

Communication and Argumentation

Matteo Secco

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1 Introduction

Course themes

- Linguistic
- Retic
- Presentation Skills
- Argumentation (and Manipulation)
- Grant-writing
- How to write papers

How to learn communication (according to Cicero)

- Study the theory
- Copy the technique of good communicators
- Practice on communication

How we'll learn during the course

- Classes
- Labs
- MOOC (like coursera)
- Tutoring for the final project

Exam structure 60% of the grade from written test, 40% from project.

Written test will consist of 6 open questions. One of those **will be** "Find 4 examples of arguments in your field of study, identify and discuss them"

Project simulation of a proposal for PoliHub/Research Council

2 Communication: basic principles

Languages are made of signs. The existence of the concept implies the existence of an intelligence capable of relating two elements: **signifier** and **signified**. For example, fire by itself is just smoke, but intelligence can read it as a sign of a fire.

Signifier is the element used as a sign: the smoke in the example above

Signified is the element the sign stands for: the fire in the example above

2.1 Four big consequences of using signs

Allow to transmit knowledge beyond direct acquaintance Of course we acquire some of our knowledge by direct experience. Symbolical representation of languages allow knowledge to be transmitted even in absence of direct acquaintance.

This can be achieved because signs work by abstraction: from a concrete object we abstract the concept of it, and are able to use it as a sign.

Anyway, without direct acquaintance, no new knowledge can be generated

Allows to expand knowledge by combining concepts together Languages are like LEGO blocks: we can combine signs to obtain new ones. For example, *Not+Finite=Infinite*. The concept of infinite cannot be experienced ever, but we are able to get it combining other concepts.

We can create things that does not exist For example we can create the concept of *Teleportation*= $\overset{\text{distance}}{\underbrace{Tele}} + \overset{\text{moving}}{\underbrace{Port}}$

We can lie

2.2 How signs work

What is a sign? It is composed by a signifier and a signified

Signifier is the element bringing a meaning

Signified the meaning

Signs are, however, arbitrary. Different types of arbitraries exist:

Arbitrary of the signifier: If we all agree to call books "Kikoo", language would still work

Arbitrary of the signified: The same sign (word) can represent different object: the Italian word "porta" can be translated to "door" or to "brings"

2.3 What is a "text"?

Text is an extended structure of syntactic units, any meaningful linguistic production, both oral and written.

Text interpretation is mostly non verbal, as the verbal components are the little part.

Co-text is essential to understand the overall meaning. Co-text refers to the "text around". It is determined by both:

the other sentences: Aldo asked me 10€. $\begin{matrix} \text{He loaned me 5€} \\ \text{He loaned me 15€} \end{matrix}$. → The picked sentence determines if Aldo is kind or greedy.

the arrangement of other sentences: Louis is good. His father bought him a pc → pc is a reward
His father bought him a pc. Louis is good → good at using the pc

Con-text Is the world around the text. The context contains the cotext, but also includes elements of knowledge that are external from the text itself.

Encyclopedia represents our knowlegde of the world: without external knowl- edge wwe would not get any conceptual difference between green eyes and red eyes. But from our personal encyclopedia, we know that red eyes are uncommon, and are maybe a sign for a disease, while green eyes are pretty normal.

2.4 Elements of good communication

Reference Communication must be understandable: a good communicator must be able to identify a common ground for communication (common knowl- edge).

3 Rhetoric

Rhetoric ("the art of speaking") is born in the Greek democracy. It is an art, with principles and rules. By itself, rhetoric is neutral, but it can be used to both manipulate or to persuade.

Bad use of rhetoric In Greek there was a rhetor, Corax, who instructed another man, Tisias, on rhetoric. Tisias refused to pay Corax, and in court he defended itself saying "If i loose the trail, I don't have to pay Corax, as he was not a good teacher. If I win the case, I don't have to pay Corax by law".

Elements of rhetorics: We will divide rhetoric into sub-steps:

- Finding good arguments
- Arranging arguments properly
- Choose the best style for the speech
- Put the audience at the center of our attention
- Calibrate our communication based on the common ground

3.1 Invention: finding what to say

Invention is finding what to say o create our communication. Invention is brainstorming.

Ancient orators suggest to take into consideration three aspects:

ethos: the credibility of the speaker

pathos: the effects on the audience

logos: the facts about the things under discussion

For example, in a typical project proposal people focuses a lot on technical facts (logos). A level up is to point out how you will be capable of running the project (ethos) and the benefits the project will bring to the company (pathos)

Prepare to objections anticipating objections allows us to reply brilliantly, avoiding to freeze and create an embarrassing situation.

