

NAMES AND IDEAS

By

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SUMMARY

Names and nouns are not exactly the same thing. What distinguishes the former from the latter is that a name always *belongs* either to someone or to something. This someone or something is the holder of the name. In the first part of this study we examine this property in detail and argue for a classification of names based on it. We group names into exclusive names and shared names, and then group the latter into homonym names and generic names. In the second part of the study we focus on a breed of name holders that we call *ideas*, and examine their special relationship with generic names. Finally, we theorize about the existence of *oversize, mixed* ideas that are undefinable by nature, and suggest that we may benefit from this knowledge when tackling some traditional subjects of philosophical inquiry.

Chapter 1 Preliminary Concepts

Before we start, we need to touch on a few concepts that are often used in this study and establish a few conventions.

Language, Word, and Expression

There is no shortage of definitions for *language*; every encyclopedia and every Linguistics 101 textbook will likely provide one. But the most concise, straightforward, and also insightful definition of language we have ever come across is found in a rather obscure dictionary of philosophy compiled by two scholars of the now-defunct Soviet Union and published in its Spanish translation in the 1970s.

Language, as Rosental and Iudin put it, is a "system of signs of any physical nature that performs a cognitive function and a communicative (of relation) function in the process of human activities." Each time two individuals engage in a verbal exchange, we are seeing language at work in its communicative mode. On the other hand, we see language at work in its cognitive mode when a traffic sign warns us about a slippery roadway ahead or a dead end.

Reportedly, there are 5,000 to 6,000 living languages. The majority of them are spoken languages with a writing system. English is one of such languages, and so are most of the major languages being used today around the world. These spoken languages with a writing system are the ones we refer to when we speak here of languages. The basic components of a language are called *words*.

When a word or a phrase is employed by someone to communicate a message to someone else, this particular word phrase becomes an *expression*. An expression can be a single word conveying an order ("Fire!"), an insult ("Idiot!"), or a call for help ("Help!"), but most often it takes on the form of a sentence. The *speaker* is the person who issues an expression, and the *listener* is the person that the expression is intended for.

Physical Context and Textual Context

In the movie *Miss Congeniality*, there is this short exchange between the host of a beauty pageant and one of the candidates:

Host: Describe your perfect date.

Miss Rhode Island: That's a tough one. (After some thought)
I'll have to say April 25th, because it's not too hot, too cold.
All you need is a light jacket.

The answer is an anomalous one, because it is intended to show how clueless this particular candidate is. Although you may interpret the meaning of the word *date* in at least three different ways (as a person of the opposite sex that you go out with; as a small, dark-brown, sticky fruit with a stone inside; or as a specific day), the context here should have made it unequivocal to anyone but the clueless beauty that it is about the former. The context here is the fact that this short exchange is taking place during the course of a beauty pageant in which the candidates are *expected* to be quizzed about their private lives and personal preferences, not about weather or farm products.

Context can be either physical or textual. Physical context is the sum of circumstances (situations, events) under which something occurs. Textual context consists of the words, sentences, or paragraphs that come before or after a given word. Both can be very helpful in clarifying the ambiguities that may otherwise beset a particular situation, idea, or word.

Chapter 2 Names and Nouns

Ever since it first showed up in our written literature around 1400,¹ the word *noun* has been considered as a synonym of the word *name*; or, at worst, as a discipline-specific word used to designate the same things that *name* designates. Few people seem to realize that the two words represent, in fact, not one and the same class of entities, but *two*.²

The subject of this study is the class of entities that we called *names*. Not *proper names*,³ which are only a subclass of names; and not *nouns*, which, as it is explained below, are not the same as names.

Let us consider a phrase such as *the Milky Way*. This three-word phrase is what we call a *name*: the name of a pale strip of light consisting of many stars that we can see across the sky at night. Now, if a name is the same as a noun, then we should call *the Milky Way*, the whole phrase, a noun too. But such an occurrence is unlikely: we are taught by what little we have learned from our high school's grammar courses to treat the entire phrase of *the Milky Way* as a combination of an article, an adjective *and* a noun, rather than as a single noun.

Consider yet another phrase: *the battle of Britain*. This is the four-word name of an air conflict that took place over the skies of England between 1940 and 1941, but, again, we are entailed to treat it as the combination of an article, a connective and two nouns; rather than as a single noun.

¹ According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word *noun* first appeared in Trevisa's translation of Bartholomew's *De Proprietatibus Rerum*, published in 1398.

² This failure to realize that they are two different classes of entities is best exemplified by one well-known grammarian when he tells us that "This definition (that of nouns) has certain weakness. First of all it is circular; *noun* and *name* being two forms of the same word..." (Roberts 1954:25).

³ Some authors seem to think that proper names are the only kind of names that there is. The author of the Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language, for example, seems to imply as much when he dedicates an entire chapter to proper names but calls it "Names."

Another thing that differentiates a name from a noun –or vice versa– is a property that is intrinsic to the former but not to the latter: any name is necessarily the name *of* someone or *of* something; the same cannot be said of a noun. For example, the word *Homer*, as a name, is the name of a Greek poet who wrote – or is reputed to have written– the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. As a noun, however, we cannot say that it is the noun of someone or of something.

As we shall see, this property that characterizes all names, of being always the name *of* someone or *of* something, is the single most important attribute of any name.

Chapter 3 One-Word Names and Multiple-Word Names

All names are made up of those basic particles of the language that we call *words*. Depending on the number of words it is made up of, a name can be a *one-word name* or a *multiple-word name*.

