"Memorable" Messages

by Mark L. Knapp, Cynthia Stohl, and Kathleen K. Reardon

Some interpersonal messages are reported to be remembered for a long time and to have a profound influence on a person's life.

During the course of a single day, hundreds of verbal messages are directed to us in face-to-face encounters for evaluation and response; during one's lifetime the quantity of interpersonal messages processed must be staggering. Most of these messages have a relatively short life; they are processed, responded to, and forgotten. Yet, there seem to be a few verbal messages which may be remembered for extremely long periods of time and which people perceive as a major influence on the course of their lives.

One such message for naval officer and eventual President of the United States, Jimmy Carter, was later used as the title for his autobiography, *Why Not the Best?* (6, preface). During an interview with Admiral Rickover for a position in the nuclear submarine program, Rickover asked Carter if he did his best while at the Naval Academy. After Carter admitted that he did not always do his best, Rickover asked, "Why not?" According to Carter, this was a question he was "never able to forget" and became a rule for him to live by. Another example involves noted therapist Carl Rogers, who recounted a memorable and influential episode which took place while he was a student discussing the learning and use of facts with a professor of agronomy. The professor reportedly said, "Don't be a damned ammunition wagon; be a rifle" (27, chapter 1).

These anecdotes and the recollection of similar messages in our own lives piqued our interest and we informally asked friends, relatives, and colleagues if there was any message they recalled from their past which

Mark L. Knapp is Professor of Speech Communication at the State University of New York at New Paltz. Cynthia Stohl is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Communication at Purdue University. Kathleen K. Reardon is Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication Sciences at the University of Connecticut.

seemed to have a significant impact on their life. Nearly everyone we asked said they were familiar with the phenomenon and were eager to explain the circumstances surrounding such personally memorable and influential statements as "You can't lead all lives," "This too shall pass," "Some people are pushed through life, others are pulled," and "You've never been anything; you aren't now; and you won't ever be anything." Even those who initially said they could not recall a memorable message often sought us out later indicating they had remembered one. Having fortuitously "discovered" a communication unit which seemed to be a common but memorable event in most people's experience and which was reported to exert a powerful influence on the course of one's life, we undertook the following study to learn more about these messages.

Our study was designed to gather a large number of memorable messages as well as information about the circumstances surrounding their transmission and reception.

To supplement our own data collection, student interviewers were trained to use a 10-question interview schedule which was typically completed in 15 minutes. Of the 224 messages obtained by the authors and the student interviewers, 166 were derived from students at the University of Connecticut; the other 58 came from parents of students and other adults over thirty years of age in northern Indiana and Illinois.

The interview data were classified and coded according to four major categories: the structure of the message; the form and organization of the message; the content of the message; and the circumstances surrounding the enactment and reception of the message. Information from each of the 224 messages was coded in 22 separate subcategories contained within the four larger categories. Intercoder reliability was assessed by determining the percentage of agreement for the responses of two trained coders to each category. In cases of disagreement, final classification was determined by consultation with a third coder. Table 1 presents the first three categories, with the percentage of agreement scores and frequency data. Table 2 presents the same information for the circumstances surrounding the enactment and reception of the message.

Before the formal study was conducted, we noticed that a number of the messages people recalled seemed to explicate guidelines or rules to follow. A rule, according to Shimanoff (28, p. 57), is "a followable prescription that indicates what behavior is obligated, preferred, or prohibited in certain contexts." Often these rule statements are similarly structured in an "if-then" form, even though the words "if" and "then" may not be used. For example, a corporate executive reported this rule-based memorable message: "When (if) you have the power to make or

