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Dr. Lewis Barnes, Editor "A Little Matter of Linguistic Focus".

Christensen supplies many examples to buttress his concepts of the new rhetoric. The examples are chosen to illustrate what he calls

- a. direction of modification
- b. the levels of generality
- c. addition
- d. texture

We need to point out that Christensen is entirely correct in his statement:

I am saying that within a single sentence the writer may present more than one level of generality, translating the abstract into the more concrete in added levels.

We observed in an earlier issue of this bulletin that the terms "abstract" and "concrete" become entirely relative with respect to the story, paragraph, or even sentence. "Oak" is concrete with respect to "tree" but somewhat abstract with respect to the kind of oak tree. We shall produce three examples used by Christensen:

1. He dipped his hands in the bichloride solution and shook them ,
  - 2 a quick shake , (NC) noun cluster
  - 3 fingers down, (Abs) absolute cluster
  4. like the fingers of a pianist above the keys. (PP)  
(Sinclair Lewis) prepositional phrase

1. Joad's lips stretched tight over his long teeth for a moment, and
  1. he licked his lips
  2. like a dog, (PP)
  3. two licks, (NC)
  4. one in each direction from the middle. (NC)  
(Steinbeck)

1. She came among them behind the man,
  - 2, gaunt in the gray shapeless garment and the sunbonnet, (AC)
  2. wearing stained canvas gymnasium shoes. (VC) (Faulkner)

When we look at the first example, that from the work of Sinclair Lewis, we note that the complete subject has only one slot filled- that of "N" as simple subject. We have this type pattern on two occasions: first, that of the expression of a poor writer or speaker, and, second, that of the expression of a skilled writer who desires the "annihilation" of the whole spoken about, the "he." The first movement is one of "tapering down." Since the movement is away from the complete subject, the description, because of the sentence pattern present (II) will have to

relate to an action or to a part. The action tapers down from hands to fingers. Because the movement is away from the whole "he," we have the hands-fingers tapering down. The whole main clause, with its phonological elements carrying meanings of precision, accuracy, and control through the phonemic construction of the words in the main clause, leads to the inevitable construction on the "physical" aspects of the "he." There are at least two major movements: first, there is the movement of sense to sensation, to the physical identification of the "he." The writer is content to focus upon the material proof of the kind of individual represented by "he." Then there is the tapering-down movement, one culminating in the movement from hand terminated in the terms of the tip of the fingers, as stated explicitly in the analogy with the tips of the fingers of the pianist. (The tips will hit the keys first.) We also have movement in Steinbeck's quotation.

Here, the movement is recognizably an abrupt shift from the whole individual to a part of the head, or a part of the face. There is no gradual "taper-down effects. The only vertical stature given is in terms of the "long teeth." The movement to the "horizontal" is secured through the initial main clause itself, in terms of "stretched tight." The reduction of time to "moment" further reduces the human stature of Joad and does so through removing a strong human quality-- that of considering himself in time. Thus, the main clause demands the intensification of the depersonalization set up in the dog-like actions. The prepositional phrase serves to "fix" the relationship "lick" and "dog." The two noun clusterings subsumed in terms of "two licks" and the horizontal plane made explicit through "one in each direction from the middle" parallels and intensifies at "tight over his long teeth for a minute," and..... Movements in terms of the horizontal, and in terms of a saliva-like horizontal licking movement cut off conclusively any claim to stature. The clustering carries out the essential direction stated by "stretched tight." We should note that the movements are so horizontal as to neither raise nor lower the "dog" in relationship to Joad, the man specified by name. Since neither one enjoys any superiority, as derived from tone and direction, the comparison is direct. Then there is the quotation taken from Faulkner's art.

We repeat the lines as

She came among them behind the man,

2. gaunt in the gray shapeless garment and the sunbonnet. (AC)

2. wearing stained canvas gymnasium shoes. (VC)

We note that Christensen gives each cluster the "2" designation. However, the statements, ostensibly on the same level, are on the same level in a unique way. We have parallel support. Such is essential because the past tense of "come" indicates an action, while the lack of focus on "she" demands linguistic articulation. While the "she" is reduced by the achromatic natures of "gaunt," "gray," and "sunbonnet," the coming is flattened and reduced to ground level by the "wearing stained canvas gymnasium shoes." She (gaunt) came (wearing) moves the whole "she," and her movement in terms of a diminishing whole-to-part stature. The movement fails to clear up the anonymity indicated in the first cluster, for she recedes, as a person, horizontally, and she diminishes vertically. However, we must note that the "simple" "she came among them behind the man," is replete with the anonymity and insignificance of being "among," while still yet "behind."