The name *Homer*, for example, is a one-word name. And so are names such as *Plato*, *car*, *truck*, *airport*, etc. It is tempting to say that most names in a language are one-word names, which seems to be the case as far as English is concerned, but multiple-word names seem to dominate in certain languages such as modern Chinese.

Multiple-word names are those names made up of two or more words. *The Milky Way* and *the battle of Britain* belong to this category of names, and so do *dump truck*, *sports car*, *the O'Hare Airport*, *Cameron Diaz*, etc.

From a purely morphological point of view, one-word names and nouns are indistinguishable ones from the others. For example, the name *Homer* and the noun *Homer* are made up of the same word *Homer*.

Chapter 4 Name Holders

As we have indicated in Chapter 2, any name is necessarily the name of someone or of something. This someone or something is what we call the *holder* of such a name. Thus, a certain blind poet who lived four thousand years ago in Greece and who wrote the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* is the holder of the name *Homer*, and an air battle that raged sixty years ago in the skies of Churchill's England is the holder of the name *the battle of Britain*.

The concept of a name holder is very similar to that of a Visa card holder or a Social Security card holder. Just as a Social Security card is simply a card with a number that is assigned arbitrarily to an individual to allow him to identify himself during the performance of certain activities, so a name is a word assigned to an individual or thing to allow him or it to identify himself or itself in the course of a communication process. There are, however, a few differences. A Visa card number or a Social Security card number is always unique as regards the card holder, but, as we shall see, this is not always the case with a name. Also, a Visa card holder or a Social Security card holder is always an individual, but a name holder does not necessarily have to be an individual.

In fact, a name holder can be *anything*. Just as it can be a person as the holder of the name *Homer*, it can be an animal (as the holder of the name *donkey*), a place (as the holder of the name *New York City*), a tangible object (as the holder of the name *book*), a quality (as the holder of the name *beauty*), a phenomenon (as the holder of the name *rain*), an action or event (as the holder of the name *soccer game*), an abstract entity (as the holder of the name *concept*), or an imaginary or fictitious being (as the holders of the names *God* and *Snow White*).

Chapter 5 The Main Function of Names

"At that time Macondo was a village of twenty adobe houses, built on the bank of a river of clear water that ran along a bed of polished stones, which were white and enormous, like prehistoric eggs. The world was so recent that many things lacked names, and in order to indicate them it was necessary to point."

This passage from the opening page of Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* may give us an intimation of what the main function of names might be. With many things lacking names in nascent Macondo, the author tells us, the only way the local inhabitants could refer to them was to point at them with their fingers. This is not only a cumbersome process, it must have forced additional constraints on the villagers: they would not be able to talk about many things as long as these things stayed out of their sight, and they would not be able to talk about *past* events related to them.

The main function of a name is to represent its holder (or its holders) in any expression wherein there is the need of mentioning or referring to such an entity (or such entities). This function of the names is so vital and central to all human interactions that the naming of things is recognized by the writer of Genesis as the first conscious act of humanity as such.

As Genesis 2:19-20 recounts, "... out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field..."

This may be passed off as merely allegorical narrative but for the fact that there is a correlation of Adam's first conscious act with a toddler's first learning experience: one of the very first things that we teach a child is how to recognize persons and objects and associate a name with them.

Chapter 6 Exclusive Names and Shared Names

Sorting names into one-word names and multiple-word names is just one way of doing it. An alternate way of classifying names is to divide them into *exclusive names* and *shared names*, based on whether the number of their holders is one or more than one.

An exclusive name is a name that has only *one* holder. The name *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors*, for example, is an exclusive name, since there is no other object or entity in the whole world with such a name except Marcel Duchamp's most ambitious and controversial work. The name *Marcel Duchamp*, on the other hand, is also an exclusive name, since we know only of one person who answers by that name. As we shall see, exclusive names are the ideal ones, the perfect names in terms of functionality.

A shared name is a name that has two or more holders. The name *Ra*, for example, is a shared name *owned* by at least two entities or objects: the sun god of the ancient Egyptians and a papyrus vessel with which the Norwegian explorer Thor Heyerdhal attempted the crossing of the Atlantic Ocean in the months of June and July, 1969. Other shared names that come up right off the top of our head are *Sputnik*, *Alexandre Dumas*, *John*, *Smith*, *bomber*, *dive bomber*, *poem*, *symphonic poem*, *house*, *boat*, etc. Of these, *Sputnik* is shared by nine or ten spacecraft of the former Soviet Union's space program; *Alexandre Dumas*, by the author of *The Three Musketeers* and the author of *La Dame aux Camélias*; and each of the other names by an indefinite number of holders.

Chapter 7 Homonyms and Generics

As it is evident from the examples that we have cited in the preceding chapter, there are two subclasses of shared names: one subclass includes *Ra*, *Sputnik*, *Alexandre Dumas*, *John*, *Smith*, and the like; and the other includes *bomber*, *dive bomber*, *poem*, *symphonic poem*, *house*, *boat*, and the like. The former we call *homonym names* or simply *homonyms*; and the latter we call *generic names* or simply *generics*.

Both a homonym and a generic have more than one name holder. The holders of a generic, however, possess a set of characteristics and attributes that is common to each of them, *and* only to them; that is, such a set of characteristics and attributes, as a whole, is both common to and *exclusive of* the holders of a generic. The holders of *boat*, for example, all possess the following set of characteristics and attributes:

- 1) being a vehicle for traveling on water,
- 2) being of rather small size,
- 3) being capable of carrying people or cargo.

