ABSTRACT
        It is proposed that many students are unable to
distinguish between unguarded writing patterns and literate or
expository ones, and it is becoming increasingly necessary in writing
instruction to clarify and impose the distinction between these
patterns. This problem is confounded by current trends toward
exclusively spoken language in the classroom and the use of
culturally authentic oral patterns. The common element in written and
oral language is the need for economy, which can be exploited to
systematically address the disorderliness of unguarded language. A
long and relatively complex sentence can be analyzed for simple
elements: action and action verbs, responsible agents and victims,
and referents. This information can be restructured into a simpler
version of the story. Another exercise has students seeking the
essential words in a page or passage, at first by guided searching
and later without guidance. The resulting list of verbs and nouns can
be reconstituted into sentences and paragraphs, with themes and
conclusions. An additional strategy uses the vocabulary relating to
familiar movies, which students write into sentences explaining the
movie stories, manipulating forms and syntax through drills, and
adding and changing phrases. Another approach uses analysis of word
clustering and sentence formulas in a passage. (MSE)

ORAL PATTERNS AND WRITTEN COMPOSITION

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Listen for a moment to these voices:

> All days make their end. By the way next when is it?
> Tuesday will be the longest day. Of all the glad new year,
> mother, the rum tum tiddely tum. Lawn Tennyson,
> gentleman poet. For the old hag with the yellow teeth... My
> teeth are very bad. Why, I wonder. Feel. That one is
> going, too. Ought I go to a dentist, I wonder, with that
> money? That one. Toothless, Kinch, the superman...My
> handkerchief. He threw it. Did I not take it up? His hand
> groped vainly in his pockets. No, I didn't. Better buy one.
> (Ulysses, 50)

That is of course a narrative string from Ulysses. Here are a couple other passages which

would not, I think, get through Freshman Comp:

> They stayed in Bordeaux only the four days it took 'em to
> wait their turn to go up to the dock and unload but they drank
> wine and cognac all the time and the food was swell and
> nobody could do enough for them on account of America
> having come into the war and it was a great old four days....
> (Nineteen-nineteen, passim)

John Dos Passos, Nineteen-nineteen. Here's Louis-Ferdinand Céline, another World War

I veteran who couldn't seem to talk right afterwards:

> Rinnnnnnnng again!...telephone...this time I tell you I've
> had it! Molière pestered to death...Poquelin!...Poquelin!
> that little Intermezzo! how about it!...and the ballet!...Louis
> XIV is giving a banquet! Tonight! ...two thousand
> guests!...tonight, I'm saying! Molière pestered to death!...

should have said: Go fuck yourself!... would have wound
up pulling an oar in some galley, Poquelin! A teddy-bear, so
he died on stage, spitting up his lungs, running out of blood
and patience at the same time   (Rigodon, 28)

This is Kurt Vonnegut, Slaughterhouse-five:

The Germans and the dog were engaged in a military
operation which had an amusingly self-explanatory
name...the divinely listless love-play that follows the orgasm
of victory. It is called 'mopping up.' The dog, who had
sounded so ferocious, was a female German shepherd. She
was shivering. Her tail was between her legs. She had been
borrowed that morning from a farmer. She had never been to
war before. She had no idea what game was being played.
Her name was Princess. (52)

And finally, an author whose name you may not know so well, but whose voice, alas, you

may recognize:

Joe Williams characterizes the human nature element in all of
us. There are two elements of human nature element Joe
Williams characterizes. These elements are restlessness and
avoidance measures. Restlessness and avoidance measures
are instinctive reactions for Joe Williams. Joe Williams is
plagued by tough breaks. These tough breaks compound his
human nature problems. He is a passive man. He does not
run his own life. His life runs him. His is constantly taking
orders. Not giving them. All of us are victims sometime in
life.

That was Joseph College, his Freshman essay on "Human Nature Elements and Problems

in Joe Williams as Characterized by Author of the Book."

Now, the Twentieth Century has more or less legitimized the introduction of the patterns of

live speech into written narrative. The problem is that with the freshness, spontaneity,

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immediacy retrieved by authentic **unguarded language** comes uninvited the chaos, the anarchy of **unguarded thought**, the torment, confusion, disarray of intrusion by the unconscious, by the persistence of memory, by the ranging of association, by the detour of sublimation, all regrettable and only-too-human tendencies upon which we would hope otherwise that reasoned, orderly discourse might set its stamp and stability. Naturally there is a culture behind this new literature, a glib, facile, parlous one. And rich enough, but not without its liabilities. If oral culture either has or uses no texts, then how, one critic asks,

> ...does it get together organized material for recall?...What does it or can it know in an organized fashion? Suppose a person in an oral culture would undertake to think and would finally manage to articulate a solution...How does he or she retain for later recall the verbalization so painstakingly elaborated? In the total absence of any writing, there is nothing outside the thinker, no text, to enable him or her to produce the same line of thought again or even to verify whether he or she has done so or not...How in fact could a lengthy analytic solution ever be asembled in the first place? (Ong, 33)

