Sample Speech Using Monroe's Motivated Sequence

The reference to the following material appears on p. 265 of *Acting on Words*.

The following (somewhat fictionalized) text by BSc and BA graduate Rebecca Dickens was written to be read to an audience. Her style is therefore informal, oral, making deliberate use of sentence fragments, colloquial sayings, contractions, and the like. She is not imagining an audience at some formal house of government but rather a more relaxed one consisting of students, teachers, and interested citizens in a university lecture hall. Remember, however, that persuasive principles grew in oral traditions: the following design and methods can easily be suited to written persuasion, simply by adapting style to the written occasion. This address may be much longer than ones you will be expected to develop for first-year courses, but its design works just as well for shortened topics.

Consulting p. 264 of *Acting on Words*, see if you can identify the five main steps of Monroe's Motivated Sequence. Also note down any other interesting features of rhetorical appeal. Then see our rhetorical observations in the document called "'Language Arts or Language Departs" With Commentary.'"

Language Arts or Language Departs?

Rebecca Dickens

The politicians and school officials call it “language arts,” but I wonder if the better term is “language departs.” Imagine if this were to happen in physics class: Heather Green struggles with how to test a new principle in quantum theory. She asks her professor for help, and he tells her to use an equation. Oh, oh. Her high school never taught her algebra. Impossible, right? But the very same thing is happening in humanities and liberal arts courses all the time. Students in droves are registering for tough courses in higher-level reading, thinking, and writing, but they, poor innocents, have never learned how to analyze a sentence. They were never taught how to decipher its algebra and thereby explore, register, and express ideas. And what do we say? “So what?” What we should say is, “I’m mad as hell, and I’m not going to take it anymore.”

Sure, I know that many of us consider “grammar” an ugly word. Let’s not go there anymore, we think. We’ve “evolved” into a text-messaging society. We’re into “the new oral.” Who needs grammar! That’s interesting, because the ancients were largely oral. The guidelines we follow today for all sorts of communications arose from their speeches and ideas on how to give successful speeches. We formulated written communication from people talking to each other, as we are doing here. Who says that talking means indifference to parts of speech and sentence patterns?

The core of classical curriculum was the triumvirate: rhetoric (the art of composing)… dialectic (the art of using logic to test both sides of an issue)… and—guess what, cover your ears—*grammar*. Yes, that dirty word. The art of recognizing standard parts, patterns, and relationships in the language we use to forge our destinies as human beings. Those less evolved people who gave us *Oedipus the King* and similar throwaway produce seemed to believe that language, too, is an equation. One that, incidentally, helps us find our way to secrets of the human condition.

Maybe it's just my last name, but I've always enjoyed Charles Dickens. I'm fascinated by how he spins sentences—all those subordinate clauses, twists and turns of thought—and even though I took a science degree, because everyone told me to be practical and get a "real" degree—I made room for a course on Dickens. My professor took pity on me. He gave me lots of extra help in how to distinguish a main clause from a subordinate one, a main idea from a secondary one. That's right—those word elements function like algebraic equations. Or they should. All of nature is a cornucopia of forms bearing meanings. Structure matched to content. Interpreting form is a basic process of all fields in our pursuit of answers to essential questions. Sentence parts symbolize thoughts and their precise relationships. You learn to read with a whole new world of understanding once you learn how these equations of sentence parts to ideas are applied.

"Geniuses," as they are called, may use and interpret language intuitively, instinctively. But many of us, last names notwithstanding, are not geniuses but simply explorers on a path, in need of signposts to help us stay on that path. The ability to analyse sentence parts and relationships has proven through centuries of scholarship a crucial signpost in the service of understanding. I thought understanding was what education is all about. So why *don't* we teach primary and secondary students how to analyse sentences?

I've heard various explanations, all pointing to the idea that the 1960s rebelled against authority, against "prescriptive" rules. Grammar was seen as "prescriptive" authority, telling us what to do, limiting creativity by imposing regulations that often demonstrated muddled thinking. For example, never end a sentence with a preposition, never begin a sentence with a conjunction, never split an infinitive. Some of these rules resulted from a misguided notion of English as country cousin to Latin. Language maestros of the day wanted to see English dancing to the music of the noble language of Rome, seat of empire. Writers like Dickens never bought into the fallacy, as their creative work demonstrates. They broke the petty rules. But they did understand that English has its *own* natural grammar—not one imposed, but one discovered. Descriptive analysis simply observes patterns that reflect general and standard usage. Where's the harm in learning guidelines that not only reflect what has been practised for centuries by incisive

and creative writers but also what is expected by editors of professional publications. Useful grammar is not so much rules as discoveries, vehicles, evaluations, processes—all leading to breakthroughs. My school gave me the basic tools of science, and I did well with them. Don't tell me I couldn't have been given the basic tools of language.