Each of these characteristics or attributes may be shared by other entities or objects (for example, being a vehicle for traveling on water is also a characteristic common to the holders of the name *ship*), but the set as a whole is shared only by the holders of *boat*. Hence, *boat* is a generic.

Please note that the holders of a homonym such as *John* may also share a set of characteristics and attributes of some sort (e.g. that they are men from Western or westernized countries), but such a set is not *exclusive* of the holders of *John*: other men from Western or westernized countries may be called *James*, *Michael*, *David*, etc.

In one of the initial chapters of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, a novel by Colombian Nobel Prize winner Gabriel García Márquez, the town of Macondo is seized by a plague of insomnia that causes loss of memory. To counter it, Aureliano Buendía conceived the formula of "marking (things) with their respective names so that all he had to do was read the inscription in order to identify them... Aureliano explained his method to (his father), and

José Arcadio Buendía put it into practice all through the house and later on imposed it on the whole village. With an inked brush he marked everything with its name: *table, chair, clock, door, wall, bed, pan*. He went to the corral and marked the animals and plants: *cow, pig, hen, cassava, caladium, banana...*"

All the names mentioned in this remarkable paragraph are generic names.

Chapter 8 Agreements of Correspondence

Let us suppose that a name X is being employed to represent an entity Y in an expression. In the mind of the speaker, there should be no doubt whatsoever about what entity is being represented by the name X in such an expression: it is Y. On the other hand, the name X may suggest to the listener the idea of the entity Y, that of any other entity, or no idea at all. *In order for the name X to suggest to him the idea of the entity Y, it is necessary that the listener knows, beforehand, that X is the name of the entity Y; that Y is the holder of X.*

In other words, in order for a name to perform as it should, there must be some kind of agreement –reached before the communication takes place or at the very beginning of the communication– between the speaker and the listener regarding the identity of the holder (or holders) of that name. We call such an accord or convention an *agreement of correspondence*.

Direct Agreements of Correspondence

There are many ways whereby an agreement of correspondence can be reached between the speaker and the listener. For one thing, the speaker may directly put forward an agreement of correspondence to the listener. In *Moby Dick*, when the narrator starts his story with the phrase "Call me Ishmael," he is doing just that, making sure that the reader will know who he is talking about every time the name Ishmael is mentioned in the course of the story. The last sentence of the preceding paragraph, which starts with "We call such an accord..." is another example of a direct agreement of correspondence between a name and its holder (or holders).

Indirect Agreements of Correspondence

Not all agreements of correspondence are direct ones. In fact, the great majority of them never require a direct proposition from the speaker to establish them. Consider, for example, the exclusive name *Greece* in the expression below:

Anyone visiting **Greece** is struck with the contrast between the white limestone of the mountains and its deep-blue, "wine dark" sea.

At no time in this study have we ever, deliberately, put forward to the reader a proposition concerning the identity of the holder of this exclusive name. And yet, we are sure that to the reader, as it is to us, *Greece* can mean only one thing: the country that has given birth to Pericles, Homer and Plato. There is, therefore, between the reader and us an agreement of correspondence as regards the name *Greece*, even though it is an *indirect*, rather than direct, agreement of correspondence.

How was such an agreement of correspondence reached between the reader and us without any of us realizing it? This is how:

- 1) The generalized and frequent use of the word *Greece* to represent Homer's, Pericles's and Plato's homeland in communications, by force of being generalized and frequent, becomes a society-wide linguistic convention.
- 2) This society-wide linguistic convention is transmitted from one generation to another and imposed upon all the individuals of a community (in this case, the English-speaking community), including among them the reader and us.
- 3) The agreement of correspondence results from complying strictly with the above-mentioned convention.

As we have noted earlier, the great majority of agreements of correspondence are indirect agreements such as the one described; and it is just as well they are: it would have been very impractical, to say the least, if a direct proposition from the speaker were the only way that we can rely on for establishing an agreement of correspondence for each and every one of the names that pepper our communications.

The Range of an Agreement of Correspondence

The range of an agreement of correspondence is the extent within which the agreement can be seen operating effectively. In more simple words, is the number of people participating in such an agreement.

An agreement of correspondence can be reached between two persons, or it can be reached among all the speakers of a language. Between these two extremes, there are agreements of correspondence with a middle range such as the one that exists among the speakers of a regional manifestation of a language, that is to say, of a dialect.

Generic Names and Agreements of Correspondence

Of particular interest to us are the agreements of correspondence that "bind" the generic names with their respective holders. All such agreements of correspondence are formulated with an *affirmative universal proposition* that, basically, runs like this:

All entity possessing the set of characteristics and attributes A will be called B,

wherein A and B are variables and B a generic name.

Thus, the agreement of correspondence that "bind" the generic name *star* with its holders, if it were formulated aloud, would take on the following form:

All small point of light that is seen in the sky at night, and which is emanated from an astral body, will be called a *star*.

Chapter 9 Names and Context

The ideal name is the exclusive name. An exclusive name is self-sufficient in terms of functionality: it does not need any help to accomplish the purpose for which it is used. If we say "Ludwig van Beethoven," for example, no one with even the most superficial knowledge of Western classical music will fail to recognize the individual we are referring to. The same holds true with "World War II" or "J.R.R. Tolkien."

