

'Synecdoche' Looms Large in the Report

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 20— A potential fad word, synecdoche, emerged today from the Senate intelligence committee's report on alleged assassination plots.

The word is the name for a rhetorical shortcut in which a complicated situation is referred to as briefly as possible, sometimes leading to misunderstandings about exactly what is meant.

As an example, on Page 265 of its report, the committee cites the phrase "disposing of Castro," which may mean either killing the Cuban leader or dislodging his regime. The point is that the phrase can mean different things to different people.

Meeting Described

Synecdoche also may be used in the reverse, with a longer phrase taking the place of one that is shorter. One example cited was "doing something about Castro," which could be taken to mean killing him.

As the committee report indicated, the use of synecdoche — it is pronounced "sin-NECK-doe-key" — complicated the unraveling of who said what to whom because of the ambiguities inherent in the rhetorical technique.

As an ominous example

of synecdoche, the report refers to a meeting in 1960 of a subcommittee of the National Security Council at which a reference was made to taking "direct positive action" against Fidel Castro, his brother Raul, and Che Guevera, another of his chief aides.

"The reference to 'direct positive action' is ambiguous and subject to different interpretations, including a suggestion that assassination be explored," the report states on Page 116.

Officials of the Central Intelligence Agency were themselves aware that such ambiguities were causing problems. In 1967 the agency's Inspector General, Lyman Kirkpatrick, said in an internal report dealing with assassination:

"The point is that of frequent resort to synecdoche—the mention of a part when the whole is to be understood, or vice versa. Thus, we encounter repeated references to phrases such as 'disposing of Castro,' which may be read in the narrow, literal sense of assassinating him, when it is intended that it be read in the broader figurative sense of dislodging the Castro regime.

"Reversing the coin, we find people speaking vaguely of 'doing something about Castro' when it is clear that what they have specifically in mind is killing him. In

a situation wherein those speaking may not have actually meant what they have said what they actually meant, they should not be surprised if their oral shorthand is interpreted differently than was intended." In the report, all the "nots" are italicized.

McCone Memo

The Senate committee's report noted that "differing perceptions between superiors and their subordinates were graphically illustrated in the Castro context." It said that John McCone, the former C.I.A. director, wrote in a memorandum of April 14, 1967:

"Through the years the Cuban problem was discussed in terms such as 'dispose of Castro,' 'remove Castro,' 'knock off Castro,' etc., and this meant the overthrow of the Communist Government in Cuba and the replacing of it with a democratic regime. Terms such as the above appear in many working papers, memoranda for the record, etc., and, as stated, all refer to a change in the Cuban Government."

But the report went on to state that another former director, Richard Helms, "who had considerable experience as a covert operator, gave precisely the opposite meaning to the same words, interpreting them as conveying authority for assassination."