When I decided, after three years of work as a scientist, that I really wanted to work with people instead of things, I registered for a BA. The self-assessment test for English revealed that I was a flop at grammar, despite the remedial help I had received from my Dickens professor. With mounting terror, I read the proviso attached to the English composition course required for a BA: "a sound knowledge of grammar is assumed." What nightmare had I entered? How could something I had never been taught "be assumed"! But it was.

My academic advisor, a kindly lady who had completed primary and secondary school before the banishment of grammar connected to "holistic learning," commiserated. She showed me the *Canadian Press Stylebook* and pointed out that following its principles was a requirement of journalists (even though some of them get away with ignoring it). She pointed out that if I wished to publish anything about people and their creations—which I did—I would need correct grammar. She tried consoling me with the revelation that my English assessment score was merely "typical." Even a touch above average. Why was I – why was my generation-- saddled with needing to learn important basics that would have been so much easier to absorb when we were younger, basics that could seem tedious and distracting now that we were otherwise ready to leap forward into ideas. If only we knew those basics! How much smoother and more effective our learning would be. And how much less taxing of money and resources: ours and those of the postsecondary system forced to grudgingly cobble together ad hoc remedial services.

I interviewed several language arts teachers in grades four through ten. All of them recited an assurance (handed down from on high) that grammar was treated on an as-need basis, not as a separate focus (because that is boring—imagine if we said the same of arithmetic). They assured me that grammar learning was integrated into work-shopping

of the students' writing. Yes, some teachers do act on this ideal, they do remember to interweave grammar learning into peer editing. They are akin to saints. I even know a few of these special teachers myself. But I also know official BS when I hear it. Like a criminal investigator, I reviewed assignments returned to various young students by many language arts teachers. Never a mention of sentence analysis anywhere. One language arts teachers even confessed that he couldn't tell a subject from a verb. The sad thing is none of you looks the least bit surprised to hear this.

I decided to poll graduates of our local education department. To a person, they confessed not knowing grammar. Some were evidently concerned and uncomfortable about that fact. Others simply said that grammar was "out of date." One of the education graduates I questioned had previously acquired his PhD in English (apparently paying for professional "editing assistance" or having had the good luck to get a thesis committee of magic-wand wavers).

I asked the professor who ran the required first-year composition course at our university why the course didn't include grammar. "Because this isn't high school," he said. My academic advisor filled me in on some history. The course had once included a grammar workbook, for recognized remedial needs, but then an opportunity had come along to license the course to the World Bank for use in the African Virtual University. The manager of the World Bank program had called the course professor and told him that "no one teaches grammar any more." She apologized but suggested he ditch the workbook or lose the contract. Apparently this World Bank manager also asked to meet the course professor next time she was "in Canada"; she thought his web site picture looked like Shakespeare and she always liked meeting famous people.

My academic advisor laughed. "If she ever dated the real Shakespeare, what would she say when he told her he had learned to write at "grammar school"?

This is all true. Grammar is not on the school radar. It's anathema to the education industry, to education departments and even, apparently, to the English departments,

which consider it beneath them. No one has really learned grammar since the 60s, so who can teach it? We can hide our heads in the sand like ostriches, but when we come up for air, guess what: grammar is still as important as ever for professional success and for deeper success. By "deeper success" I mean our negotiation of the magical space-less dimension between thought and word. Hurray for the Beatles and other innovations of the 60s, but not for that decade's simple-minded rejection of tools of learning. I'm sure I don't need to convince you that being precise, observant and knowledgeable—that being conscious-- is hardly a threat to being creative.

So what now? We give up and go on faking it, right? Rubbish.