Problems arise when shared names –either homonyms or generics– are used. Suppose, for example, that the homonym *Alexandre Dumas* is mentioned in the course of a communication. Is the speaker talking about the author of *The Three Musketeers*, or is he talking about the author of *La Dame aux Camélias*? Consider, again, the generic name *movie* in the expression below:

The **movie** has grossed 601 million since its release.

Which of the hundreds of thousands of movies is the speaker referring to?

One solution to this problem of ambiguity is, of course, context, both physical context and textual context. Thus, if the homonym name *Alexandre Dumas* and the generic name *movie* were mentioned, respectively, during the intermission of Verdi's *La Traviata* and at the conclusion of *Titanic*, it is logical for the listener to surmise that the speaker was talking about, in the first case, of the author of *La Dame aux Camélias*; and in the second, of the Oscar winner of 1998.

Also, there would be no ambiguity if *Alexandre Dumas* showed up in a preface to *The Three Musketeers* and *movie* in the insert booklet of a DVD copy of *Titanic*.

Chapter 10 Specifiers

Physical context and textual context alone, however, are not always enough to resolve the problem of "ambiguity" that a shared name may raise; that is, to allow the listener to single out one of the many holders of that name as the *one* the speaker is referring to. More often than not, the speaker is capable of sensing when context –both physical and textual– alone is enough and when it is not, and, in the latter case, attempts to solve the problem by providing his listener with additional details of the person or object that he has in mind, details that do not apply to the other holders of the shared name. Such additional details, which take the form of complements of words or phrases, are what we call *specifiers*.

Thus, in the expression:

I rewrote my novel, and it was rejected just like the others,

the speaker is using the specifier *my* as a way of differentiating a particular novel from all the other holders of the shared name *novel*.

Other examples of specifiers are shown in the expressions below in italics, with the shared names that they are being applied to in bold:

- (1) **Alexander Dumas**, *films*, is the creator of Marguerite Gautier.
- (2) The **inauguration ceremony** *of the local school* was scheduled to be on a Monday.
- (3) The *latter* **paradox** was a brainchild of Leonhard Nelson and Kurt Grelling.

(4-5) In *this device* an electric spark was used to simulate atmospheric discharges, as they are supposed to be common in *that period of time*.

We should not confuse specifiers with simple descriptive words or phrases such as *poor*, *smooth* and *the author of One Hundred Years of Solitude*, that are shown in the sentences below:

(6) Next morning *poor* Little Billee was dreadfully ill.

(7) We walked along the *smooth* lawns of Pookie's campus, past quiet buildings shrouded in the first warm afternoon of fall.

(8) Gabriel García Márquez, *the author of One Hundred Years of Solitude*, was born in Aracataca, Colombia.

A specifier is *also* a descriptive word or phrase, but it is one to which we have entrusted, in addition, the task of making it clear to the listener which of several things we mean.

Chapter 11 Specifiers (Continuation)

There are instances when the speaker is required to apply two or more specifiers to a shared name to "clarify its meaning." Thus, in the expression:

Mrs. Wong's oldest child has died at birth ten years earlier,

two specifiers (*Mrs. Wong's* and *oldest*) are applied to the shared name *child*. In this case, the specifiers are placed one after the other.

In another expression, the specifiers *coldest* and *of December* are applied to the shared name *day*:

On the *coldest day of December* we flew back to Boston.

In this example, the specifiers are placed one before the name, and the other, after the name.

Please note that the phrase *Mrs. Wong's oldest* does not constitute a single specifier, but two, because it describes two different characteristics of the child the speaker is referring to, not just one: that being born to Mrs. Wong, and that being the first-born among her progeny.

Chapter 12 The Plural of Shared Names

For the sake of convenience, we have so far treated the shared names as if they can represent only *one* of their holders at any given time. This is, of course, untrue. As we can see in the examples given below, the speaker may use a shared name to refer to two or more of its holders simultaneously:

There were **thunderstorms**, the temperature dropped, and the **Egyptians** died of hunger.

The **beds** were not yet made when they went back to the cottage.

The **planes** had been bombing the city relentlessly.

Something of her surprise may have been shared by the **Brontës** as they arrived at Haworth.

Feminism is the ideal that **women** should have the same social and economic rights and privileges as **men**.

When a shared name is representing two or more of its holders at one given time, we say that the shared name is in the plural. In the examples given above, the generics *thunderstorm*, *Egyptian*, *bed* and *plane*, and the homonym *Brontë* are in the plural.

To indicate that a shared name is in the plural, the general practice is for the English speaker to add the ending -s or the ending -es to it. There are, however, many exceptions to this rule: shared names such as *child*, *man*, *woman*, *mouse*, *goose*, etc., are irregular in their plural forms.

A shared name in the plural can either be representing:

- 1) *all* of its holders; or
- 2) only *some* of its holders.

In the examples given above, *men* and *women* are doing the former, and *thunderstorms*, *Egyptians*, *beds*, *planes*, and *Brontës* are doing the latter.

Chapter 13 Specifiers and Shared Names in the Plural

As we have indicated in the previous chapter, a shared name in the plural may be used by the speaker to refer to either 1) the set of all of its holders, or 2) any proper subset of that set. Which begs the following question: How can the listener tell when the said shared name is representing one thing, and when it is representing the other?

As with the shared names in the singular, part of the answer is provided by context, both physical and textual. Consider, for example, the shared name *Egyptians* in the expression:

There were thunderstorms, the temperature dropped, and the **Egyptians** died of hunger.

Clearly, the context here seems to indicate that the speaker is not talking about *all* the Egyptians, but about a particular subset of Egyptians, however large that subset may be.