Table 1: The nature of "memorable" messages

	Frequency of occurrence	% of agreement between coders
RULE STRUCTURE		
Message statement		
Rule-structured	135	89
Nonrule-structured	89	84
FORM AND ORGANIZATION		
Sentence number		
Single sentence	205	100
Multiple sentences	19	100
Grammatical subject		
Second person singular (direct)	58	97
Second person singular (imperative form)	78	92
Other (I, pronoun, noun)	88	94
Command form		
Direct/imperative form	123	92
Indirect command	44	88
Other	57	92
Communication channel		
Orally transmitted	209	100
Not orally transmitted	15	100
NATURE OF THE CONTENT		
Situational applicability		
Applicable in many situations	212	96
Applicable in only one situation	12	93
Emotional content		
Serious	224	99
Not serious	0	99
Recollection of message[a]		
Very certain (8, 9, 10)	159	100
Not sure (5, 6, 7)	46	100
Unclear (1, 2, 3, 4)	19	100
Behavioral orientation		
Action-oriented/actively stated	162	94
Not action-oriented/passively stated	62	96
Behavioral recommendation		
Precise prescription of recommended behavior	129	88
Precise prescription of nonrecommended behavior	33	89
No recommendation	62	99
Subject matter of advisement statements		
Love yourself/self-respect	94	92
Relational message	42	92
Education and jobs	24	96
God and religion	6	96
Virtues	14	88
Other	5	88
No advisement	39	96
Familiarity of advisement statement		
Advice seems familiar (to coders)	140	96
Advice seems unique (to coders)	20	94
A known proverb	30	98
No advice	34	96

[a] Numbers in parentheses represent points on a ten-point scale identified by informants.

Note: For all categories except gender of communicators, the first entry differs significantly from the others ($p < .001$).

Table 2: Circumstances surrounding the enactment and reception of memorable messages

	Frequency of occurrence	% of agreement between coders
Age of recipient when message received		
21 years or less	180	100
Over 21 years	44	100
Age of sender		
Over 21 years	192	100
21 years or less	32	100
Status comparison		
Sender of higher status	152	98
Sender of lower status	6	100
Equal status	61	97
No response	5	100
Gender of communicators		
Male to female	69	100
Female to male	27	100
Male to male	59	100
Female to female	66	100
No response	3	100
Setting		
Private	138	92
Public	73	91
No response	13	100
Audience		
Personally/privately directed	220	92
Publicly directed	4	92
Type of interaction		
Face-to-face	211	96
Not face-to-face	13	98
Perceptions of sender's communicative behavior		
Seriously stated	155	98
Jokingly stated	45	97
No response	24	100
Perceptions of sender's purpose		
Benevolently stated for recipient's own good	175	94
Impersonally stated	25	94
Negatively stated (nasty)	4	92
Selfishly stated for sender's own needs	5	98
No response	15	100
Effects on the recipient		
Long-term positive effect	202	98
Long-term negative effect	7	97
No effect	9	100
Unsure	6	100

Note: For all categories except grammatical subject, the first entry differs significantly from the others ($p < .001$).

break a man's whole career, (then) don't get too close to him." Shimanoff (28, pp. 75–77) shows how other rules can be reconstructed to fit the if-then form—e.g., "The dealer at bridge always bids first" can be reconstructed, "If one is playing bridge and is the dealer, then one must bid first."

In an effort to determine the extent to which memorable messages were rule-structured, we asked our coders to look for the if-then format as well as four other structural characteristics of regulative rules. These four components were derived from the work of Gottlieb (11), Cushman and Whiting (8), and Shimanoff (28), and were applied in a study of

marital communication by Harris (13). These included (a) an indication of the circumstances or context in which the rule is applicable—this *condition* must be of a repeatable nature if the behavior suggested is to become a rule; (b) a *prescriptive marker* which indicates obligation, preference, or prohibition—the words "must," "should," and "should not" are commonly used; (c) an indication of the *behavioral act* which ought to, may, or must not be performed to comply with the rule; and (d) an indication of the *desired consequences* of behaving in the prescribed manner. For example:

Condition ..... If your argument is sound
Prescriptive marker ..... it is unnecessary
Behavioral act ..... for you to raise your voice
Desired consequence ..... in order to win the argument.

