

Phrasing

A phrase may name also. Some phrases name, whereas some relate concepts in ways akin to stating. So phrasing overlaps the functions of naming and stating, by expanding the first and compressing the second. A phrase is a word cluster relating the concepts that the individual words stand for. The result is a conceptual complex. Phrases add to naming the very important language operation of modifying. *Man in the moon, gesture of contempt, separate peace, delightful old coot, behind the curtain, during the war* are words brought to bear on each other so that the meaning of one is modified by the meaning of the other. This joining of concepts may create an original notion or may be so standard (*man in the moon*) as to have the force of a single concept and single word only.

Phrases modify either a noun or a verb and hence function in a sentence as an adjective or an adverb. This means they express both concepts of things and concepts of relations. Prepositional phrases treat relations directly because prepositions name relations (*near, during*). Phrasing increases enormously the variety of ways things can be named. The lexicon of a language is finite, but the permutations of this lexicon by phrasing are virtually infinite.

Suppose a speaker does not know the name for a public concept. If she doesn't know the word *nave*, she will have to resort to talking around the concept—to a circumlocution—such as “the part of the church running lengthwise.” In this case, phrasing indicates lack of growth in vocabulary. Often youngsters' concepts outstrip their vocabulary and force them to invent. Phrasing of this sort shows clearly the disparity in growth between thought and speech and also shows how the presence or absence of a certain word is no accurate index to the presence or absence of certain concepts.

Phrasing from necessity spurs invention, however, and some of it has the virtue of originality. A fourth grader writing about his trip to New York City referred to the Statue of Liberty as “that big metal girl,” having forgotten the name. Fresh phrasing like this re-creates the world. It can amuse us, make us see old things in a new way, and understate. The power of poetry depends tremendously on originality of phrasing, to name anew and relate the normally unrelated.

In a kind of parody of their future growth, the fourth grader's phrase and preschooler's “Hat” do out of necessity and naivete what the best users of language do. Once again, the surface form of the language does not show this difference. Growth of phrasing consists of doing with foreknowledge of effect what the fourth grader did as makeshift. In the play *Cyrano de Bergerac*, Cyrano reels off a fanciful catalogue of the ways in which his detractor might have referred to

Cyrano's nose had he the wit to make his insults imaginative. Though not executed in phrases only, his tour de force exemplifies the high art of versatile and original referring that extends beyond the word and that learners grow toward. Skilled language-users don't always *want* to use the conventional term for a concept, because they can get various rhetorical effects by a creative circumlocution.

Furthermore, words do not exist for everything that can be conceived. Any trait whatsoever, visible or invisible, can be the defining characteristic of a class. Concept formation can be very personal. People classify other people, for example, into those who are safe or dangerous, useful or useless, attractive or repulsive, stable or flighty, and so on. Anyone can form a class concept any time merely by designating the trait or traits that would identify instances of the collection, just as anyone could decide to form a club whose members would all be left-handed Bach-loving expatriates. The more original the thinking, the more original will have to be the naming and phrasing of it. Vocabulary alone tends to stereotype thought. The only way to offset this is to combine vocabulary in unusual ways by making up phrases.

Growth Sequence 13: Metaphor and circumlocution enter more and more into the learner's language as a way not to substitute for lack of vocabulary but to express a greater range of thought in a greater range of styles for a greater range of effects.

By bringing parts of speech to bear on each other, phrases explicitly relate one concept to another and hence approach the role of stating. Many a clause could in fact be a phrase ("... after the show was over ..." or "... at the end of the show ..."). Reduced clauses or potential clauses will be treated below as statement, but it's important to keep in mind that an option nearly always exists to relate concepts as a phrase or as a clause. One chooses whether to assert the relation as a statement, thereby giving it more importance, or to subordinate the relation within a statement asserting something else.