It is also useful, for our own organization, to categorize the possible objection, in order to be more efficient in preparing the answers and in remembering it

Anticipate wishes What is the audience wishing? Anticipating the wishes allows us to create a sensation of satisfaction, which will lead to a positive overall perception

Brain-mapping After we think we gathered enough material, we want to group it. A possible grouping may be ethos-pathos-logos, but also more domain-specific groupings are possible
Grouping allows us to check whether we have enough of everything.

Conclusion Invention is crucial. Being essentially brainstorming, it works better if performed in group. Also, keep in mind that invention will always be "opened", it will not end after the first time you perform it. The contents will change overtime, influenced by new information. Some new topics may emerge, some other may become not relevant.
Finally, keep in mind that invention takes time. Ideas come where they want, not when you command

3.2 Arrangement: organizing the communication

Is the act of picking the best order of our argument. The ways to arrange depends on the context: for example whether the communication will be oral or written, may be interrupted or not, and other

Nestorian order can be used in both written and oral communication. It requires to have the full and continuous attention of the audience → no interruptions. This is because if the communication is interrupted, strong arguments may be lost.
The Nestorian structure is **Strong arguments → Weak arguments → Strong arguments**.

Descending climax The structure is **Strongest arguments → Strong arguments → Weak arguments → Weakest arguments**.

Ascending climax The structure is **Weakest arguments → Weak arguments → Strong arguments → Strongest arguments**. This is desirable when we want to be sure to have an emotional effect, and we are sure that we will not be interrupted.

3.2.1 Beginning of the speech

Captatio benevolentiae is the act of winning the favor of the audience. It can be achieved in three ways:

- Pleasing the audience
- Putting yourself into the shoes of the audience
- Playing humble and be self ironic

3.3 Style: dressing ideas in words

There are more ways in which you can express an idea, and the way we choose will make a difference on how the content is perceived. In this section we will learn how to choose one.

Elocutio reminds that a good text has to be correct, clear and appropriate to the situation

Ornament is using rhetorical figures to deflect the normal use of language with the purpose of provide a vivid image

3.3.1 Rhetorical figures

Metaphor making reference to something by means of something else.

Analogy a comparison meant to help the audience to connect to an idea.

Anaphora is the repetition of the same word/expression at the beginning of successive clauses.

Suggested to dig out for more by ourself

3.4 Common Ground

The collection of mutual knowledge, mutual beliefs and mutual assumptions that is essential for communication between two people (Herbert Clark)

We will consider, in general, Common Ground as Shared Knowledge.

Common ground mistakes

- Taking for granted not shared knowledge
- Explaining knowledge that is already known

3.5 Proposed exercises

Exercise 1: "good plagiarism" Don't be afraid, it's ok. And do be sure that I know that "real" plagiarism is bad. But it can also be used for the good, as in this exercise.

Cicero said that you learn by imitation. You find a report that according to you is well organized? Try to "copy" it, organizing YOUR report using that schema. You find an "introduction" paragraph that arranges arguments in a way you feel is effective?

Try to do the same for the introductory paragraph of YOUR scientific paper. And so on.

Exercise 2: “Talk to the most unlikely audience” This exercise is about common ground and being clear.

Take a technical topic (related to your research) and make a presentation (e.g. a 15 minutes oral presentation) meant for somebody with a different background (e.g. in humanities) or with a different education level (e.g. high-school students or even primary school children) or for someone completely far from the field you are active in (e.g. your grand-father?).

Try to find a way to actually deliver the presentation and get feedback, it will be eye-opening!

Exercise 3: “Give yourself a goal” This exercise is about invention. The same topic (e.g. a research activity) can give vent to quite different kinds of communication, according to a number of parameters (the goal, the audience, the context...). In this exercise, you are required to work on the goal.

Create a presentation about the topic of your research with the goal of getting funds for it, another with the goal of conveying to fellow scientists the significance of your work, etc.

If you have the option to actually find someone who might fit into your hypothetical scenario, give the presentation and collect feedback. But even if you can't, the sheer exercise of choosing the proper topics (exercise on “key messages”) to fit the goal will bring substantial benefits to your communication skills.

A Communication Tips

Acronyms must always be explained at least once.

Correctness of grammar and semantic.

Be informative Saying "he has 2 eyes, 1 mouth" is useless when describing a person.

Be relevant ensure to answer any open question, be it explicit or implicit.

B Likely exam questions/arguments

Find 4 example of arguments in your field, identify and discuss them

Ambiguity of signs 2.2