

Section 2: Word meaning or lexical meaning (Cont.)

2.4. Denotation and connotation

- The denotation (denotative meaning) of a word is **the core, central or referential meaning** of the word found in a dictionary.
- The connotation (connotative meaning) of a word is **the additional meaning** that the word has beyond its denotative meaning. It shows *people's emotions and/or attitudes* towards what the word refers to.

Ex1. **Child** is denotatively described as [+human], [−mature] and [±male].

- Positive connotation: [+affectionate] or [+innocent].
- Negative connotation: [+noisy] or [+irritating].

Ex2. **Woman** is denotatively described as [+human], [+mature]&[+female].

- Positive connotation: [+devoted] or [+patient].
- Negative connotation: [+wicked] or [+talkative].

Distinction between **denotation** and **connotation**

| | | DENOTATION | CONNOTATION |
|-----------------|------------------------|---------------------------|--|
| | | what a lexical item means | emotions and/or attitudes towards what a lexical item refers to |
| | | core, central | peripheral |
| | | referential | social, affective |
| <i>bachelor</i> | <i>unmarried man</i> | | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- still single after the usual age for marrying- decided by himself to stay single- enjoying freedom, friendship, life, etc.- ready for his impending marriage |
| <i>spinster</i> | <i>unmarried woman</i> | | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- still single after the usual age for marrying- <u>not</u> decided by herself to stay single- left in an unfavourable state- a symbol for some failure in life |

Positive Connotations

Directions: Read the pairs of words below. Which word has the more positive connotation? Write the letter of the word on the blank at the left. (5)

- | | | | |
|-------|----|---------------|--------------|
| _____ | 1. | a. basement | b. cellar |
| _____ | 2. | a. spare room | b. junk room |
| _____ | 3. | a. junk | b. garbage |
| _____ | 4. | a. leftovers | b. food |
| _____ | 5. | a. gossiped | b. visited |

Negative Connotations

Directions: Read the pairs of words below. Which word has the more negative connotation? Write the letter of the word on the blank at the left. (5)

_____ 1. a. happy

b. bouncing off the walls

_____ 2. a. sloppy

b. underdressed

_____ 3. a. jock

b. athlete

_____ 4. a. odd

b. unique

_____ 5. a. intimidating

b. bully

Denotation ~ Connotation

Directions: Read the word before each pair of descriptions. Read the two selections carefully & consider the descriptions below. Write **con** for connotation or **den** for denotation on the blank at the left. (12)

vacation

1. beach, airplane, sleeping, skiing
2. a time away from work

homework

3. busy work, papers, red pens, reading
4. assignments that check your learning

dentist

5. a doctor that examines the oral cavity
6. drill, blood, toothache, expensive

automobile

7. Porsche, BMW, convertible, junker, lemon
8. a transportation method, a vehicle

dog

9. a canine being
10. Spot, pit bull, man's best friend

turkey

11. a member of the bird family
12. goofy, dressing, Thanksgiving, hunting

Connotation Practice

Words with similar dictionary meanings often have different connotations, so it is very important for a writer to choose words carefully. Consider the following table. Each row contains a list of words with similar dictionary meanings but different shades of feeling.

| | Neutral | Favorable (Positive) | Unfavorable (Negative) |
|-----|--------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| 1. | Inactive | | |
| 2. | Shy | | |
| 3. | Funny | | |
| 4. | Old | | |
| 5. | Reserved | | |
| 6. | Persistent | | |
| 7. | New | | |
| 8. | Conservative | | |
| 9. | Proud | | |
| 10. | Curious | | |

| Neutral | Favorable | Unfavorable |
|--------------|----------------|--------------|
| inactive | relaxed | lazy |
| shy | modest | mousy |
| funny | Good-humored | sarcastic |
| old | time-tested | out-of-date |
| reserved | dignified | stiff-necked |
| persistent | persevering | stubborn |
| new | up-to-date | newfangled |
| conservative | thrifty | miserly |
| proud | self-confident | conceited |
| curious | inquisitive | nosy |

Decide if the sentences below use literal or figurative language. Then, place an “L” or an “F” before each one.