Then, of course, there are the specifiers, when context alone is not enough.

Specifiers are applied only to a shared name in the plural when it is representing a proper subset of all of its holders. In the absence of any context or specifiers indicating otherwise, a shared name in the plural is always assumed to be representing the set of all of its holders.

Some examples of such specifiers are shown below in italics, with the shared names they are being applied to in bold:

With two miles down and 24 to go, **runners** *competing in the Berlin Marathon* pass through the reopened Brandenburg Gate into eastern Berlin.

The majority of *today's* **Palestinians** are descendants of Arabs who migrated after 1840 mainly from Egypt and Syria.

Chapter 14 The Idiosyncratic Nature of the Classification of Names

What is an exclusive name for one person, may be a homonym for another. For most of us, for example, the name *Tchaikovsky* has no other holder than the 19th century Russian composer to whom we owe such delights as the music of *The Nutcracker* and *Swan Lake*, and is, therefore, an exclusive name. For a Russian speaker, however, who in his lifetime may have run into a handful or so of fellow countrymen with that surname, or have read about them in publications, *Tchaikovsky* is certainly not an exclusive but a homonym name.

Vice versa, what is a homonym for one person, may be an exclusive for another. The name *Ra*, for example, which we have cited as a homonym, may surely be an exclusive name for someone who has never heard of the papyrus vessel of Thor Heyerdahl.

It is also possible that what is a generic for some may turn out to be simply an exclusive or a homonym; or vice versa.

Simply put, the classification of names into exclusives and shared names, homonym and generics, is not a *rigid* one as the classification of nouns is. It is flexible, or rather, idiosyncratic, because it varies from one person to another.

Chapter 15

A generic name and an exclusive name may be formed by the same word or the same words.

The word *woman*, for example, is functioning as a generic name in the expression below:

(1) It happened that Fico was in bed with that **woman**, and my father found out about it;

and is functioning as an exclusive name in:

(2) **Woman** brings to man his greatest blessing and his greatest plague.

Please note that what the exclusive name *woman* is representing in (2) is not in the same class or category of things as what the generic *woman* is representing in (1). The latter has a physical presence, like your wife or my sisters; the former does not, and it is an *idea*.

Chapter 17 The Concept of Idea

An idea ⁴ is, first of all, an abstract entity; a creation of the mind when it "extracts" and "fuses" the characteristics and attributes that are common to and exclusive of all the holders of a generic name into a single mental image, which is then projected *outside* of the mind. The entity thus originated, has all the characteristics and attributes that are common to and exclusive of all the holders of that generic name.

Please note the implications of this latter assertion: an idea must have *all* the characteristics and attributes that are common to and exclusive of all of its *notes*. Therefore, an idea –an abstract entity notwithstanding– may be touched, felt or seen, if one of the characteristics and attributes that are common to and exclusive of all of its notes consists of being capable of being touched, felt or seen. In the expressions given below, we see how an idea may be *used to carry farming tools*, or may be *dried under the sun*.

The donkey is used to **carry farming tools** in the countryside.

The grain is **dried under the sun**, ground, and turned into flour.

⁴ That is, an idea of the name-related breed.

Chapter 18 The Notes of an Idea

Both the notes of the idea of gorilla and those of the idea of novel we have seen represented in Chapter 16 are physical realities, things that one can see or touch. And so is the single note of the idea of woman that we have seen represented in Chapter 15, which has a physical presence just as any womenfolk in our families.

But the notes of an idea can be just as abstract or near as abstract as the idea itself. Thus, the notes of the idea of motion, one of which is being represented by the generic *motion* in:

The bed swayed with the **motion** of the ship,

cannot be apprehended without some effort of abstraction.

Still more abstract are the notes of the idea of value, one of which is being represented in:

What will happen to the **value** of my property during these hard economic times?

or, for that matter, the notes of the idea of inadequacy, one of which is being represented in:

Parents are complaining at the **inadequacy** of education facilities in Britain.

Chapter 19 Why Ideas Are Needed

Why are ideas needed? Why does the mind feel that it has to make the effort of abstracting and creating an idea?

To answer these questions, we need to examine a certain aspect of the things that can be represented by a generic name.

Basically, the things or entities that can be represented by a generic name may be classified as either countable or uncountable; that is, either they can be counted, enumerated, or they cannot. Things such as men, planes, fingers, dinosaurs, etc., are clearly countable, but the same cannot be said of the things that we refer to as *my talent*, *Cameron Diaz's beauty*, *his vision*, etc. They are uncountable.

Ideas are created as a response to the need we frequently experience of having to refer to the holders of a generic name *in general*. With countable things, this is done by employing a generic name in the plural.⁵ For example, if we wanted to refer to men in general, we would be able to do so by simply using the plural form of the generic name *man*, as in:

Men have Reason to be well satisfied with what God hath thought fit for them.

But with things such as Cameron Diaz's beauty, Cleopatra's beauty, the beauty of Princess Diana, etc., we cannot apply the plural form of the generic name *beauty* to refer to them in general.⁶

⁵ Another way of generalizing, that is, of referring to the holders of a generic name in general, is to use the singular form of the generic name with the indefinite article *a/an*, as in:

A man has to stand for his convictions.
A, here, has the same meaning of *any*.

⁶ When *beauty* is used in the plural, as in:

I was surrounded by native **beauties** who had barely a cloth on, it refers to completely different entities.

The idea of beauty, thus, seems to have been created out of the necessity to fill in this void.