The problem is, of course, that our students, products of a talky, talking, talked-on, talked-over, talked-up, talked-out society are, alas, oral. Walter Ong, in a brief recapitulation of scholarship on the question of "orality," cites the following as elements of what he calls the "psychodymanic of orality": **additive rather than subordinative** (prefering correlatives to circumstantial conjunctions); **aggregative rather than analytic** (tending to epithets or formulas, clusters of words); **redundant or copious** (tending to derive its emphasis from repetition rather than studied effect); **traditional or conservative** (tending to dwell on themes, motifs, pearls of accumulated wisdom); **agonistically toned** (given to seeing things as black or white, adversarial) ;

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empathetic and participatory rather than objectively distanced (given to feeling rather than judging by reason); **homeostatic** (dwelling in present) ; **situational** (disdaining abstractions or abstract dimensions). (37)

I will suggest that these are precisely the qualities which underlie my students' **written work,** ironically, and I will be go so far as to suggest that they are in your students' papers as well. I will suggest that, although we may not live in a "primary oral society," many of our students are **unable to distinguish between unguarded patterns and literate or expository ones,** and that to teach writing it is becoming increasingly necessary to **clarify and impose that distinction,** not merely for the purposes of encouraging **adult style,** but of bringing about **simple comprehension.** I would say further that the devices of logic, that is the post-oral or alphabetical "tool" for organizing thought, are being atrophied by the overpowering presence of pre-alphabetic mechanisms in students' minds and hence students' composition. Now I haven't time to speak much about logic, but I would suggest that reestablishing conventional grammar will have the salutary effect of redressing many confusions in reasoning as well.

Those of us who are in foreign languages have a problem compounded by current trends toward the teaching and testing (and curiously enough in the history of this business it is the testing which preceded the teaching) of **exclusively spoken language in the classroom,** "oral proficiency," and more and more of **culturally authentic oral patterns,** tending toward a genuine orality in this or that target language, gestures included. Well, fine. But how do we get from there to composition, to written

accountability and the recrudescence that writing lends to unformed, spontaneous thought?

I think there is one principle which spoken language and written language share, which we as teachers may plausibly take as a point of departure, and which students must be taught to appreciate. The common element is this: **economy.** Now it is not the same economy, be it understood, but it is a process of paring away, casting off, and one students may more reasonably be expected to perform than genuine creation, at least in the beginning. The economy in oral communication, spoken language is **economy of effort, of vocabulary, of time**--not time speaking but time readying to speak--; the economy of written discourse is **economy of form, of space, of word and therefore of material.** But both written and spoken discourse reduce to a fundamental or nuclear component for coherent communication, a pattern which I would urge teachers to inculcate into their students and exploit as the irreducible core of grammar. It is an economy, I say, which turns on a minimal component of communication, which we may call the **nuclear sentence.**

responsibility   action   victim/consequence

We know that speaking tends to tolerate the stringing together of groups or even fragments of these. That writing is intolerant of fragments, prefers to maintain their integrity and bind or subordinate them to one another. But in the beginning teaching this structure means teaching **nouns and verbs.** And that is a good place to begin. Anything else is satellite: apposition, preposition, proposition, dependent, subordinate, secondary.

And so I think we can begin to make a transition from the one medium to the other. Consider this sentence from a grade B novel in French. I deliberately choose a work outside the canon of "literature" because we would not expect to find such high-powered structures, nor presumably such high-powered abstractions of thought:

> Rendus furieux par le traitement infligé à leur chef, dont ils avaient apprécié la fermeté et le courage, exaspérés par le chapelet d'injures et de coups que les gardes faissaient pleuvoir sur eux, enragés de devoir travailler comme des esclaves à un ouvrage précieux à l'ennemi, désemparés d'être séparés de leurs officiers et de ne pas entendre les commandements habituels, les soldats britanniques rivalisaient à montrer le moins d'entrain possible ou mieux encore, à commettre les bévues les plus grossières, en feignant la bonne volonté. (Boulle,

Here's the translation for anyone who needs it:

> Made furious by the treatment inflicted upon their leader, whose courage and firmness they had admired, exasperated by the hail of blows and insults which the guards rained down on them, enraged to have to work like slaves at a project important to their enemy, confused to be separated from their own officers and no longer to hear the customary commands, the British soldiers competed in demonstrating the least enthusiasm possible or, better yet, in committing the most spectacular mistakes, allthewhile fiegning good intentions.

A long sentence and a nightmare for a second-year student. Let's look at it anyway. All I want you to do is **find the action** for me. Any action. All the action. All the verbs, conjugated or other. But only action verbs: auxiliaries, modals, facilitators don't count. I want the infinite form of each, no tenses, no moods, only the fundamental and basic action, in order if possible, though even that is not essential. My students routinely can come up with a list like this:

rendre	**make**
apprecier	**admire**
exaspérer	**exasperate**
pleuvoir	**rain down**
enrager	**enrage**
travailler	**work**
désemparer	**confuse**
séparer	**separate**
entendre	**hear**
rivaliser	**compete**
montrer	**demonstrate**
commcttre	**commit**
feindre	**fake, feign**