Although the model used for determining whether a statement was structured as a rule designated four components, these components did not always manifest themselves explicitly in the statements. Sometimes the antecedent condition or the desired consequence was left unspecified in the statement and was gleaned from other interview responses—e.g., the respondent's perception of the sender's intent and the respondent's report of the message's impact on his or her life. Sometimes the prescriptive marker was implicit in the imperative form of the statement—e.g., "When you are kicked by a jackass, (you should) consider the source." Since the coder's classification of rule statements frequently required judgments based on responses to several interview questions and the reconstruction of segments implicit in the reported statements, the high percentage of agreement between the coders (shown in Table 1) was somewhat surprising.

The number of memorable messages structured as regulative rules was both statistically and conceptually significant. The following two examples from the 135 statements that coders classified as rule-structured messages illustrate some of the ways implicit and explicit elements combined to complete the established rule framework.

If you want a relationship to work (condition) you have to (prescriptive marker) work at it (act). The desired consequence (that the relationship will work) was implicit and had to be supplied by the recipient.

No matter what the other girls are doing (condition), act like a lady (act). In this example, both the prescriptive marker (you should) and the desired consequence (social approval) had to be supplied by the recipient.

The omission of one or more of the elements necessary to complete these rule statements may magnify a message's perceived "insight."

When the recipient is required to participate in forming the message, even if it is only to fill in implicit premises, the chances of perceiving the message as important and the chances of remembering it would seem to be greatly improved.

Even though a significant number of the messages met our criteria for the structure of regulative rule statements, our coding system may have underestimated the number of memorable messages which *function* as rules. For example, the message "Everyone rises to their own level of incompetency" may affect a person's attitudes and/or behaviors in a manner similar to rule-structured statements even though it does not adhere to the structural criteria we established.

The messages we collected were communicated orally in a single sentence. Most of the 224 messages (75 percent) contained an injunction or command.

Even though memorable messages are perceived to be delivered during a single, specific situation, in 212 of the 224 messages analyzed the content transcended any one specific context. Of the twelve messages which were not applicable in other contexts, eight involved the loss, death, or illness of a loved one, one was a proposal of marriage, two were related to specific jobs, and one dealt with the "day of infamy." Coders agreed that the substance of the messages was always serious in nature.

Most of the informants (70 percent) were very certain that they remembered the precise words uttered. Since long-term memory has been proven to be very unreliable (18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23), we questioned the validity of this perception, reasoning that our informants simply wanted to believe that a message which had significant impact on their lives was precisely recalled. Research on human memory indicates that we tend to remember the gist of meaningful material rather than the precise wording (23, p. 118), and that we tend to construct additional bits and pieces to fit into a coherent story since we often remember only parts of events (14).

Thus, we checked with ten of our informants five months after they had provided us with a memorable message. Six respondents originally said they remembered the message exactly as it had been said to them (ten on a ten-point scale); four said they recalled the wording well enough to select a nine on a ten-point recall scale. Only three of the ten informants reported a different wording for the messages when we surveyed them five months later. Even the differences in these three instances were minor—e.g., "Lonely people build walls instead of bridges" was changed to "Lonely people make walls instead of bridges"; and "They can take everything from you but your education" was changed to "They can take everything away from you but your education."

The content of memorable messages is also most often (72 percent) action-oriented—i.e., contains prescriptions of what one should or

should not do rather than passive remarks on the state of the world. These messages most frequently (42 percent) contained advice about how the recipient could improve his or her self-concept—e.g., "If you don't love yourself, no one else will" or "You can be whatever you want to be." Two other common themes concerned advice about how to get along with other people ("Don't kick the king unless you kill him") and advice on one's education or job ("Make your avocation your vocation"). Very few of the messages we obtained dealt with God. Most seemed to be statements reflecting virtues and values common to the society from which our sample was selected—e.g., "If you want to lead a long, full life, do everything in moderation," "Always be happy with little, don't be greedy," or "Don't regret what is past, it is over." Our coders identified 30 of the 224 statements as proverbs—e.g., "If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen" (the relationship between proverbs and memorable messages will be explored more fully below).

