Understanding Public Speaking

Style: Rhetorical Devices

Week 9, November 15, 2023

Common Figures and Terms There are thousands of techniques for speaking figuratively, and many have multiple names and subtle variations. Among them, the following are the commonly observed figurative devices listed by Dennis Glover in his book *The Art of Great Speeches and Why We Remember Them.*

Schemes: changes in the way words are arranged to make them more attractive or give them greater force

- *accumulation*: a vigorous summation of previous points
- *alliteration*: beginning a series of words with the same letter or a similar sound
- *anadiplosis*: beginning a clause or sentence with the last or most prominent word of the preceding sentence
- *anaphora*: beginning successive clauses, sentences or paragraphs with the same word or words
- *antimetabole*: repetition of words in successive clauses but in (rough) reverse order, also called 'chiasmus'
- *antithesis*: the employment of opposite or contrasting ideas
- *aposiopesis*: breaking off from a speech suddenly for dramatic effect
- *apostrophe*: sudden redirection of the speech to another person or object
- *assonance*: the use of two or more words that sound similar
- *asyndeton*: the exclusion of conjunctions between words or clauses (usually the omission of 'and' in lists)
- *climax*: words or ideas arranged in escalating importance
- *epanalepsis*: beginning or ending a clause or sentence with the same word or words
- *epiphora*: repetition of the same word or words at the end of a clause or sentence
- *isocolon*: a succession of phrases containing an equal number of syllables
- *parallelism*: the use of two or more similarly constructed clauses
- *parenthesis*: interrupting a sentence to introduce additional descriptive information
- *periphrasis*: using multiple words when one or two will do
- *polysyndeton*: the multiple use of conjunctions in rapid succession
- *repetition*: repeating words or clauses for forceful effect
- *symploce*: the combination of anaphora and epiphora the same line
- *tricolon*: speaking in threes to emphasise points

Tropes: changes in the normally accepted meanings of words

- *allegory*: storytelling employed as a metaphor
- *allusion*: indirect reference to a person, thing or event
- *antanaclasis*: repetition of a word whose meaning changes
- *anthimeria*: the substitution of one part of speech for another (e.g. nouns as verbs, nouns as adjectives, etc.)
- *anthypophora*: asking and then immediately answering rhetorical questions
- *antiphrasis*: using words opposite to their usual meaning
- *antonomasia*: the substitution of a descriptive phrase for a name and vice versa
- *archaism*: the use of outdated words
- *commiseration*: invoking pity
- *ellipsis*: intentional omission of details
- *erotema*: asking a rhetorical question
- *hyperbole*: intentional exaggeration, not meant to be taken literally
- *innuendo*: using words to convey an indirect, usually disparaging, meaning
- *irony*: using words to express the opposite of their usual meaning
- *litotes*: a form of irony that employs understatement, usually by stating the negative of the contrary (e.g. 'it was no small accomplishment')
- *maxim*: a pithily expressed precept relating or moral or political behaviour
- *meiosis*: deliberate understatement to reduce importance
- *metaphor*: substituting one thing for another to describe an object, happening or action more vividly
- *oxymoron*: using two words with opposite meanings to make a contradictory statement
- *parable*: an extended metaphor, usually in the form of a story, to make a moral point
- *paradiastole*: the rhetorical re-description of something to give it lesser or greater significance, or more positive or negative qualities than your opponent has claimed
- *paradox*: posing a contradiction to evoke a truth
- *paronomasia*: a pun using similar sounding words with differing meanings
- *personification*: attributing human agency to non-human objects or events
- *practeritio*: alluding to something while pretending to pass over it
- *pysma*: asking multiple rhetorical questions
- *satire*: using sarcasm, irony or ridicule to highlight vice or folly or to send up opponents
- *simile*: comparing two or more things
- *syncatabasis*: the art of speaking at the level of your audience
- *topos (pl. topoi)*: common forms of argumentation

Comparing schemes and tropes in speeches: *The two excerpts below are taken from Julius Caesar, one of William Shakespeare's best-known tragedies. Marcus Brutus, leading the conspirators who had assassinated Julius Caesar, and Mark Antony, to be appointed one of the triumvirate after Caesar's murder, spoke beside the dead body of Caesar. Speaking in diverging ways for seemingly diverging purposes, the two men had the same intention: to persuade the crowd that was listening to them.*

Speaker: Marcus Junius Brutus

[1] Romans, countrymen, and lovers! [2] hear me for my
cause, and be silent, that you may hear: believe me
for mine honour, and have respect to mine honour, that
you may believe: [3] censure me in your wisdom, and
awake your senses, that you may the better judge.
[4] If there be any in this assembly, any dear friend of
Caesar's, to him I say, that Brutus' love to Caesar
was no less than his. If then that friend demand
why Brutus rose against Caesar, this is my answer:
–Not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved
Rome more. [5] Had you rather Caesar were living and
die all slaves, than that Caesar were dead, to live
all free men? [6] As Caesar loved me, I weep for him;
as he was fortunate, I rejoice at it; as he was
valiant, I honour him: but, as he was ambitious, I
slew him. [7] There is tears for his love; joy for his
fortune; honour for his valour; and death for his
ambition. [8] Who is here so base that would be a
bondman? If any, speak; for him have I offended.
Who is here so rude that would not be a Roman? If
any, speak; for him have I offended. Who is here so
vile that will not love his country? If any, speak;
for him have I offended. I pause for a reply.