Now we turn loose the students on a "travail de detective," the moral erand Oedipus, the primal man, was on, the search for responsibility. Who is responsible for each of these

actions, who the victim, what the consequence? Sometimes that party or parties will not even be in the sentence, in which case the students will have to supply memory or common sense, after the fashion described by Professor Hirsch in his Cultural Literacy, though considerably less sophisticated for our purposes in an Intermediate French class. Here's a sample, though not the only one, of what they can usually come up with:

responsibility	action	victim/consequence
le traitement	rendre furieux	les soldats britanniques
les soldats britanniques	apprécier	la fermeté, le courage
les injures	exaspérer	les soldats britanniques
les coups	pleuvoir	sur les soldats britanniques
__ __	enrager	les soldats britanniques
les soldats britanniques	travailler	à un ouvrage
____	désemparer	les soldats britanniques
____	séparer	les soldats britanniques
les soldats britanniques	nepas entendre	les commandements
les soldats britanniques	rivaliser	
les soldats britanniques	commettre	les bévues
les soldats britanniques	feindre	la bonne volonté

Now the **underlying structure** of the larger sentence is exposed. And the first thing that emerges is a true picture of just what was contained in that sentence and just what work, **economy**, is at root of composing or abridging the chain of thoughts which inspired it into a legitimate written form. We will speak of this process later. For now, all we have to do to make sentences, utterances is to conjugate the verbs, that is bond responsibility and action. There are some problems, though, let's admit.

The students did not plausibly come up with subjects for the verbs enrager, désemparer, séparer. This inheres partially in the nature of the past participle and the implied passive construction here. It belongs to a special relationship which exists between subject and object, a relation marked by the active, the passive, the causative, the reflexive. I recommend that you keep everything active and present for now. Remember that **homeostasis** is a characteristic of the oral mentality! What sort of word ultimately provokes the action represented by enrager, désemparer, séparer? In the sentence, we can find traitement, which is apparently the umbrella term for all this. Don't like that. Well, then who provokes the action, since it is best of all to assign responsibility to people in this synthetic world we are making up here? Of course it is les gardes, le colonel Saïto, les Japonais or something like that, from in or out of the passage.

This passage, depending how your conscience lets you break it up, shows twelve nuclear utterances within. Of those, five show irregular verbs, seven regular. Not bad odds, especially allowing that your sutdents, or mine the next time I try it, may not get all twelve. And there are others. I didn't go after infliger, for instance, which I thought too deeply

imbedded, though some students do spot it. It would give us: _____ **infliger le traitement.** Question: who or what provokes this action? Again, the answer lies variously inside or outside the passage: <u>les gardes, le colonel Saïto, les Japonais</u>. The drill in class is to elicit the verbs, maybe keep track on the board depending on how ferocious a passage you attack, then elicit by small bites the **responsible parties and victims or consequences** from within or without the text itself. Throw everything else away. Yeah, yeah. I know. For now, though: broad strokes. Principle at stake. Exceptions negligible. The business of this hunting down responsibility is both a moral and a grammatical exercise, and brings up all sorts of provocative questions to be dealt with in embryonic, macaronic, or actual French or even English if it's important enough. If the guards <u>infliger</u> the <u>traitement</u>, for instance, but on <u>ordres du colonel Saïto</u>, then who is ultimately responsible? And on and on.

You know what structures will get them into trouble. Steer around them. Modify them. If you must, take the time to explain them as they nest with your grammar review or syllabus. My idea of grammatical review is to feed them only the elements of syntax they really need to crack these little puzzles and in order of need, so that in my grammar the past and future, the passive come last; adjectives never. Only the grammar of nouns and verbs--definite, indefinite, interogative, negative--detains us. I find that with a short, perhaps painful, bit of conditioning--without using any heavy duty grammar, either--my stude.1ts, mostly in the 450-550 verbal range, can usually crack a sentence like this up to 80%, which I call good at that level. And I add that these short sentences are speakable, recallable in class and usable for oral drill, as I hope to show later.

At first, I try to guide the students to the essential ideas of a page or passage by questions. Later, when they get good at that, I take away the questions and let them determine for themselves which words are important on a given page, which ideas seem to tell the most about a given condition or situation in the narrative. What we will have to assume, because we will never have time enough to analyse every sentence in this or any book we read, is that essentially in any good work of literary art--and you will hear this again--the relation of the part to the whole will be visible in the part. This assertion, if it is true, would authorize us to study one page carefully to discern the theme of the ten pages which surround it. We test the premise in the weeks to follow. For our purposes,though, about half-way through the semester, students no longer answer specific questions. They will write daily *résumés* that is, summaries of reading assignments. They will do these summaries just as they do their reading and just as they did their questions: **analysis of structure and form.**

As they read a given page, they notice and jot down words they find essential to that page. I limit them to ten; that will hone their sense for judgment and discrimination and **economy.** I do not allow vague or general words. They won't summarize the specific action or tell us anything. Students must always choose the most concrete words they can find; that's the cutting edge of action. Consider these words from the first pages of the above text, Le Pont de la rivière Kwaï:

respecter

la discipline

ordre

capitulation

le Haut Commandement

combattre

une évasion

Nicholson

de jeunes officiers

Now, all we have to do is find verbs for the nouns and nouns for the verbs, some of which may already be on the list. We may make five sentences of these ten words or ten; mostly what we want to do is cover all the situations suggested by these words and what we understood or think we understood of the text. Any old order for now. Let's try a few:

Le Haut commandement donne l'ordre.

C'est l'ordre de capitulation.

Nicholson respecte l'orare.

Nicholson respecte la discipline.

Nicholson accepte l'ordre.

Nicholson accepte la capitulation.

De jeunes officiers n'acceptent pas l'ordre.