There seems to be a configuration of characteristics common to the enactment and reception of memorable messages. Eighty percent of the informants were less than 21 years old when they heard the statement while 85 percent of the senders were over 21. The disproportionately large number of informants who were attending college surely affected these results, but 25 percent of the parents and informants over the age of 30 also reported that they were under 21 when the message was received.

These messages were most often received from a person who was older and of higher status.

In only three percent of the cases did an individual remember receiving a memorable message from a lower-status person—e.g., a boss receiving a memorable message from an employee, a parent from a child, etc. The messages did not seem to favor dyads composed of same or different genders, but 51 percent of the females said the message was sent by a male while only 31 percent of the males said they received a memorable message from a female.

Most messages (62 percent) were exchanged during interactions in a private setting—e.g., the home or car of one of the communicators. Even in public settings like classrooms, the message was perceived by the recipient to be targeted toward him or her instead of the larger group—e.g., a class of students. The memorable messages which were not given in face-to-face interactions (six percent) were most often given over the telephone.

There was considerable agreement among the recipients concerning their perceptions of the sender's behavior. The sender was generally considered to be serious at the moment in the interaction when the message was stated, and to have made the statement for the recipient's own welfare. In only four percent of the cases did the recipient perceive

the sender as saying the message to hurt the recipient or to fulfill his or her own selfish needs. Most recipients (90 percent) believed that the message had a long-term, positive effect on their life.

When these messages are remembered, the reasons are complex and involve the nature of the recipient, the sender, and the message itself.

Memory processes have rarely been examined in natural, everyday life situations (but see 2, 18, 19). Linton (18, 19) reports that she forgot over 30 percent of the *events* which occurred during the five-year study of her own memory. The attrition rate for specific sentences must be much higher. Memory researchers Loftus and Loftus tend to indict most long-term recollections as unreliable (20, 21, 22, 23). Further, once a message is determined to be a memorable message, the person may believe it has been operative longer than it actually has. In the words of James Fenimore Cooper, "On the human imagination, events produce the effects of time. Thus, he who has travelled far and seen much, is apt to fancy that he has lived long, and the history that abounds in important incidents, soonest assumes the aspects of antiquity" (7, p. 1). The fact that nearly everyone asked said they had a message they had remembered for a long time also makes us question whether long-term memory was actually operating.

On the other hand, we cannot entirely dismiss the possible role of long-term memory. All of our informants claimed to have remembered the messages for a long period of time and our spot check indicated virtually perfect recall over a period of five months. In addition, the Loftuses point out that hearing memory is apparently stronger in human beings than sight, touch, or smell memory (24). Furthermore, Linton (18, 19) notes that the novelty and uniqueness of an event make it more likely to be remembered. Although some of the messages we examined seemed to be clichés, it seems likely that the recipient perceived the message as a unique insight—providing a hitherto unknown or unusual perspective on a situation or situations. The sender of the message may not remember saying the message because it is the receiver who determines whether a particular message sufficiently integrates his or her past (and probable future) experiences into a coherent, useful shorthand rule of thought or behavior. It is within this framework that Linton's observation that "well remembered events are idiosyncratic to the individual" is meaningful.

Instead of trying to argue that all of these messages are constructed and/or remembered in the same way, it is probably more accurate to suggest a variety of patterns, all of which are rooted in the way a person "frames" a situation. When we frame a situation, Goffman (9) says, we look for cues that direct our attention toward certain aspects or attributes

Roy T. S. Lee

and away from others. Frames are the means by which we organize our perceptions of social events. Thus, when we are looking for an answer to a problem (the stimulus for the emergence of "memorable" messages), it may involve recalling the answer from the past, inventing an answer and attributing it to the past, or storing a present answer for future recall.