Speaker: Mark Antony

[1] I am no orator, as Brutus is;
But, as you know me all, a plain blunt man,
That love my friend; and that they know full well
That gave me public leave to speak of him:
[2] For I have neither wit, nor words, nor worth,
Action, nor utterance, nor the power of speech,
To stir men's blood: [3] I only speak right on;
I tell you that which you yourselves do know;
[4] Show you sweet Caesar's wounds, poor poor dumb mouths,
[5] And bid them speak for me: but were I Brutus,
And Brutus Antony, there were an Antony
Would ruffle up your spirits and put a tongue
In every wound of Caesar that should move
The stones of Rome to rise and mutiny.

Rhetorical Devices in Speeches

Introductory Notes *The excerpts below are taken from five speeches made on different occasions. What they have in common is the employment of rhetorical figures to make the moments, and the words as well, remembered.*

Tony Blair *speaking of Princess Diana's death after she was killed in a car crash on 31 August, 1997:*

But people everywhere, not just here in Britain, kept faith with Princess Diana. They liked her, they loved her, they regarded her as one of the people. She was the People's Princess and that is how she will stay, how she will remain in our hearts and our memories for ever.

Ronald Reagan *speaking on June 6, 1984 at Pointe du Hoc on Normandy beach in France, on the 40th anniversary of the Normandy invasion:*

We stand on a lonely, windswept point on the northern shore of France. The air is soft, but 40 years ago at this moment, the air was dense with smoke and the cries of men, and the air was filled with the crack of rifle fire and the roar of cannon... Behind me is a memorial that symbolizes the Ranger daggers that were thrust into the top of these cliffs. And before me are the men who put them there.

Nelson Mandela *speaking in self-defence against the death penalty in his trial for treason on 20 April, 1962:*

During my lifetime I have dedicated my life to this struggle of the African people. I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons will live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal for which I hope to live for and to see realised. But, My Lord, if it needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.

Winston Churchill *speaking in the House of Commons on June 4, 1940, facing a possible German invasion of the United Kingdom:*

We shall go on to the end, we shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our Island, whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender.

Martin Luther King Jr. *speaking on Aug. 28, 1963, on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, Washington D.C.:*

[1] Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of their captivity.

[2] But one hundred years later, the Negro still is not free. One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. One hundred years later, the Negro is still languished in the corners of American society and finds himself in exile in his own land. And so we've come here today to dramatize a shameful condition.

[3] In a sense we've come to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men — yes, Black men as well as white men — would be guaranteed the "unalienable Rights" of "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check which has come back marked "insufficient funds". But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation. And so we've come to cash this check, a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice.

[4] But there is something that I must say to my people who stand on the warm threshold which leads into the palace of justice. In the process of gaining our rightful place, we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds. Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred. We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence. Again and again, we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force.

[5] There are those who are asking the devotees of civil rights, when will you be satisfied? We can never be satisfied as long as the Negro is the victim of the unspeakable horrors of police brutality. We can never be satisfied as long as our bodies, heavy with the fatigue of travel, cannot gain lodging in the motels of the highways and the hotels of the cities. We cannot be satisfied as long as the Negro's basic mobility is from a smaller ghetto to a larger one. We can never be satisfied as long as our children are stripped of their self-hood and robbed of their dignity by signs stating: for whites only. We cannot be satisfied as long as a Negro in Mississippi cannot vote and a Negro in New York believes he has nothing for which to vote. No, no, we are not satisfied, and we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream.

[6] So even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream today!

I have a dream that one day down in Alabama with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of "interposition" and "nullification", one day right there in Alabama little Black boys and Black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers. I have a dream today!

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight; and "the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together."

This is our hope. This is the faith that I go back to the South with.

Cicero on STYLE

Introductory Notes *The following words elaborating the essense of style are taken from Cicero's two books, which were dedicated to his promising young friend, Brutus, later famous in the conspiracy against Caesar. Cicero's wide practical experience informs the book ORATOR, which depicts the ideal speaker, details the principles of eloquent oratory, and quotes instructive examples. The other book BRUTUS gives an account of the Roman tradition of public and law-court speeches from its beginning to what Cicero describes as the polished and entertaining speeches of his own day. Along the way Cicero has interesting things to say about the influence of the speaker's audience on his style and technique.*
Do the words below remind you of what Aristotle tells us about STYLE?

[1] The decision as to subject-matter and words to express it belongs to the intellect, but in the choice of sounds and rhythms the ear is the judge; the former are dependent on the understanding, the latter on pleasure; therefore reason determines the rules of art in the former case, and sensation in the latter. We had thus either to neglect the favour of those whom we were striving to please, or find some art of winning it. [Source: *Orator*]

[2] The principal ornaments of oratory are what the Greeks call figures of speech. Their significance does not so much lie in their capacity to add colour to language as in their power to present ideas with increased vividness. [Source: *Brutus*]

[3] If they have similar case-endings, or if the clauses are equally balanced, or if contrary ideas are opposed, the sentence becomes rhythmical by its very nature, even if no rhythm is intended. [Source: *Orator*]

[4] If you use it constantly, it not only wearies the audience, but even the layman recognises the nature of the trick: furthermore, it takes the feeling out of the delivery, it robs the audience of their natural sympathy, and utterly destroys the impression of sincerity. [Source: *Orator*]