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Circumlocution

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Synonyms

[Periphrasis](#); [Pleonasm](#); [Prolix](#)

Definition

Circumlocution is the use of more words than necessary to express what could be said precisely and directly. Frequently present during word-finding difficulties, circumlocutions typically involve production of functional or attributive descriptions in place of content words that cannot be immediately accessed (Benson and Ardila 1996). Examples include saying, “the thing that you use to tell time” instead of “clock” or saying “the thing that is red, white, and blue” instead of “American flag.”

Circumlocution is found in neurotypical individuals who occasionally have a word on the “tip

of the tongue,” that is, when the semantics of a needed word can be accessed but not the phonological form. It is also frequently present, however, as a symptom of anomia in individuals with fluent aphasia and cognitive-communication disorders (Davis 2013). In these circumstances, circumlocution can be viewed as both a symptom and a compensatory strategy to circumvent a failure of phonological access (Raymer 2015). In bilingual speakers who experience unwanted language switching, it can also serve to facilitate interlanguage access via the common conceptual store to which related words in different languages are linked (Kohnert and Peterson 2012).

Further Reading

- Benson, D. F., & Ardila, A. (1996). *Aphasia: A clinical perspective*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Davis, G. A. (2013). *Aphasia and related cognitive-communication disorders*. New York: Pearson.
- Kohnert, K., & Peterson, M. (2012). Generalization in bilingual aphasia treatment. In M. R. Gitterman, M. Goral, & L. K. Obler (Eds.), *Aspects of multilingual aphasia* (pp. 89–105). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Raymer, A. M. (2015). Clinical diagnosis and treatment of naming disorders. In A. E. Hillis (Ed.), *The handbook of adult language disorders* (2nd ed., pp. 161–183). New York: Psychology Press.