De jeunes officiers n'acceptent pas la capitulation.

De jeunes officiers proposent une évasion.

Nicholson combat l'évasion.

That's all I want for a while. We collect these things, scrutinize the basic grammar and get the conjugations right, watch direct or indirect objects, discourage copying from text and long answers. That's plenty for a few weeks, even a semester. **Then we make the transition.** What we have now is the core or nucleus of a paragraph. All we really have to do is eliminate any repetitions we have created, see about arranging our little sentences in some order (any order will do, pehaps the best one being the order they appeared in as we read), and then filling in any gaps in the sequence or sense of what is left.

> **Le Haut Commandement donne l'ordre de capitulation. Nicholson respecte la discipline. Il respecte cet ordre. De jeunes officiers n'acceptent pas cet ordre. Ils proposent une évasion. Nicholson combat cette évasion. Il respecte les ordres.**

To make these seemingly independent sentences coalesce or fuse into a paragraph, all we have to supply is the set of **relation-words** which make **obvious** to a reader the connections which are already **implicit** in the sentences themselves.

> **Le Haut Commandement donne l'ordre de capitulation. *Puisque* Nicholson respecte la discipline, il respecte cet ordre. De jeunes officiers n'acceptent pas *pourtant* cet ordre. Ils proposent une évasion, *mais* Nicholson combat cette évasion. Il respecte *trop* les "instructions reçues."**

Notice which words set up and set off the relationship between sentences. Puisque explains why a soldier like Nicholson would surrender, not of his own free will, but on

orders, which he respects above all. This respect puts him in a curious position, pourtant, that is, however, since he will have to oppose a porposed escape by his junior officers to maintain his respect for the letter of the law, to surrender and not resist or evade. The last word we added was clearly a personal word, a judgment: we think Nicholson was wrong to hold to the letter of the law and to forbid his junior officers to escape. We suspect, furthermore, that Nicholson's narrow interpretation of rules and orders is going to lead to trouble later on. We think, in short, that Nicholson holds too much respect, trop, for authority, and we have underlined it with a phrase from the text, a phrase Nicholson himself is probably fond of, "les instructions recues."

Now, we have already learned how to extract the core or pivotal action from a passage, that is, the four or five crucial verbs, for which we identify subjects, and to which we seek consequences. For the first act of Becket, we might have chosen these verbs or other specific actions like them:

responsible party	action	victim or consequence
Tout propriétaire	devoir	une taxe ou un soldat
Un laic	devoir	la taxe
Un clerc	assister	dans ses prières
Le roi	attendre	sa taxe
l'Eglise	refuser	cette taxe
la question		être
un principe		
la question		être
"qui gouverne?"		

We can make simple enough sentences from these, for instance:

Tout propriétaire doit une taxe ou un soldat.

Un laic doit la taxe.

Un clerc doit assister dans ses prières.

Le roi attend sa taxe.

L'Eglise refuse cette taxe.

La question est de principe.
La question est 'qui gouverne?"

Now, if we simply string those simple sentences together and indent the first, we come on something vaguely resembling a paragraph, though not yet actually a paragraph:

> Tout propriétaire doit une taxe ou un soldat. Un laic doit la taxe. Un clerc doit assister dans ses prières. Le roi attend sa taxe. L'Eglise refuse cette taxe. La question est de principe. La question est "qui gouverne?"

Our question is: have we arranged these sentences in their best and most easily-followed order? Then: What is the unifying theme or thesis of these sentences? Finally: what conclusion is to be drawn from this string of sentences. We might prefer this order, for instance, as clearer:

> Tout propriétaire doit une taxe ou un soldat. Le roi attend sa taxe. L'Eglise refuse cette taxe. Un laic doit la taxe. Un clerc doit assister dans ses prières. La question est de principe. La question est "qui gouverne?"

We might propose this as a topic or theme:

> Le conseil d'Evêques se dispute avec le roi Henri Plantagenêt. Tout propriétaire doit une taxe ou un soldat. Le roi attend sa taxe. L'Eglise refuse cette taxe. Un laic doit la taxe. Un clerc doit assister dans ses prières. La question est de principe. La question est "qui gouverne?"

Remember that in good writing the relation of the part to the whole, the topic, is visible in some form in each of the parts. Perhaps a word or two here and there coulld spell out more clearly who took what position in this dispute and why:

> Le conseil d'Evêques se dispute avec le roi Henri Plantagenêt. Selon les coutumes, tout propriétaire doit payer une taxe ou fournir un soldat armé. Le roi attend sa taxe de l'Eglise. L'Eglise refuse de payer cette taxe. L'Archevêque insiste qu'un laic doit payer la taxe. Il déclare qu'un clerc doit assister dans ses prières seulement. Pour l'Eglise la question est de principe. Pour le roi la question est "qui gouverne en Angleterre?"

Looking at our expanded paragraph, it is clear where the focus is: the King wants his money, but the Church won't pay it. We should bring that idea up front if we can.

> Le conseil d'Evêques se dispute avec le roi Henri Plantagenêt. *Le roi attend sa taxe de l'Eglise, mais L'Eglise refuse de payer cette taxe.* Selon les coutumes, tout propriétaire doit payer une taxe ou fournir un soldat armé. L'Archevêque insiste qu'un laic doit payer la taxe. Il déclare qu'un clerc doit assister dans ses prières seulement. Pour l'Eglise la question est de principe. Pour le roi la question est "qui gouverne en Angleterre?"

