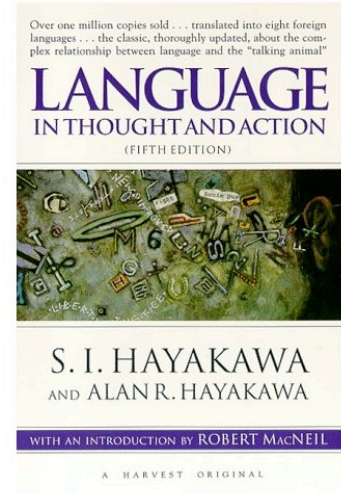# HAYAKAWA'S LADDER OF ABSTRACTIONS

DEFINITION:

- **S.I. HAYAKAWA**
- **ABSTRACTION LADDER:**

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS:

- **LEVELS:**

APPLICATIONS:

- **READING COMPREHENSION:**
- **WRITING:**
- **CRITICAL THINKING:**

LEVELS OF ABSTRACTIONS

LEVEL FOUR: ABSTRACTIONS **EXAMPLES**: life, beauty, love, time, success, power, happiness, faith, hope, charity, evil, good.
LEVEL THREE: NOUN CLASSES: BROAD GROUP NAMES WITH LITTLE SPECIFICATION. **EXAMPLES**: People, men, women, young people, everybody, nobody, industry, we, goals, things, television.
LEVEL TWO: NOUN CATEGORIES: MORE DEFINITE GROUPS. **EXAMPLES**: teen-agers, middle-class, clothing industry, parents, college campus, newborn child, TV comedies, house plants.
LEVEL ONE: SPECIFIC, IDENTIFIABLE NOUNS. **EXAMPLES**: Levi 501 jeans, my blue, three bedroom house on Hollis Street, *In Living Color*, Bud commercials, African violets, Tina's newborn sister, Mina.

"Most writing contains a range of abstraction levels, but successful professional writers draw heavily on Level One abstractions. Sophistication of thought deals in the realm of abstraction, but sophistication of writing is achieved through supporting those abstractions with concrete details…In the simplest terms then, if Level One abstraction is used in writing, the audience will understand what ideas and concepts are being discussed…If a writer is trying to describe a person, and she mentions that the protagonist wore Birkenstock's and a jeans skirt, an image is evoked in the reader's mind; whereas, if the writer says the protagonist was dressed in casual attire, the reader's impression of the character is not as strong, and the audience will be free to interpret the writer's meaning in ways. Wearing a green and pink housecoat with flip-flops would mean casual to many people, so using the levels of abstractions carefully will help convey meaning to the audience."

Jan Streever [http://ol.scc.spokane.edu/jstrever/comp/Summer201/hw3.htm]

SAMPLE ABSTRACTION LADDERS

LEVEL 4	society	human endeavors	economy
LEVEL 3	most people	industries	farm assets
LEVEL 2	spoiled child	cosmetic company	cattle
LEVEL 1	my sister, Tracy	Max Factor, Inc.	Bessie, the cow

(*based on the work of Hayakawa's ladder of abstractions)

RESOURCES:

- Book: *Language in Thought and Action*. S.I. Hayakawa. 5th Ed. Harcourt, 1991.
- Hayakawa Overview: http://homepages.ulb.ac.be/~jpvannop/HAYA.html
- Summary: http://homepages.ulb.ac.be/~jpvannop/HAYA.html
- Origins: http://ol.scc.spokane.edu/jstrever/comp/Summer201/hw3.htm
- Critical Thinking & Ladder [limited access via JSTOR]: http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0013-8274(199102)80%3A2%3C44%3ACTVTAL%3E2.0.CO%3B2-X