Here's what you can do, based on who you are, who you know, what you do, and how much time you have on hand. Let's say you don't think you know anyone or know much of anything. You are still bound to know a child. See if that child is learning to analyse speech, including grammar; if he or she isn't, write a letter to your MLA. Copy the letter to your MP, to the principal of the child's school, to the head of the local school-board, to the chair of the Education Faculty, and to the editor of your local newspaper. Most importantly, if you send that letter to only one person, send it to our provincial Education Minister. I have heard from political insiders that just 100 letters are enough to change a Ministry's direction, as long as the letters are genuine and original, citing facts and concerns from one's own observation.

Another thing you could do is organize or join a citizen's action group. Coincidentally, I happen to be founding president of one such group called *Language Yes*. You can sign up for our quarterly newsletter and make a modest contribution to our cause by stopping at one of the three tables on your way out. Three tables and me—that's already four! And we just barely started. Our first issue newsletter is available at the tables. It gives you links to other initiatives you might wish to join. For instance, professors Fred Williams and Sally Rubinek are spearheading a volunteer group of English teachers and speech communicators who are going to visit elementary and secondary schools as classroom guests as well as deliver work-shops to interested teachers on how to teach

grammar. One hundred teachers have already asked for this participation-- but the teachers say they can't really teach the grammar until it's back on the official curriculum.

So.

Next week when I show up for a visit with the Education Minister, one that he has been avoiding for six months, when I show up and he says that he can't put grammar back in the schools because there is no one to teach it, I will have a pretty good answer, don't you think? Along with the support of professors Rubinek and Williams, I have a signed petition from these 100 school teachers saying they believe we need to restore grammar. I apologize if I was sounding unfair to our teachers a little earlier. There's nothing wrong with them—most are tremendously hard-working and dedicated to their students. It's just that when it comes to grammar, they haven't been given the tools or the empowerment they need.

And if the Ministry still doesn't respond? Professors Williams and Rubinek are going to co-author hard-hitting articles for the media describing our concerns and the lack of response from government and education officials. Blackmail? Perhaps. But as the politicians would say, that's politics. I call it grammar in action.

Professor Rubinek sometimes teaches adult basic upgrading classes. She once had a young man who performed at below grade two on the standard test of basic English. But Professor Rubinek is a marvellous teacher; this student is a marvellous learner. She gave him extraordinary time and attention. Six years later, the student graduated with a first-class honours degree in English. His first novel describing a painful childhood of social neglect, problems with addictions, scrapes with the law, is due for publication next spring. The gritty content and success-story theme helped the sale, to be sure, but so did the writer's command of English. And that includes standard English usage. Grammar.

I don't think of myself as a product of social neglect. I could be your sister, your daughter, your partner—as I look around, no, not quite your mother—but you get my

drift. I'm a typical case of someone with all the so-called social advantages. Yet I hit my university arts program in desperate shape. The truth is, I nearly didn't make it. The Writing Centre was my salvation for three years. Now with funding cuts to student services as the new computer lab expands, the Writing Centre is no more. That next young woman in line, who could as well be me six years ago, maybe won't make it at all. The sight of all that red ink on her first essay may be the final blow to her struggling confidence. As Rudolf Steiner once told the Austria of his time when it called on him to change the state of education, the only way to make real change is to start again with the children. They are our tomorrow. As the Aboriginal elders remind us, we need to think of the next five generations. We need to start with the young.

Each of our tables by the exits to this hall has the mailing address of the Education Minister. Each has the petition for you to sign stating your support for our demand to the Ministry. It's a simple demand, a doable demand. There are no real excuses, if we all participate. As you have seen, there are already plenty of citizens prepared to volunteer their time and skills to help implement the transition to a better day for language. A better day for language means a better, healthier tomorrow. We worry about physical health, but I'm talking about the health of hearts and minds. The time to restore a basic, time-honoured medicine is now.

Practice Activity

1. Imagine that you have been asked, as editor of your institution's journal, to cut Rebecca Dickens's speech for publication by 800 words (the text is around 2,500 words). Which parts would you cut? Explain why.

2. Imagine that your institution's president likes this speech and wants to deliver it at an upcoming convention. However, he has been requested to speak for at least 25 minutes. You time the speech, using a natural pace with appropriate pauses, and it clocks in around 16 minutes. You need to add another four pages or so, or 1, 500 words. Could you do that without the speech becoming "padded"? What might you add, where, and why?