We still need some evidence from the text, the real words of the actors, which will anchor our assertions in the only reality we have, namely that of our source, *Becket.* The trick is to quote often, but briefly; to choose exactly the key words and no more; to support your claims but not merely repeat them; to single ou⁺ those words spoken frequently in the source--they must be significant--and those things said one and for all, in a particular way and never better. Briefly but often.

> Le conseil d'Evêques se dispute avec le roi Henri Plantagenêt sur 'la taxe dabsence." *Le roi attend sa taxe de l'Eglise, mais L'Eglise refuse de payer cette taxe.* Selon "nos coutumes," explique le roi, tout propriétaire doit payer une taxe ou

fournir un soldat "l'écu au bras.". L'Archevêque
insiste qu'un laic doit payer la taxe. Il déclare
qu'un clerc doit assister dans ses prières
seulement. Le roi appelle ces réponses "des
arguties." "Alors payez!" crie-t-il? Pour l'Eglise
la question est de principe. Pour le roi la question
est "qui gouverne en Angleterre?"

Finally, what can we conclude about this entire struggle? The student is entitled to make a
personal judgment. The trick is to make that judgment the reader's judgment as well.
Here is one possible conclusion to a pretty good paragraph:

Le conseil d'Evêques se dispute avec le roi
Henri Plantagenêt sur 'la taxe dabsence." *Le roi*
attend sa taxe de l'Eglise, mais L'Eglise refuse de
payer cette taxe. Selon "nos coutumes," explique
le roi, tout propriétaire doit payer une taxe ou
fournir un soldat "l'écu au bras.". L'Archevêque
insiste qu'un laic doit payer la taxe. Il déclare
qu'un clerc doit assister dans ses prières
seulement. Le roi appelle ces réponses "des
arguties." "Alors payez!" crie-t-il? Pour l'Eglise
la question est de principe. Mais, pour le roi la
question est "qui gouverne en Angleterre?" Donc,
puisqu'on ne pose pas la vraie question, on ne va
pas trouver la vraie solution.

Notice the *mais* that returned at the end to reprise the initial statement of topic or theme?
That simple conjunction **binds** the thesis and yet **separates** it. That tension between two
competing yet compatible notions is what gives writing a living force. **Paradox holds**
attention. In the same sentence we have both topic and division. The remaining
sentences deal with one side or the other of the quarrel: **will pay, will not.**

Good writing? Welllll!llllllllllllllllllll... Acceptable writing. A good beginning. A
dependable and consistent core upon which to squander a bit of wit and some polish. No
past tenses. No subjunctives. No pronouns, even. Yet the thought is clear, complete, and
consistent with the text, documented by the text. It is also true that writing is less adding
than **subtracting**. It seems to me in general that students are better off writing a lot

and cutting, pruning, editing than **writing a little and then inflating.** Suit yourself, though. But if the student builds up a good core of thought, he or she just has to be alert for the things which spoil or pollute clarity. And most of us can at least tell what to **get rid of,** even if we can't tell how to **produce** what we are after.

Now, I have found conversations in standard, year-long texts insufficiently active and not readily susceptible of action-directed animation. Perhaps my weakness. In any event I also found the exercises, though sound and pedagogically appropriate, disjointed or *décousu;* that is, the students found the leap from one to the next, shifts in vocabulary and context, difficult. The isolation of a single teaching point seems to be hampered by a too-broad vocabulary. Teaching vocabulary, a subject for which I have no particular feeling or aptitude, would appear to be yet another qustion; all I can ascertain is that the disparate nature of the training utterances seemed to interfere with the exercises. Furthermore, the exercises were artificial, in the sense that they were not spontaneous or not spontaneously-generated by the students themselves. And I think they can be.

Anyhow, this is what I have tried out and pursued as a sort of "theme" , with more or less success. My impression is furthermore that they were successful at manipulating such exercises, which is also encouraging. My impression is that, finally, they learned no less and no less well than they would have by text-generated or text-spawned drills: remains to be seen or verified independently.

Soooooooooooooooooo...

This is what we do. We say, "OK. Aujourd'hui on va au cinoche. Au cinéma joue film suivant:"

<u>Le Train sifflera 3 foi</u>

<u>La Guerre des étoiles</u>

<u>Casablanca</u>

<u>Le Faucon maltais</u>

<u>Le Sorcier d'Oz</u>

With a mixed class, we pretty much have to pick flicks with recognizable or at least explicable titles in French and those that are likely subjects for general viewing; a class with a more definite or particular identity might be amused by a specific kind or period of film. We try to isolate some primitive vocabulary but as little as possible and not too complicated. The goal is **not** vocabulary in this drill, though a little is required. The trick is to make a few pieces of "furniture" do the job by encouraging students to use imagination and circumlocution to get at the core of the tale. Imaginatively. Spontaneously. Orally. Here, for instance, is what we came up with for <u>Le Sorcier d'Oz</u>. Notice that we are mostly interested in nouns and verbs for basic oral utterance at Novice or Intermediate level. We can extort satellites like adjectives and adverbs, adjectivals and adverbials out of them during the exercise, *au vol*. So, <u>Le Sorcier d'Oz</u>:

l'épouvantail	chanter
le cyclone	marcher
la ferme	avoir peur'
les pompes (vermeil)	transporter
Toto	attaquer
Dorothée	transformer
le sorcier	donner
le lion timide	pleurer

l'arbre parlant	menacer
la fleur magique	avoir sommeil
le bucheron (en étain)	avoir envie
le chemin en briques (pavés) d'or	suivre
un manche á balai	se trouver
	s'évanouir