Chapter 20 The "Make-Up" of an Idea

The usage of a generic name determines the "make-up" of the idea that is associated with it. This fact may seem like obvious, but it is not easy to either prove or disprove. Most people do not see their usage of a certain generic change significantly in the course of their adult life, unless such generic belongs to a second language that they are learning, and then they are not always aware of it.

We can, however, postulate that such changes are not a rare happening during a child's learning process. Consider, for example, the way a child is taught to use the generic name *ship*: he is probably first taught to associate the word with tugboats, cruise ships, war ships, aircraft carriers, cargo ships, and sail boats that the parents would point out for him. At this stage the idea of ship that is formed in the child's mind would almost certainly include water as an element of its "make-up." However, as his world widens through the medium of television, he will come to learn that the aircraft that carried the monster Ymir back from Venus, the tattered cargo vessel of Han Solo, and Captain Kirk's massive *Enterprise* are also ships. The element of water will then be eliminated completely from the "make-up" of this child's idea of ship.

The 17th century philosopher John Locke seems to have been the first person to glimpse this empirical nature of ideas, and he certainly was well aware of the close connection between ideas and generic names, which he calls *general terms*. He views, however, these general terms as subservient to the *framing* or formulation of ideas, which is the reverse of what we are postulating in this study.

Chapter 21 How to Recognize the Notes of an Idea

The easiest way to recognize the notes of any idea is by the presence of specifiers. The presence of a specifier is almost always an indication that the name that it precedes –or follows– is a generic. (The other possibility is that the name is a homonym, but then there is little problem in distinguishing a homonym from a generic; or vice versa.) The specifier may be a demonstrative adjective such as *that*, as in:

Everyone in the building hated **that** woman;

a possessive adjective such as *his*, as in:

His face has turned pale;

or a more elaborate string of words, such as *of education facilities in Britain*:

Parents are complaining at the inadequacy **of education facilities in Britain**.

For example, if we want to know what the notes of the idea of whiteness are, all we need to do is look into a text for occurrences of the name *whiteness* that are either preceded or followed by a specifier. The presence of a specifier next to the name tells us that the latter is either a homonym or a generic. If it is a generic, what it represents in the text is almost certainly a note or a number of notes of the idea of whiteness.

Chapter 22 Sub-Ideas

On the other hand, it could be a sub-idea.

A sub-idea is neither an idea nor a note of an idea; sub-ideas make up a category in between.

A sub-idea is, for example, what is being represented by the name *bird* in:

Although the diet of the raven is omnivorous, the **bird** shows preference for food of animal origin.

Notice how it differs from the bird –which is a very physical reality– that is mentioned in:

One day the **bird** began to do acrobatic tricks on the beams of the kitchen and fell into the pot of stew with a sailor's shout of every man for himself;

and how it resembles –but not quite– the bird that is mentioned in:

The **bird** is a creature with feathers, two legs, and two wings, which lays eggs.

The latter is an idea, and the former one of its notes.

Chapter 23 What Is a Sub-Idea?

An idea, as we have seen in Chapter 17, is the mental image that is abstracted from the *entire* set of holders of a generic name. Thus, the idea of bird is nothing but the mental image that our mind has abstracted from the entire set of holders of the generic name *bird*.

A sub-idea is also a mental image, but it is abstracted, not from the entire set of holders of a generic name, but only from one of its many proper subsets. Thus, the sub-idea of bird represented in:

Although the diet of the raven is omnivorous, the **bird** shows preference for food of animal origin,

is the mental image, not of all birds, but only of a proper subset of birds, which in this case turns out to be the ravens.

Chapter 24

Not only can a generic name and an exclusive name be formed by the same word or the same words, as we have seen in Chapter 15; so can two or more generics.

Thus, the word *intelligence* functions as a generic name in:

She prided herself on her **intelligence**;

and as another, different generic name in:

The **intelligence** that was available to Churchill on the fourteenth convinced him that London was indeed the target.

Another example is the word *date*, which serves as one generic name in:

The **date** was agreed upon for the invasion of Normandy;

as a second generic name in:

By the time their **dates** arrived, the girls were hysterical with laughter;

and as yet another generic name in:

Dates grow on palm trees in hot countries.

Chapter 25

The names of two or more ideas may be formed by the same word or the same words. The word *intelligence*, for example, functions as the name of the idea that is represented in:

In recent years, debates have raged between those who regard **intelligence** as genetically fixed, and those who take it to be a product of social, cultural, and educational factors;

and as the name of the idea that is represented in:

Both men were naval officers specializing in **intelligence**.

The two ideas are associated, respectively, with the two generics *intelligence* that we have cited in the previous chapter.

Chapter 26 The Secondary Functions of Names

The main function of a name is to represent its holder (or holders) in any expression wherein there is the need of mentioning or referring to such an entity (or entities). This is the *raison d'être* of any name. We should not assume, however, that this is the only thing that a name can do. Just as often as we may find a name operating in this primary, representative role, we may find it working in a *vocative*, *affective*, or *descriptive* mode within an expression.

In the sentences below, for example, the generic names *reader* and *man* are operating, respectively, in their vocative and affective modes:

Reader, I married him.

Man, am I glad to see you!

It is in their descriptive mode, however, that we more often find the names engaged in. In the short paragraph below, for example, we find no less than four names (in bold) serving as either specifiers or simple descriptive particles:

Now he was stocking shelves at a **convenience** store and struggling to pay the mortgage on the **retirement** home of his **dreams** –a luxury condominium overlooking **Tokyo** Bay.

