

Framing

Chris Potts, Ling 390a: Controlling the Discourse, Fall 2007

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1 Overview: Framing is about choices

I want to communicate the proposition p . Which of the sentences S_1, \dots, S_n of my language should I utter to express p ?

- i. Which S_i will make things easiest for me (for my listener)?
- ii. Which S_i will generate the right pragmatic meanings when its content interacts with the maxims?
- iii. Which S_i will frame the issue from my perspective?

1.1 Central tenets of framing (George Lakoff)

- i. Every word has a frame.
- ii. Negating a frame evokes that frame.
- iii. Evoking a frame reinforces that frame.

2 Examples

2.1 Tax relief

- (1)
 - a. Ed was relieved from his pain.
 - b. The pool hustler relieved Sally of her money.
 - c. hunger relief
 - d. We relieved Ed from his chores.
 - e. We relieved Ed from his vacation.
 - f. tax relief

- (2) *relieve*

x	relieves	y	from	z
↑		↑		↑
reliever-of-pain		blameless afflicted		cause

2.2 Similar political catch phrases

- (3) “I am not a crook”.
- (4) Democratic party vs. Democrat party
- (5) death tax
- (6) war on terror/drugs/the environment
- (7) protect the environment
- (8) **Filibluster, by Hendrik Hertzberg**¹

“Meanwhile, the skirmishing over terminology — the metaphor war — continues. The nuclear option was named by Senator Trent Lott, Republican of Mississippi, in a moment of carelessness. It sounds like a bad thing, so Democrats eagerly adopted it. Republicans, embarrassed, have tried mightily to persuade the press and the public that the phrase is a Democratic calumny, and that the proper term is “constitutional option,” which sounds like a good thing.

- (9) **From The Known World, by Edward P. Jones:**²

In the spring of 1844, a good many white people in Manchester County remained uneasy about news from other places about slave “restlessness” that had gone on a few years before. In the North, people called it slaving uprisings, but in much of Virginia the word *uprisings* had an abolitionist undertone and was felt to be too strong for what many slaveowners preferred to characterize as “a family squabble,” instigated by unknowns not part of the family.

- (10) Some results of the Democratic research firm Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, and Associates concerning effective language for The Nature Conservancy and The Trust for Public Land to use when trying to get its message of environmental stewardship across to the general public.
 - DO stress “preserving” water quality.
 - DO link land conservation to preservation of “working farms and ranches” [...] The word “working” must ALWAYS precede farms and ranches.
 - DO evoke protecting wildlife, although the phrase “wildlife habitat” speaks more to the base.
 - DO NOT say “open space”. “Open space” is NOT one of the better terms to use in the vocabulary of conservation, and “urban open space” is even worse. In the focus groups, voters perceived “open space” as empty land, not near them, . . .
 - DO say “natural areas” instead
 - DO not just say “trails” – say “hiking, biking and walking trails”. “Trails” can’t be assumed as a phras that envelopes recreation.

¹The New Yorker, Issue of 2005-06-13 and 20; Posted 2005-06-06;
<http://www.newyorker.com/talk/content/articles/050613ta_talk_hertzberg>

²Amistad Publishing, 2003 (p. 147-148).

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THE DAILY SHOW, APRIL 19, 2005
Transcript at:
<http://jabbs.blogspot.com/2005/04/daily-show-reveals-luntz-for-master.html>

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BEE (voiceover): From renaming the estate tax the "death tax," to helping label relaxed emissions standards the "clear skies initiative," Luntz has made a brilliant career spraying perfume on dog turds.

[...]

Another vital component: language.

LUNTZ (to Bee): When you want to communicate, even the sounds of the words matter. And the ideal is to use words that begin with the same letter.

BEE (voiceover images of town hall meeting): For example, this banner reads "Strengthening Social Security." That's a big improvement over the original text: "Creating Vast Opportunities For Wall Street To Generate Enormous Commissions Without Addressing The Actual Problem."

BEE (to Luntz): I'm going to read you some words. Help me warm these up a bit.

LUNTZ: O.K.

BEE: Drilling for oil.

LUNTZ: I would say: "Responsible Exploration for Energy."

BEE: Logging.

LUNTZ: I would say: "Healthy Forests."

BEE: Manipulation.

LUNTZ: Explanation and education.

BEE: Orwellian.

LUNTZ: ...

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