**Vocabulary of Vocabulary**

**Denotation and Connotation**

The denotation of a word is its specific dictionary meaning. Here are a few examples:

***Word***  ***Denotation***

humane kind and merciful

braggart boastful person

search look for

The connotation of a word is its tone – that is, the emotions or associations it normally arouses in people using, hearing, or reading it. Depending on what these feelings are, the connotation of a word may be favorable (positive) or unfavorable (negative, pejorative). A word that does not normally arouse strong feelings of any kind has a neutral connotation. Here are some examples:

***Word***  ***Connotation***

humane favorable

braggart unfavorable

search neutral

**Literal and Figurative Usage**

When a word is used in a ***literal*** sense, it is being employed in its strict (or primary) dictionary meaning in a situation (or context) that “makes sense” from a purely logical or realistic point of view. For example:

**On our hike we picked berries, mushrooms, and other wild plants**.

In this sentence, mushrooms is employed literally. The mushrooms are real fungi.

Sometimes words are used in a symbolic or nonliteral way in situations that do not “make sense” from a purely logical or realistic point of view. We call this nonliteral application of a word a ***figurative*** or ***metaphorical*** usage. For example:

**Sometimes a minor border incident mushrooms into a major international crisis**.

In this sentence, mushrooms is not being used in a literal sense. Rather, the word is intended to convey graphically that the problem is growing rapidly, like a mushroom.

**Synonyms**

A synonym is a word that has the same or almost the same meaning as another word. Here are some examples:

cheerful – glad select – choose attempt – try

mercy – kindness salary – pay careful – cautious

**Antonyms**

An antonym is a word that means the opposite of or almost the opposite of another word. Here are some examples:

generous – stingy love – hate give – take

swift – slow cheerful – sad conceal - reveal