More or less. A small list will lead to student suggestions, seems to me. At least that was the way it worked in practice. The fact of the bucheron' 's, the lion 's, the épouvantail 's dilemma led, for instance, to suggestions of the things they lacked, therefore sought from Oz: un coeur. une cervelle. du courage. The word sorcier suggested untimately sorcière. Most of the verbs are from the simpel conjugatio, mostly cognate; a few judicious suggestions, however, can steer this business in any direction. A few pantomimed actions by prof can extort from students most of a core vocabulary needed to get the drill cooking. Keep it simple, keep it fast-paced, keep it rolling. Fi..t we cull a few basic utterances about the acation in the film. For instance:

Un cyclone transporte la ferme.

Dorothée a peur de la sorcière.

La sorcière a envie des pompes.

L'épouvantail a envie d'une cervelle.

Le lion timide a besoin de courage.

Le bucheron a envie d'un coeur.

Dorothée a sommeil.

Le lion timide a peur de Toto.

La sorciére attaque Toto.

And on and on. First drill.

Now we can try to squeeze satellites out of them. Ask them to elaborate. Ask leading questions. Pantomime:

Dorothée a sommeil *parmi les fleurs magiques.*

Le cyclone transporte la ferme *du Kansas en Oz.*

L'épouvantail a besoin d'une cervelle *pour penser.*

La sorcière attaque Toto *de son manche à balai.*

And on and on. Mostly we settle for phrases rather than clauses, prepositions rather than conjunctions, noun-based amplifications rather than verbal. Each sentence a student generates, however, much be accompanied by the appropriate or even the inappropriate gestures, actions, movements. (Rassias Principle Number Four) No speech without movement allowed. We spin for the cylone, we ride the manche à balai, we hang out our arms limp for the épouvantail, and so on. Second drill.

Now we grab the first five students, yank them up front, and put them into a rough line. Goal: to manipulate these basic utterances in and out of fundmental patterns of the

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language, according to the structures students will have studied thus far in course. Certainly transformation to interrogative and negative, pronoun object integration, alteration to past compound, imperfect, and future. Later, as we shall see, we can begin combing simple sentences for the conditional and subjunctive or for circumstantial clauses ad lib. For now: simple. We want students to discover for themselves that speech is a living and palpable thing, responsive, malleable, tangible, infrangible, susceptible of manipulation. Here is an example:

student #1: Un cyclone transporte la ferme au Kansas.

student #2: Un cyclone l'y transporte.

student #3: Un cyclone l'y a transportée.

student #4: Un cyclone ne l'y a pas transportée.

Or:

student #4: Un cyclone l'y a-t-il transportée?

student #5: Un cyclone ne l'y a-t-il pas transportée?

Or:

student #5: Un cyclone l'y transportera.

Or:

student #5: Un cyclone l'y transportait.

I'd say no more than five, which makes for relais. teams perhaps, for competition or at least some relief for those who perform. Two or three sentences per group, then back to seats and another up front. They must pantomine action, something like the Rassais

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wave formation, upon which -- naturally -- this exercise is patterned. Keep it simple. Keep it fast. Try to detour or derail over-complex or just-won't -work formations, although I'd say to permit the odd or uncomfortable sentence that comes up through the luck of the draw just to maintain the illusion of order in the language. Don't get wrapped around the axle over obscure exceptions or fine detail for the moment, at least in any level for which this sort of drill is apt. My opinion, any way. Their own sentences . They manipulate. Let them have the small dignity of thinking, for the nonce anyway, that it's smooth. Time to pull back later.

Other structural possibilities within the rubric of "simple sentence": active-to-passive tranformations; amplification by causative or indefinite use of reflexive:

student #1: Un cyclone transporte la ferme au Kansas.

student #2: La ferme est transportée par le cyclone au Kansas.

Or...

student #1: On entend le cyclone à la ferme.

student #2: Le cyclone s'entend à la ferme.

student #3: Le cyclone est entendu à la ferme.

Or. .

student #1: La sorcière capture Dorothée.

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student #2: La sorcière fait capturer Dorothée.

student #3: La sorcière fait capturer Dorothée par les gardes.

student #4: Dorothée est capturée par les gardes.

student #5: Les gardes capturent Dorothée.

I suppose if one were clever enough, a single sentence could be made to suffice for all these. So far I am only at Consicouness Level I just now, and can't quite come up with them.

If that works smoothly enough, and the class is sophisticated enough, try this. We rig up a couple of columns with slippery, generally applicable fragments, that is, simple sentences which we can combine plausibly--key word here "plausibly," because out of the nature of this drill we shall have to be a little tolerant of the combinations--into conditional sentences with si... Like this:

voir	un arbre parlant	avoir peur
	l'épouvantail	avoir sommeil
	le cyclone	s'écrier
		s'évanouir
saisir	Toto	attaquer
	le manche à balai	voler
	les pompes	être perdu(e)

Without exhausting the list of simple harmlessly ambiguous fragments, we can simply identify persons, then point to a sentence from one column and then to another column, perhaps with a different personage from the movie, and how "Siiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii..." The sentences should come out something like this, perhaps better if the components are more cleverly designed:

Si la sorcière saisissait Toto, Dorothée attaquerait.