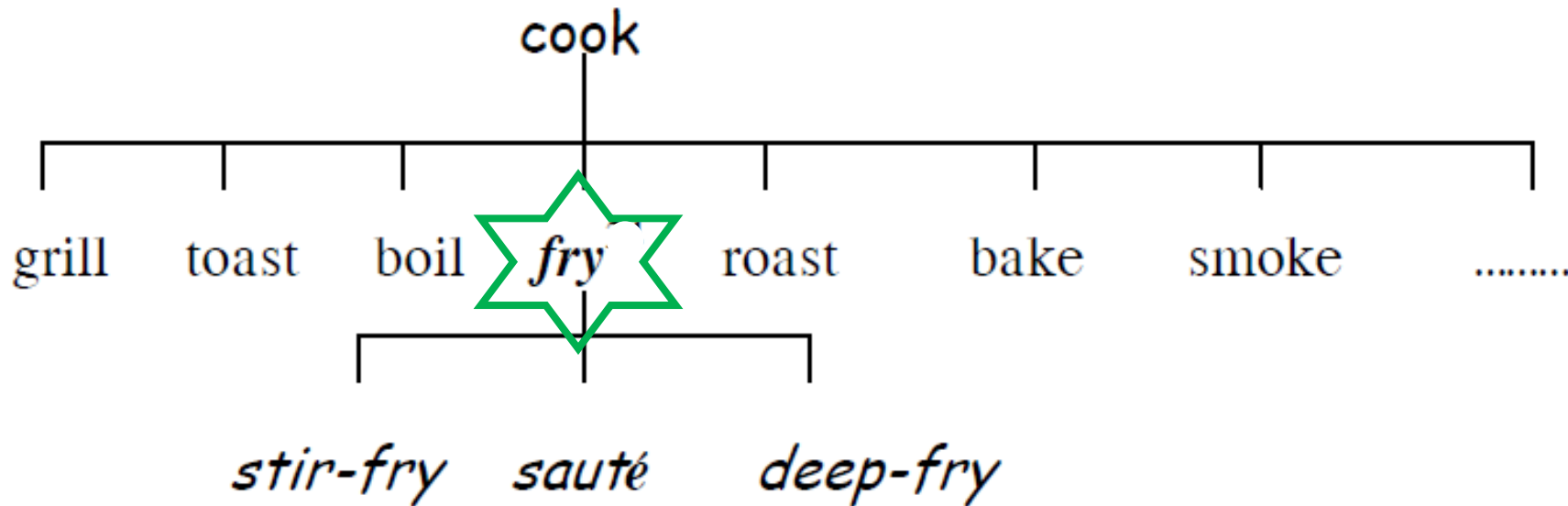
- _____ 1. Eric thinks doing schoolwork is one big video game.
- _____ 2. Lauren has made up her mind to volunteer every Tuesday after school.
- _____ 3. Thinking about summer camp makes me feel like a bundle of joy and sunshine.
- _____ 4. As I delivered my speech, my voice sounded as if I'd swallowed rocks and sand.
- _____ 5. Emma may seem clumsy, but onstage she dances like a gazelle.
- _____ 6. Jacob expresses many feelings through his photography.
- _____ 7. My teammate is a snail and a turtle combined!
- _____ 8. Before the soccer match, both teams attended a sportsmanship program.
- _____ 9. I have a ton of paperwork to do before I can enjoy the sun this summer.
- _____ 10. Sometimes I have to be my little brother's brain.

