with the very impersonal language of science, the task is sometimes difficult. Nevertheless, we can, by being aware of the favorable or unfavorable feelings that certain words and facts can

arouse, attain enough impartiality for practical purposes. Such awareness enables us to *balance implied favorable and unfavorable judgments against each other*. To learn to do this, it is a good idea to write *two essays at a time on the same subject, both strict reports, to be read side by side: the first to contain facts and details likely to prejudice the reader in favor of the subject, the second to contain those likely to prejudice the reader against it.* For example:

FOR

He had white teeth.
His eyes were blue, his hair blond and abundant.
He had on a clean blue shirt.
He often helped his wife with the dishes.
His pastor spoke very highly of him.
He liked dogs.

AGAINST

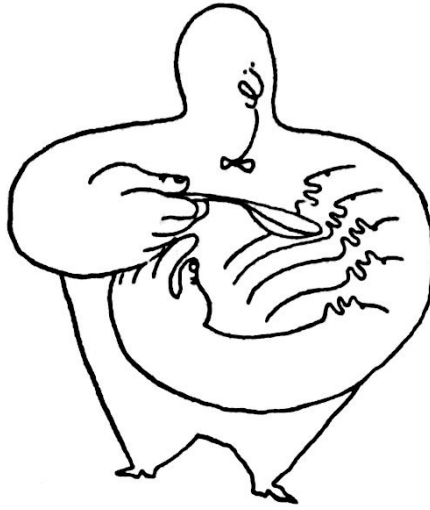
His teeth were uneven.
He rarely looked people straight in the eye.
His shirt was frayed at the cuffs.
He rarely got through drying the dishes without breaking a few.
His grocer said he was always slow about paying his bills.
He disliked children.

This process of selecting details that are favorable or unfavorable to the subject being described may be termed *slanting*. Slanting gives no explicit judgments, but it differs from reporting in that it deliberately or inadvertently makes certain judgments inescapable. One-sided or biased slanting, not uncommon in private gossip and backbiting and all too common in the "interpretive reporting" of newspapers and magazines, can be described as a technique of lying without actually telling any lies.

Discovering One's Bias

When a news account tells a story in a way we dislike, leaving out facts we think important and playing up others in a way we think unfair, we are tempted to say, "Look how unfairly they've slanted the story!" Such a statement, of course, is an inference about the story's reporters and editors. We are assuming that what seems important or unimportant to us is equally weighty or trivial to them, and on the basis of that assumption we infer that the writers and editors "deliberately" gave the story a misleading emphasis. Is this necessarily the case? Can the reader, as an outsider, determine whether a story assumes a given form because the editors "deliberately slanted it that way" or because that was the way the events appeared to them?

The point is that, by the process of selection and abstraction imposed on us by our own interests and background, experience comes to all of us—including editors—already "slanted." What is important to a 50-year-old suburban lawyer will likely be different from what is important to a 20-year-old, unemployed, inner-city parent.



Press secretary spoon-feeding the press

The writer who is neither an advocate nor an opponent avoids slanting, except in search of special literary effects. The avoidance of slanting is not only a matter of being impartial; it is even more importantly a matter of making good maps of the territory of experience. The profoundly biased individual cannot make good maps because she can see an enemy *only* as an enemy and a friend *only* as a friend. The individual with genuine skill in writing—and in thinking—can with imagination and insight look at the same subject from many points of view. The following examples may illustrate the fullness and solidity of descriptions thus written:

Adam turned to look at him. It was, in a way, as though this were the first time he had laid eyes on him. He saw the strong, black shoulders under the red-check calico, the long arms lying loose, forward over the knees, the strong hands, seamed and calloused, holding the reins. He looked at the face. The thrust of the jawbone was strong, but the lips were heavy and low, with a piece of chewed straw hanging out one side of the mouth. The eyelids were pendulous, slightly swollen-looking, and the eyes bloodshot. Those eyes, Adam knew, could sharpen to a quick, penetrating, assessing glance. But now, looking at that slack, somnolent face, he could scarcely believe that. ROBERT PENN WARREN, *Wilderness*

Soon after the little princess, there walked in a massively built, stout young man in spectacles, with a cropped head, light breeches in the mode of the day, with a high lace ruffle and a ginger-coloured coat. This stout young man [Pierre] was the illegitimate son of a celebrated dandy of the days of Catherine, Count Bezuhov, who was now dying in Moscow. He had not yet entered any branch of the service; he had only just returned from abroad, where he had been educated, and this was his first appearance in society. Anna Pavlovna greeted him with a nod reserved for persons of the very lowest hierarchy in her drawing-room. . . .

Pierre was clumsy, stout and uncommonly tall, with huge, red hands; he did not, as they say, know how to come into a drawing-room and still less how to get out of one, that is, how to say something particularly agreeable on going away.