Chapter 27 Measure Words

Introduction

Measure words are a class of words that, when sandwiched between a cardinal number (or an indefinite article) and a name, serve to modify the “meaning” of that name. Words such as *dozen*, *couple*, *half*, *group* and *liter*, as they appear below, are measure words:

- (1) The drive was cluttered with a **dozen** cars.
- (2) They've been helped by a **couple** of reporters.
- (3) One **half** of the world is illiterate.
- (4) A **group** of teenagers were hanging about the place.
- (5) The jug contained two **liters** of milk.

Measure words represent **units** by which the related names are going to be quantified; the quantifiers proper are the cardinal numbers or the indefinite articles that precede them.

Once the numbers of the units are established, they need not be represented in subsequent sentences. Thus, *a dozen cars*, *a couple of reporters*, *one half of the world*, *a group of teenagers*, and *two liters of milk* can become, respectively, **the dozen cars**, **the couple of reporters**, **the half of the world**, **the group of teenagers**, and **the liters of milk**.

Substantivization of Measure Words

A measure word may temporarily acquire the primary function of the name that it precedes, when the name is removed from the text. This is possible, however, only if the context can warrant that no ambiguity or misinterpretation will occur. Thus, in the following sentence the measure word *group* has been substantivized and it stands as the equivalent of *a group of teenagers*, as shown previously in (4):

The **group** still lingered there after midnight.

But make no mistake that the word *group* is primarily a measure word and not a name.

Names As Measure Words

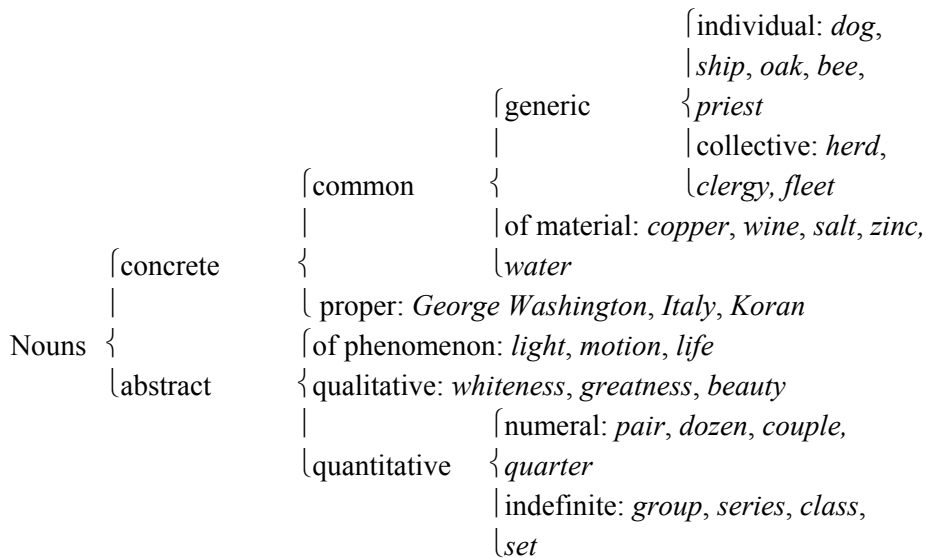
Just as a measure word can temporarily function as a name, so can a name temporarily function as a measure word. In the following example, the generic name *glass* is acting as a measure word, rather than as a name proper:

I was having a **glass** of red wine.

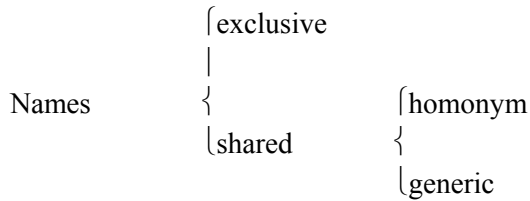
Chapter 28 Comparing Apples and Oranges

The differences between names and nouns cannot possibly be shown in a clearer light as by comparing the way some words fit into the complex classification of nouns and then into the simpler and more unobtrusive classification of names, even though comparing names and nouns is not unlike comparing apples and oranges.

Nouns are classified differently from one language to another, and from one grammar book to another. For the purpose of our comparison, however, we have selected the classification that is listed in Rafael Saco's 1972 edition of *Gramática esencial del español* because of the great detail that it provides.



The classification of names, on the other hand, is way much simpler :



A List

Word: *dog*

Traditionally, an individual generic common concrete noun.

According to our classification of names, it may be:

- 1) A generic, as in "They killed the family **dog**."
- 2) An exclusive, in this case the name of an idea, as in "**Dog** is man's best friend."
- 3) A homonym whose holders comprise both those of the generic and that of the exclusive aforementioned.

Word: *herd*

Traditionally, a collective generic concrete noun.

According to our classification of names, it may be:

- 1) Just a measure word, as in "The road was obstructed by a **herd** of pigs."
- 2) A generic resulting from the substantivization of the aforementioned measure word, as in "The countryside is full of such **herds**."

Word: *wine*

Traditionally, a common concrete noun of material.

According to our classification, it may be:

- 1) A generic, as in "This **wine** is from France."
- 2) An exclusive, in this case the name of an idea, as in "Was it Omar Khayyám who called **wine** the most precious ruby?"
- 3) A homonym.

Word: *Koran*

Traditionally, a proper concrete noun.

According to our classification of names, it may be:

- 1) A generic, as in "In Mecca he bought a moth-eaten **Koran**."
- 2) An exclusive, as in "The **Koran** was first revealed to the prophet in Ramadan."
- 3) A homonym.