Si La sorcière saisissait son manche à balai, elle volerait.

Si Dorothée voyait un arbre parlant, elle s'évanouirait.

Si Dorothée voyait le cyclone, elle s'écrirait.

Si la sorcière saisissait les pompes, Dorothée serait perdue.

If you're reaaaaaaaaaaaaally hardcore, you could drop these poisonous things into the negative through the same sort of drill. Plausible, short, auto-generated utterances, largely oral, largely exploiting minimal but specific vocabulary.

OK, let's go one further and try the same drill with the subjunctive. Same game. Two columns. Sentences suggested by student banter about the flick, judiciously nudged into a useful form by miming, swarming, coaxing, cajoling prof. I would say that some classes--and some profs--could handle this all orally, without resort or recourse to the board. Individual determination and--my view--the ideal. One could start with the board and then graduate to freehand, bareback, sentence-mixing. Limitless. But always the specter of structure and always the minimal core of the simple sentence (subject-conjugated

verb-perhaps object) subjacent, lurking, ready to pounce.

douter		refuser un coeur à
avoid peur/craindre		saisir son manche à balai
être nécessaire/falloir	QUE	ne pas avoir de coeur
être juste, bon, naturel, curieux		vouloir du courage
vouloir, prérérer, désirer, aimer		donner une cervelle à être
content, triste, surpris, honteux		parler

The teacher points, identifies potential subjects, leaves as much as possible of the sentences to be designed, devined by the students, imposed as it were not by grammar or the class-room structure, but by the general logic of the story, the film:

Dorothée doute QUE le sorcier refuse un coeur au bucheron.

Il est curieux QU' un lion veuille du courage.

Il n'est pas juste QUE le bucheron n'ait pas de coeur.

Dorothée a peur QUE la sorcière (ne) saisisse son manche à balai.

My advice: forget that pléonaste in the last one. Suit yourself.

One last possible drill. Same exercise but exploiting the conjunctions governing the subjunctive in French:

pleurer	rendre Toto
demander un coeur	entendre
crier	s'évanouir
avoir du courage	saisir son manche à balai
claquer des talons	rentrer au Kansas

Notice that there are really two games possible here. If the prof chooses the same subject for each action (one from either column), then the student responds with the economical infinite form; if the prof names two different subjects, then we must conjugate, and having conjugated use a conjunction, and having chosen one of the below in French, conjugate in the subjunctive.

afin que	pour que
de sorte que	de maniere que
de peur que	de crainte que
avant que	en attendant que
jusqu'à ce que	
sans que	à moins que
quoique	bien que
pourvu que	à condition que

Soooooooooooooooooooooo...

Le lion a du courage *jusqu'à ce que* la sorcière saisisse son manche à balai.

Dorothée crie *avant que* le lion (ne) s'évanouisse.

Le bucheron demande un coeur *sans que* le sorcier entende.

Dorothée pleure *sans que* la sorcière rende Toto.

And...

Dorothée pleure *sans* rentrer au Kansas.

Le lion a du courage *sans* s'évanouir.

Dorothée claque des talons *pour* rentrer au Kansas.

Seems like a simple exercise, capable of "contextualizing" drills by calling up a commonplace of some frequency even among disparate social groups or levels in a given section. It seems to offer a physical, action-oriented component, great flexibility, the capacity to accelerate in level along with the class, and the potential to exact some modest application of imagination from most students along with a sufficient degree of professor input and control to allow the latter some pleasure in the exercise as well.

So, let's get back to that student paragraph that I offered as introduction. Remember:

> **Joe Williams characterizes the human nature element in all of us. There are two elements of human nature element Joe Williams characterizes. These elements are restlessness and avoidance measures. Restlessness and avoidance measures**

> are instinctive reactions for Joe Williams. Joe Williams is plagued by tough breaks. These tough breaks compound his human nature problems. He is a passive man. He does not run his own life. His life runs him. His is constantly taking orders. Not giving them. All of us are victims sometime in life.

How do we fix it? Well, first off it is essential that it be the students who "fix" it. What we have to do is mostly negative, according to the doctrine I have tried to peddle today. We must deny him his "oral" devices, and that means requiring the correlating or subordinating of any sentence with a repeated element in it by one of four "expository" devices: relative, correlative, circumstantial, infinite or non-conjugated verb. Then we must attack word clustering and formulas. That means something like this:

responsible	action	victim/consequence
Joe Williams	characterizes	human nature element
Joe Williams	characterizes	elements
Elements	are	restlessness
		avoidance measures
Restlessness	are	instinctive reactions
Avoidance measures		
Tough breaks	plaque	Joe Williams
Tough breaks	compound	human nature problems
Joe Williams	is	passive
Joe Williams	does not run	own life
His life	runs	Joe Williams

Joe Williams	takes	orders
Joe Williams	does not give	orders
All of us	are	victims