So, part of the memorable nature of these messages is found in the receptivity of the target person. On those occasions when the memorable message "takes hold" immediately, it is likely that the message has provided a unique way of resolving a crisis, integrating diffuse experiences, and/or creating hopeful guidelines for future satisfactions. In a study of natural conversation, Keenan *et al.* (16) found that statements which were more interactionally "charged" (statements conveying more information about the speaker's intentions, beliefs, and attitudes toward the listener) were recalled with far greater accuracy than those which did not provide such information. These results, say the authors, "indicate that the impact of this parameter on memory is more dramatic than any of the other parameters which have been examined to date" (p. 558). Memory for these statements is positively affected because of the quantity of information conveyed, the personal nature of the information, and the probable emotional/affective response, all of which are consistent with the conditions our informants typically associated with memorable messages.

It is possible that at different times in one's life different types of messages will take on an importance not found at other life stages. One's self-concept and ability to get along with others (the two most common topics of memorable messages) may be especially important during adolescence and early adulthood, so advice on such matters may be more salient at that time. Receptivity to such messages may also be high during life crises involving one's self-concept or relationships with others—e.g., divorce, death of a loved one, failure or doubt about one's abilities on the job, etc. In therapeutic contexts, these individual/social needs and emotional states of the receiver have been shown to play an

important role in one's receptivity to and memory for statements similar to those we collected. According to Watzlawick (29, p. 74), "It seems there is something in the essence of a well-constructed aphorism that lends itself to an almost flashlike illumination of complex human situations and, therefore, also of world images."

Haley (12) acknowledges the power of these aphorisms to effect significant change in an individual, but suggests that the impact may not always be immediate. The usefulness of the message for guidance and understanding in multiple situations may only be "seen" later (p. 127). In this case, the message is stored in our memory until other life experiences occur to give it richer meaning. Sometimes a slight amount of stress may even improve one's memory for an event, but too much stress is likely to increase the distortion of information recalled. If the message is not useful in describing the course of one's life, it is not recalled; if it seems to capsulize accurately a person's experiences over time, that individual probably will believe it has been operative since the time it was first heard. It is quite possible that the participants in this study will recall other messages in five or ten years which they will deem memorable. Some of these will spring entirely from their imagination; others will be based on messages already received, even though the events which will be organized and integrated within the framework of the message have not yet taken shape.

When we purposefully reconstruct our past to seek guidance and explanations for our current life situation, our needs and emotions affect the memory process. A person's current self-image will figure in those messages he or she recalls as important in forming that image. Thus, regardless of how they are constructed or recalled, an important part of the memorable nature of these messages is the perceived applicability of the verbalized formula to the person's current social and emotional needs.

The person sending the message constitutes a further important element in its likelihood of being memorable, however it is carried or retrieved. Normally, the sender is older and perceived as having a higher social status than the receiver, and the sender's credibility in the life of the recipient may both legitimize the longevity of the message and/or make it easier to recall.

Messages perceived as memorable are most often brief oral injunctions that prescribe rules of conduct for solving a personal problem.

The way a message is structured and delivered may also contribute to its perceived (or actual) memorable quality. First, it is brief—a single utterance which is the equivalent of a short sentence. Second, the

