

## The Language of Hypnosis, Part I

by

Dennis K. Chong and Jennifer K. Smith Chong ©

In this paper, the male pronoun will apply to either gender. The plural pronoun will apply to both authors. The nominal pronoun will apply to the first author.

Given the infinite possibility of how words can be strung together to form sentences, the question is whether there is a way to select the words that fit a given subject to determine a trance state. This paper examines such a possibility. The alternative is to fly by either luck or the instincts of experience. Whilst the former has nothing to speak for it, the latter is open to the risk of error. Neither is, therefore, satisfactory.

There are those who are undoubted cognoscenti in evincing informal trance inductions<sup>1</sup>; and then there are those who do not know how to do it and are therefore stuck with verbalizing from the existing menu of formal trance inductions. Either way, the question remains. How do they work?

In trance inductions, the undoubted mystery concerns:

1. How do they work when they do?
2. How is it that they do NOT work for everyone?
3. How is it that they do work on one occasion and not on another.

It is this uncertainty of results that denies the place of Hypnosis in the domain of the scientific disciplines. It is for this that one can have a professorial chair in “mass communication,” whatever on earth this field of study may mean, and not one in Hypnosis of Clinical Hypnosis.

For the practiced and tested professional, the problem lies in the difficulty of understanding what a trance is. To say that it is an altered state is clearly insufficient. As I type this now, I know that if I were to lose my temper in the next moment, then in my anger, I shall without question be in an altered state relative to the present typing state. However, I somehow feel that I am not in a trance state by being in an angry mode relative to my typing mode. My colleague shares this conclusion with me; and I am quite sure that clinicians will agree that whilst I am in an altered state, such an altered state is not a trance state. What this is, is something that I found from my experience when I was the stage hypnotic subject of Reveen the Impossibilist on the stage of Hamilton Place, Hamilton, Ontario.

This event took place sometime in the eighties. As I recall, he began with a series of

hypnotizability tests of the people who had responded to his invitation to be his subjects for his stage performance. When his tests were complete, and he was left with his subjects, I was one of them.

His induction was a formal one, Progressive Relaxation. he then anchored the trance to a piece of music. It was a power anchor. From then on, he offered a series of direct suggestion that were part of the fabric of his show. As a result of his suggestions, among other things, I found myself conducting a full non-existent 150 piece symphony orchestra on the stage; at another point I was swimming the full length of an Olympic swimming pool in an Olympic race and there was not one drop of water.

It was only on very fleeting occasions that I was vaguely aware of how insane my behaviour was. When these very brief moments of awareness came, they were immediately dismissed as utterly immaterial and intrusive. Even as they were dismissed, what came into greater focus were the suggestions. They were what I wanted to do.

From this experience, we can say that a trance state has the following features:

1. An internal focus (or fixation) on a way of BEING in spite of all possible transient counter-arguments-in-awareness.
2. a wanting to be in focus (or fixation) of a way of BEING in spite of all possible transient counter-arguments-in-awareness.

It is quite clear that if the counter-arguments-in-awareness could have prevailed, I would not have submitted to the ridiculous suggestion to conduct a non-existent 159 piece symphony orchestra on a stage before an audience of some 3000 people! It is the critical feature of the discounting of any counter-arguments-in-awareness that is the hallmark of what a trance state is.

Many years ago, when I was new to the study of Hypnosis, I studied under Dr. Edgar Barnett<sup>3</sup>. He introduced to me the concept of Critical Factor (CF). Today, we also understand CF as the meta function (m(f)) - the ability to evaluate, abstract, opionate and adjudicate. With this in mind, we would say and it is something that is in concordance with Barnett's position:

**Trance exists when the operation of CF or m(f) is set aside in a person.**

CF or m(f) is a metaphor for our philosophies, attitudes, beliefs, values<sup>5</sup> and isomorphisms<sup>6</sup>. Thus, for any context of life in which we find ourselves, we have to arrive at some understanding of it. Our understanding may or may not be concordant with others that co-share the moment with us.

In that context, we bring to it the body of our philosophies, attitudes, beliefs, values, criteria, and isomorphisms. In turn, this creates the conditions for how we shall respond to the moment. And our response will be uniquely ours.

When we attempt to evince a trance state by setting aside critical factor or m(f), we are

attempting, in effect, to set aside, for a given context either the entire body of philosophies, attitudes, beliefs, values, criteria and isomorphisms, or more likely some critical domain that applies to a given subject in a given context. At one level, if it were the former, one's instinct is that this would in effect be an enormous, singular if not impossible task. If it were the latter then it would still be challenging.

How to do this can be very taxing. However, there is a way around this. And this is what the cognoscenti do in their approaches to secure a trance in an informal manner. At issue is also what is the implicit formal structure that all such operators are using to secure a trance state. We propose to examine this in Part II

Endnotes:

1. Informal trance inductions.

The creator and exponent of this methodology was the late Milton H. Erickson M.D. He was decidedly opposed to the application of formal trance induction protocols. If our understanding of his position is accurate, we would say that he deemed their use as insane parroting.

2. Powerful anchor is a term equivalent to a re-induction cue. During his performance, Reveen took a break. I had seen him perform at the Imperial Room of the Royal York Hotel in Toronto. I remembered that this portion entailed the subjects doing even more silly things. I therefore, decided not to return to the stage. His cast reassembled and he re-induced a trance by playing music. When he concluded the trance for his subjects, I came round in my seat to the laughter of my family and the people around me because, as the expression goes, I was zonked out during the entire time of the end phase of the Reveen performance. In more ways than I can measure, it was a privilege to his subject because by experience, I came to learn what Hypnosis is.

3. Edgar Barnett wrote the definitive work on *Analytical Hypnotherapy*. He is a recognized authority in this sub-domain of Clinical Hypnosis.

4. Meta function (m(f)): This term was first introduced and discussed in the work *Power and Elegance in Communication*.

5. Criteria are the parameters we use to determine what is important for us, especially what is the most important.

6. Isomorphisms are the parameters that we use to determine what is fitting for us, especially what is the most fitting.

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