As you can see, our expansion is not substantially different from the student's, which suggests that his paragraph was in the wrong form for written discourse. Our expansion also revealed what was hidden by a fragment and by at least one passive. Now, before we try to combine these for economy, let's get the gibberish out. What is hiding behind those collocations? We simply refuse them and make the student come up with a word, a single word, that he or she meant. The results can be surprising. Here's what this student decided upon after my simple refusal to let him use evasive terms like "human nature element" or "avoidance measure":

responsible	action	victim/consequence
Joe Williams	characterizes	weaknesses
Joe Williams	characterizes	kinds
Kinds	are	restlessness
		fear
Restlessness	are	instinctive
Fear		
Tough breaks	plague	Joe Williams
Tough breaks	compound	weaknesses
Joe Williams	is	passive

Joe Williams	does not run	own life
His life	runs	Joe Williams
Joe Williams	takes	orders
Joe Williams	does not give	orders
All of us	are	victims

Now, I still have a couple of questions, but that is what the student came up with. Let's ask him to combine these sentences, distill the repetitions, perhaps even do away with what does not add or amplify:

> Joe Williams characterizes two kinds of human weakness, fear and restlessness. Tough breaks plague Joe Williams and compound his instinctive weaknesses. Because Joe Williams is passive, he does not run his own life; life runs Joe Williams. He takes orders but does not give orders. All of us are victims.

Now if we look closely at the forms, we see that the writer has left instinctive and passive, which actually seem to stand in some relation; they both describe Joe's state. Soooooooooo...if a = b and b = c, then a = c. Instinctive must be passive for our purposes here, and they in turn must be opposed to something that Joe is not. When pressed, this student came up with active quickly enough for the opposite value to passive, but he could not do the same for instinctive. Turned loose on the problem, a whole class offered up animal for instinctive, and human first as an opposite to animal. Then, seeing they were in trouble when their second sentence was compared to their first, they agreed that human, now a synonym to animal, was in fact what was wrong with Joe, human weakness,

opposed to some other sort of _strength_: _____ strength. What Joe lacked. What he ran from. What he would have had if he stayed. What would have made him stay. Well, of course, after a lot of agony, someone proposed _responsibility_ and the whole thing fell clear. He needed _moral strength_ to resist _natural weakness_ and as a result would assume _responsibility_ and stay, not run.

> **Joe Williams characterizes two kinds of human weakness, fear of responsibility and restlessness. Tough breaks plague Joe Williams and compound his instinctive weaknesses. Because Joe Williams is passive, he does not run his own life; life runs Joe Williams. He takes orders but does not take responsibility. All of us are victims.**

When the new ideas were introduced, it became clear that the _take-give_ antinomy of the next-to-last sentence was not right, but that a _take-take_ paradox would make more sense, and from that the nifty irony that _taking orders_ was a passive response while _taking responsibility_ was active. And that leaves us with the original conclusion, that _all of us are victims_. I say that it is now either incomplete or inconsistent with what we have deciphered about Joe's life. Here's what the kids came up with as a personal judgment, to be developed in what follows, of course: "All of us can be victims like Joe, unless we learn to take responsibility for our lives."

Well, is that then a good paragraph? I know it is a better paragraph. I for one still have questions about _tough breaks_ and about _fear_. What _tough breaks_? _Fear_ of what? But what has emerged here is, I say, a lot clearer than what was there first. Best of all it gets corrected by the student by the mostly private application of some mostly simple measures

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and a bit of professorial sternness, namely the refusal to accept certain favorite word-dodges by which students conceal a lack of thought.

Any one of you who have assigned a composition topic and retrieved from eleven out of twelve students this sentence: "Gerty Mac Dowell and Nausicaa are very similar in their thoughts and actions but also very different" should harbor the suspicion that our students are given to **formulaic** composition. Any of you who have waded through a Freshman essay inserting periods, conjunctions, colons, and semicolons knows that **parataxis** is a thriving medium nowadays. Any of you who have gnashed your teeth at clichés, bromides, platitudes, and other lieux communs will be persuaded that **thematic thought and composition by motif** remain traditional technique. So what do we do? Well, perhaps this. Students, who live clearly enough in a parlous, spoken culture among themselves, mistrust and recoil from writing, from reading as a related skill. I prefer to legitimize initial efforts by drawing them out of reading from some of the authors I have mentioned. We can introduce into students' reading, first off, familiar patterns not so far divorced from what they speak and hear. We can begin reasonably enough with pastiches of these spoken patterns, first to leave them the joy of unfettered composition on paper, though not without some communion with an artist in this medium, someone who used such speech with a purpose. The pastiche is a respectable teaching tool in Europe, a traditional one, and, I say, a useful one for our purposes; even the lowly dictée seems to me legitimate for this purpose, though with obvious limitations.

We can slowly and systematically attack what is most dangerous about unguarded speech,

its failure to order itself. This we do by exploiting what conversation and composition have in common: **economy.** If we begin with what students are thinking and--most important--how they are thinking, and arm them in class with devices, procedures for testing that sort of thought, I think they can do better at seeing with genuine clarity **what is going on around them** and do better at generating ideas, bright and valid ideas, for **changing what is going on around them when it should not be.** At the least we can show them how to sift and sort out what patterns are those of spontaneous language and what ones formulas which deserve inspecting and perhaps discarding.

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