

# Child, hot rod, and computerworld

Sociology



Denotation is used in all three in relation to the main topic, for example, text (A) uses very simple and literal terms your child, and alternating male and female pronoun his and her. Parents are denoted from the point of view of the child: "... being taken to bed by Mommy or Daddy at the same time every night can be the sequence of events....". Simple and repetitive commands are given such as speak quietly to your child ... then leave the room...then repeat the process... continue in this fashion...let him cry and then leave... use the same technique. This excessive ritualization is indicated both in the title of the article, and its repetitive structure. There is a clear bias towards this repetitive, organized parenting style, as opposed to, for example, a more free and easy response to the child's sleeping habits.

Example (B) uses less literal denotation and prefers descriptions that have a masculine connotation for example He saw shades of a muscle car or very graphic metaphors such as Anthony polished a turd into something that redirects attention from standard hot rods... This phrase is quite humorous, because it is a mixed metaphor, with two non-matching elements: polish and turd. The negative connotations of turd reflect the bias which this article has against ordinary cars that are not yet polished into hotrods by the typical readers.

Example (C) displays the most complex use of language, and especially so when referring to technical matters. The statement a deployment strategy will help eliminate the number of gotchas is a reference to a sport where a gotcha is a situation where a player is caught out. Another metaphor refers to baseball: we felt that we covered every base. There are clichéd metaphors such as " You have to think about everything" he says " It is a minefield" and the buck stops here but also extended metaphors relating to the way that

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the computer systems work: some of those programs stay asleep for months at a time...One day the routine woke up and began sending an email that was undeliverable. The use of the verbs "sleep" and "wake" in examples (A) and (C) are different, because the first one describes literally what a baby is doing, while the second one is a metaphor for inactive and active phases of the computer programs. The use of this human vocabulary for an inanimate object betrays the way that the professional IT specialists see computers as having human qualities that they must monitor and support, like a parent caring for an unpredictable and wayward child. Complex noun structures are used: real estate data services company because the five individual items stress the literal, factual nature of the piece. The use of noun+noun instead of adjective+noun is also very evident: visualization conversion.

Both (B) and (C) in their choice of metaphors make it clear that they are aiming at a mainly masculine readership, and the language deliberately creates an impression that the reader and writer belong to an "in-group" which shares the same language and excludes others. Text (A), however, goes out of its way to use simple, inclusive, and gender-neutral language so that it can appeal to all kinds of parents who share a common interest in parenthood.

Close analysis of these three texts helps us to refine our analytical skills by focussing on how something is being said rather than what the content is. The advantage of this process is that it reveals more about the bias which the text has towards (or against) particular reader groups and the topic at hand, which in turn allows us to gain a deeper understanding of the fine nuances of meaning and intention.

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