recipient perceives the message to be directed solely at himself or herself for his or her benefit. This personal dimension is less likely to be evident when a statement is classified as a proverb (1). Third, memorable messages most often conform to a simple rule structure rather than exhibiting more complex constructions, including some of the "stylistic devices of poetry" (4) in proverbs, or the "neat symmetries and witty convergences of sound and meaning, tight formulations of logical relations, highly patterned repetitions, structural balance, and familiar metaphors" (17) associated with proverbs; or the juxtapositional structure attributed to chiasms like "If guns are outlawed, only outlaws will have guns" (29); or the combining of two concepts in an unusual way as some aphorisms do—e.g., "Too little to live on, too much to starve from." Some of the messages designated as memorable did have intricate constructions which would set them apart from the flow of conversation, but many did not. Thus, brevity, personal focus, and a relatively simple rule structure may enhance the process of memory storage and/or retrieval. These characteristics may also facilitate construction of those messages which are invented rather than based on recall. Ong (26) has suggested that certain features of oral communication trigger a "light bulb effect" in people which the more linear, analytic nature of written material discourages. His analysis also helps to explain why these oral messages so often seem to parallel clichés and proverbs.

> *The noetic processes of primary orality, as is now widely known, are formulaic and rhapsodic rather than analytic. As in Homeric epic and to a great extent in classical oratory, particularly of the more orotund variety, this orality operates with the sort of commonplaces, formulary expressions, and clichés ordinarily despised by fully literate folk for, without writing, an oral culture must maintain its knowledge by repeating it. Writing and, even more effectively, print store what is known outside the mind and downgrade repetitive styles. In lieu of more elaborate analytic categories, primary oral culture also tends to break down issues into simple polarities in terms of good and evil, "good guys" and "bad guys"* (p. 200).

Our experience in yielding to the wisdom of these brief oral injunctions and proverbs begins early in life when the communicative impact of orality is high. As early as age five, children are able to recognize a few proverbs and give some explanation of their meaning (25). Ong (26) tells of an episode in which a child wants to preempt a car's window seat for a ride lasting several days. Another child disputes the first child's rights until the adult in the car says, "Turnabout is fair play." At this point, the dispute ends and the child yields the window seat.

> *. . . the saying saved the youngster's face. . . . [It] was something everybody knew, or should know, part of the common store of*

> *knowledge that a culture consists in. There is a deep humanity in the noetic processes of primary orality* (p. 202).

The fact that memorable messages are usually in the form of an injunction also has implications for the memorable nature of these messages. Commands not only demand attention; they are a regular and familiar part of the parent-child dialogue. Berne (3) even argues that the "script" our life follows is often heavily rooted in the injunctions set forth by our parents—e.g., "You'll be famous some day," or "College is for eggheads," or "Marriage is a trap only fools fall for" (15). Some of these injunctions we follow; some we try to disobey; some we ignore. But we become accustomed to the message format. Thus, it should not be surprising that the format used to *explain* the trajectory of our life is similar to those which helped *guide* it along the way. Memorable messages normally represent an attempt to integrate certain parts of a life script comprised of a set of guiding injunctions. The memorable message may be one which "makes everything clear" in retrospect or it may be a message which has, over the years, represented a superordinate injunction guiding certain life decisions.

Furthermore, these messages are most characteristically positive and optimistic injunctions. When negative messages were recalled, they were presented in the context of having "overcome" them. Our successes, it seems, may appropriately be explained by a guiding principle, but we may not wish to view our failures in such "simplistic" terms. We seem to be far more able to accept the notion that one statement made "all the difference" if the difference is in a positive direction. There are both psychological and social pressures against the idea that one message can cause us to behave or believe in a negative manner:

> *Any injunction, any instruction is much more effective when given in positive language—that is, free from negation. "Remember to mail this letter" is bound to be remembered much more reliably, especially by a child, than "Don't forget to mail this letter. . . ." The more negative and frightening a linguistic formulation, the less the other will be willing to accept it and the sooner he will forget it. Positive and concrete formulations are preconditions of any successful lasting influence* (29, pp. 67–68).

Although there are differences in the content of proverbs and memorable messages, the kinship of these two phenomena understandably reveals similarities as well. Brunvand (4) says proverbs in Western society are statements which reflect a rather conventional or puritanical social code. The attitudes and behaviors most beneficial for the maintenance of the social system, then, are the most likely candidates for proverbs (10). Similarly, memorable messages may serve to maintain those attitudes, behaviors, and goals most beneficial for the maintenance

of the individual's personal and social system—e.g., improving one's self-concept, getting along with others, performing effectively in school and on the job.