Sense relations/Semantic relationships

- 1. Hyponymy**
- 2. Synonymy**
- 3. Antonymy**
- 4. Homonymy**
- 5. Polysemy**
- 6. Lexical ambiguity**

Hyponymy

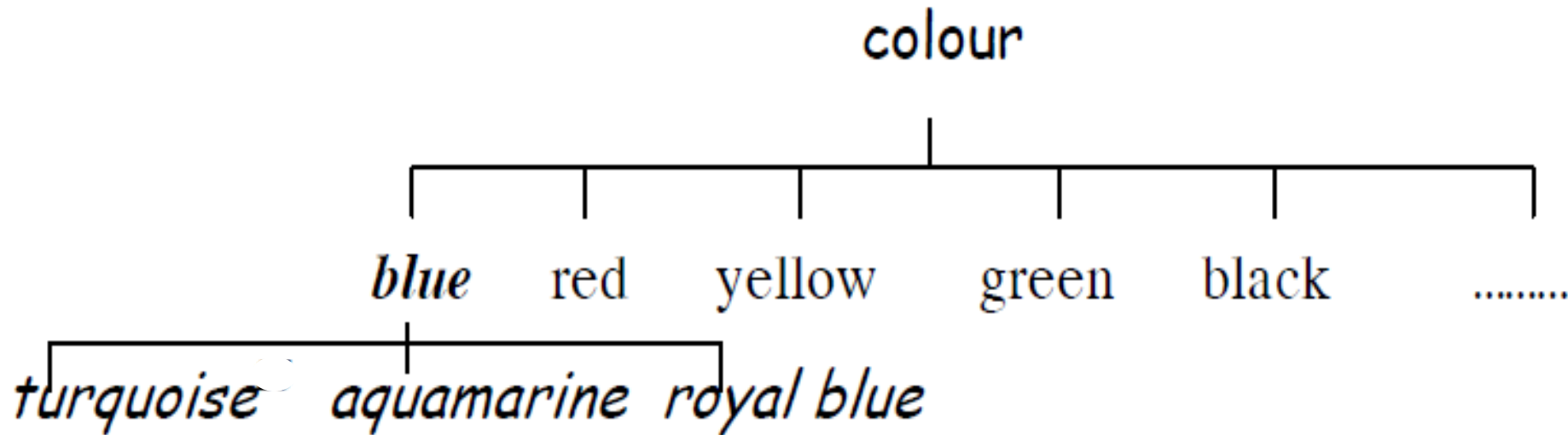
- Definition: **Hyponymy** is a relation in which the referent of a word is totally included in the referent of another word.
- In other words, *hyponymy is the relationship between each of the **hyponyms** (the “lower” words) and its **superordinate** (the “higher” word):*