Word: *motion*

Traditionally, an abstract noun of phenomenon.

According to our classification of names, it may be:

- 1) A generic, as in "The slow **motion** of the ship worked on her like a lullaby."
- 2) An exclusive, in this case the name of an idea, as in "Energy generates **motion**."
- 3) A homonym.

Word: *beauty*

Traditionally, a qualitative abstract noun.

According to our classification of names, it may be:

- 1) A generic, as in "Her **beauty** was fading rapidly."
- 2) Another generic, as in "When she was young, she had been a striking **beauty**."
- 3) An exclusive, the name of an idea, as in "**Beauty** and truth are one and the same thing."
- 4) A homonym.

Word: *pair*

Traditionally, a numeral collective abstract noun.

According to our classification of names, it may be:

- 1) Just a measure word, as in “He was wearing a **pair** of white gloves.”
- 2) A generic resulting from the substantivization of the aforementioned measure word, as in “The **pair** became soaked when he fell into the pool.”

Word: *group*

Traditionally, an indefinite collective abstract noun.

According to our classification of names, it may be:

- 1) Just a measure word, as in “Two **groups** of men had converged at the square.”
- 2) A generic resulting from the substantivization of the measure word aforementioned, as in “The two **groups** fought one another bitterly.”

Chapter 29 Super-ideas: A Hypothesis

Introduction

In Chapter 24 we have indicated how two or more generic names may be made up of the same word or the same words. We cited then as examples the three generic names *date* that appear, respectively, in:

The **date** was agreed upon for the invasion of Normandy.

By the time their **dates** arrived, the girls were hysterical with laughter.

Dates grow on palm trees in hot countries.

Clearly, the holders of these three generic names are very different ones from the others, and it is impossible that they could be mistaken as belonging to one and the same set of entities.

But the holders of other generic names sharing the same word or words may not be so easily distinguishable ones from the others. Consider, for example, the following sentences:

Her **tone** was defiant.

Don't put your money in until you hear the **tone**.

He said the new people had lowered the **tone** of the neighborhood.

The colors of the pigeons matched the **tones** of the sky.

Schoenberg thenceforth built his works out of twelve arbitrary **tones** arranged in a definite order, each in importance to the others.

How many of us realize that each *tone* in these five sentences is in fact a different generic name? ⁷

What Is a Super-Idea?

An idea is an abstraction that our mind makes out of the set of entities named by a generic. Ideally, all ideas should be formed in this manner; that is, from the holders of *one* single generic. But as we have seen in the preceding section, the holders of many generic names may be so similar ones to the others that it is often hard, if not quite impossible, to tell them apart, and they are mistaken as belonging to one and the same set of entities. Now, what will happen if our mind tries to make an abstraction out of such a group of seemingly homogeneous, but actually diverse entities?

What will result from such a process of abstraction is a *super-idea*. Since the basis for the process of abstraction is comprised of two or more diverse sets of entities, the process itself cannot be a very rigorous or a very logical one. Necessarily, too, what will result from the process has to be something logically misshapen or nebulous. If an idea is a mental image in which each of the holders of the related generic name will find itself fully and clearly mirrored, the *notes* of a super-idea (that is, the holders of the different related generic names) will find themselves mirrored in the super-idea only in an incomplete, imprecise manner. As a matter of fact, an alternate name we suggest for the super-ideas is *mixed*

⁷ The first *tone* is a quality of the voice; the second, a sound; the third, a quality of something; the fourth, a shade of color; and the fifth, a musical note.

ideas. (We use the adjective *super* to refer to their "size," to the fact that each of them occupies the place of many ideas proper.)

Given the fact that it is nothing more than a mental mishmash, a super-idea is not definable; at least, not in the way we are accustomed to define things: no single definition will be able to encompass it. To define a super-idea, we need to reverse-engineer the muddy process of abstraction that has given birth to it, i.e. identify the various generic names that are associated with it, and define each of these generic names separately. The multiple definitions, taken as a whole, will then be *the* definition of the super-idea.

Many of the concepts that have traditionally been subjects of philosophical inquiries –concepts such as art, beauty, and even philosophy itself– are, we suspect, super-ideas, which may explain why the truth about them is so elusive.

Chapter 30 The True Nature of Nouns

The first documented instance of the word *noun* being used dates back to around 1400, two centuries after that of the word *name*, and it appeared in a grammar treatise. Even if, in all likelihood, these two dates do not reflect the actual first occurrences of the two words, it is fairly safe to surmise that *name* predated *noun*, and not the other way around. It is also fairly safe to surmise that nouns are a creation of the men who first set out to establish the rules of language. A question we cannot help asking is: Why did these scholars feel that they had to invent an entirely new term (i.e. borrow it from Anglo-French), when already there was a very apt one? Parlanse for parlanse's sake? A whim for high-flown words? It is not as simple as that.

When the first grammarians borrowed *noun* from Anglo-French, they meant to use it, not to refer to the names proper, but to refer to the *words* that make up the names. Intuitively at least, they realized that one thing is a name, and quite another the word that makes up a name. The latter lacks the very property that is essential to all names: the property of *belonging* to someone or something.

Nouns, in fact, originated in a manner quite different from that of names. Whereas names were created as a response to a very fundamental need in human interactions –the representation of persons and things in communication–, nouns were an artificial, albeit unintentional creation of the first grammarians as they grouped all words into the so-called word classes in an attempt to explain their nature and regulate their usage.

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