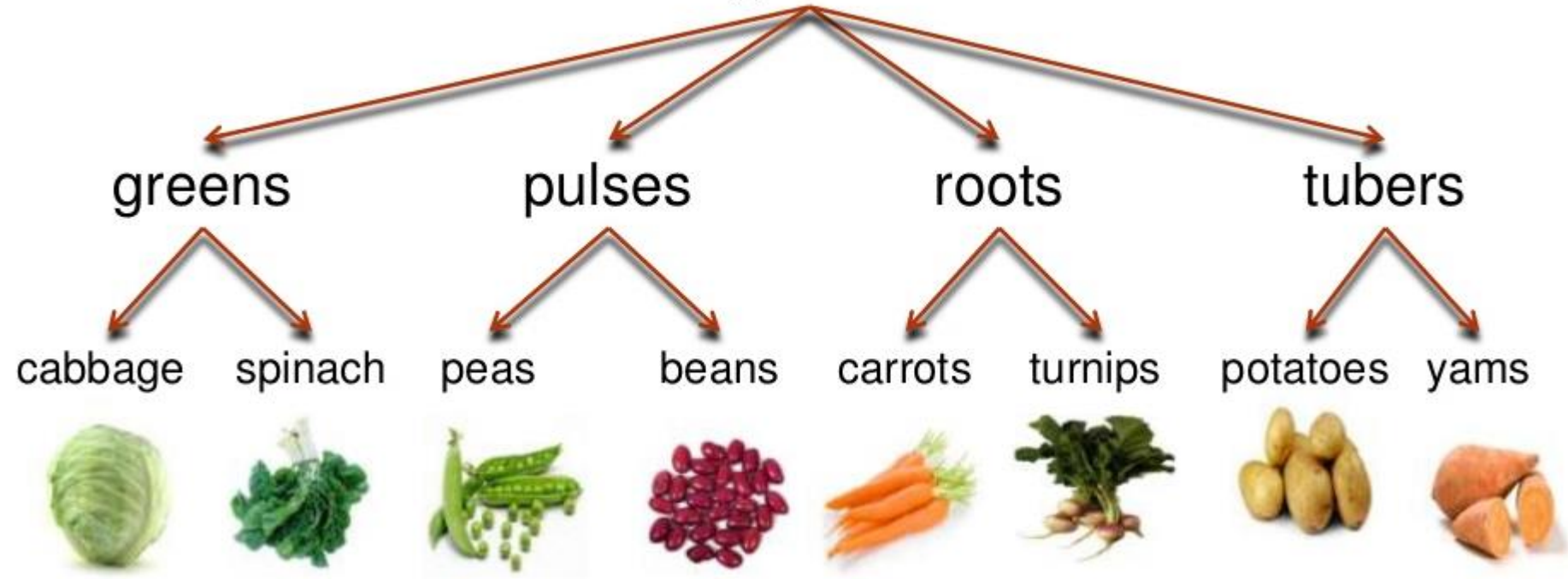
Distinction between a **hyponym** and a **superordinate**

- A **hyponym** is a word “whose referent is totally included in the referent of another word (the prefix hypo- in hyponym means ‘below’).”
- Accordingly, a **superordinate** is a word whose referent covers all the referents of its hyponyms. (The prefix hyper- in hyper(o)nym means ‘over.’)

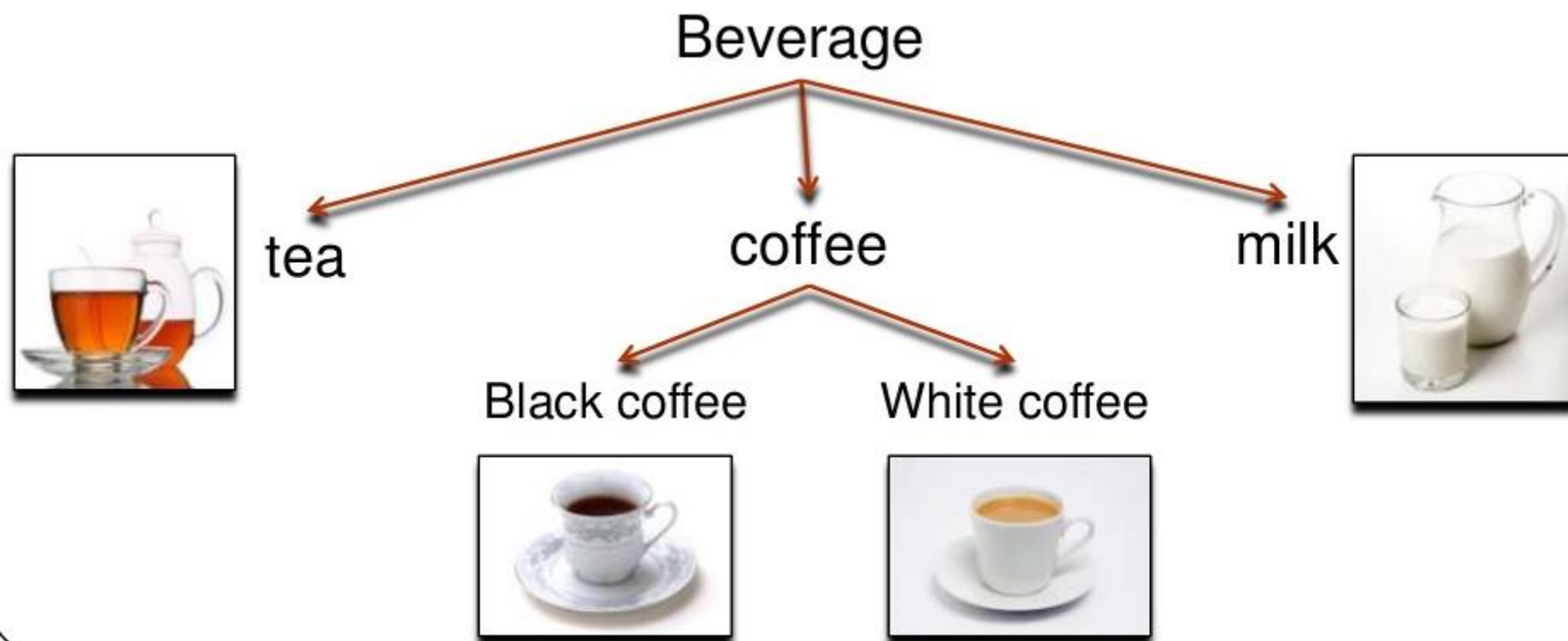
Hyponyms often exist at more than one level, resulting in multiple layers of hyponymic relationships:



vegetable



- Tea
- Black coffee
- coffee
- Milk
- White coffee
- Beverage



Hyponymy and inclusion

- HYPONYMY involves us in the notion INCLUSION in the sense that:
 - *tulip* and *rose* are included in **flower**
 - *lion* and *elephant* in **mammal** (or perhaps animal).
 - *scarlet* is included in **red**.
- Inclusion is thus a matter of class membership: the ‘super’ term is the SUPERORDINATE and the ‘lower’ term is the HYPONYM.”

Synonymy

- **Synonymy** is a relation in which various words have **different** (written and sound) **forms** but have **the same or nearly the same meaning**.

Ex1: The two English verbs **hide** and **conceal** are synonyms; they both mean *keep somebody/something from being seen or known about*.

Ex2: The four English nouns **kind**, **type**, **sort** and **variety** are synonyms; they all refer to *a group having similar characteristics*.

True synonymy

- There are **few** true synonyms in the lexicon of a language.

Example 1: **movie**, **film**, **flick** and **motion picture** may be considered as synonyms because they have the same denotative meaning.

However, these lexical items differ in their connotative meanings:

- **movie** may strike you as American
 - **film** may strike you as British or as appropriate for movie classics or art movies;
 - **flick** is used chiefly in very informal contexts
 - **motion picture** is quaintly outdated flick n [C] (dated, informal) cinema film and has connotations as a term from the thirties or forties of the 20th century.
- In brief, **movie**, **film**, **flick** and **motion picture** are not true synonyms.

True synonymy

- Example 2: **fast**, **quick** and **rapid** may be considered as synonyms because they may be used interchangeably in: *He's a fast/quick/rapid runner.*

However;

- a **fast** talker: one who is able to get out of trouble by talking cleverly,
- a **quick** talker: one who usually talks in a rapid manner;
- OR He has a **quick** mind, not a rapid mind or a fast mind;
- OR He gave her a **quick** glance, not a rapid glance or a fast glance.
- In brief, **fast**, **quick** and **rapid** are not true synonyms.

Although *true synonymy is rare*, the notion is useful because it helps describe similarities between the meanings of different terms in the lexicon.

Partial synonymy

- *Partial synonymy* is a relation in which *a polysemous word* shares *one of its meanings* with another word.
- Example:
 - (1a). You have my deep sympathy.
 - (1b). You have my profound sympathy.
 - (2a). The river is very deep at this point.
 - (2)b. *The river is very profound at this point.
- Partial synonymy leads to collocations: *a bunch of keys, a herd of sheep, a school of ants, a flock of birds, a group of teachers, a gang of thieves, etc.*