Whereas proverbs serve as guidelines for the collective experience of many people, memorable messages appear to be master rules derived from the collective experience of a single person—i.e., personalized proverbs.

Memorable messages, like proverbs, offer "strategies for dealing with situations" (5). The purposes served by proverbs in these situations also seem to be consistent with those memorable messages we collected—i.e., inspiration, explanation, exhortation, admonition, rationalization, and the provision of solace (5, 25). However, the scope of memorable messages is often more limited than that of proverbs. Proverbs address many types of social relationships (1)—playful, gaining moral dominion over the listener, satiric, etc.—but memorable messages usually emphasize the counseling relationship. The content specifies personal, action-oriented advice for a person with a problem. Unlike many proverbs, then, memorable messages are "internalized" and "taken to heart." Thus, memorable messages are less likely than proverbs to elicit a passive, intellectually detached appreciation for a witty or insightful commentary on some aspect of human life.

Both memorable messages and proverbs also tend to transcend any specific context; normally, they can be applied to many situations. It is likely that a memorable message initially refers to a specific event, but the wording is such that it may be applied to a variety of experiences should the recipient choose to do so—e.g., "Always remember who you are." For example, ". . . if you don't get a job" originally concluded the reported message "You've never been anything, you aren't now, and you won't ever be anything." By omitting the job context, the informant is able to demonstrate a never-ending list of successes in a never-ending number of circumstances. This continually accumulating evidence that the person has indeed become "something" provides an ongoing foundation for a positive self-concept.

The increased number and variety of events which can be associated with the message would also seem to increase the chances for stimulating recall. In cases where the recipient repeats his or her memorable message to another person, which some of our informants reported doing, recall may be further enhanced. In those cases where the message is associated with a single event, the event itself has major significance for the person—e.g., the death of a loved one. Sometimes the situation which prompted the statement is completely forgotten; in other instances, the original event is recalled, but recalled within the context of many similar and related events.

It would be inappropriate to make the distinctions between memorable messages and proverbs too rigid. Sometimes the distinction resides in who is asked. What one person would consider a personal, individually adapted message, others may consider to be a well-known proverb. At the time one informant heard, "If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen," it was perceived as novel and personally meaningful. It was some time later that this informant discovered that others categorized this statement as a well-known proverb. Some memorable messages may, through repetition and publicity, eventually be recognizable as proverbs.

Memorable messages are a rich source of information about ourselves, our society, and our ways of communication.

They are memorable in two ways: people perceive these messages to have a notable and influential effect on their lives; and people who hear the messages believe they remember them for a long time. Some of the messages may indeed be recalled over the span of many years; others are probably forgotten until they seem to embody the occurrence of certain life experiences (at which time the message impact is applied retroactively); and still others are imagined. Sometimes fragments of the original message are recalled and sometimes these fragments will be supplemented with new words.

Whether the message is actually remembered or not, there are several characteristics of the message and the context in which it is reportedly delivered that would seem to facilitate memory processes. First, the message is personally involving. It is perceived as an unusually insightful way of integrating diffuse experiences or dealing with a type of problem. The subject matter concerns such personally important issues as one's self-concept, getting along with others, and performing effectively on the job. Second, the message usually occurs at a time when the person is seeking help. Perceptual and emotional receptivity, then, appear to be high. Third, the source of the message is a person whom the recipient respects—someone who is "older and wiser." Fourth, the message itself has several features that may make it easier to remember. It is a brief, spoken injunction that frequently requires the recipient to participate in constructing parts of the message that are implicit. The message can also be applied to a variety of situations. This increases the number of associations and possible repetitions that may contribute to the message's memorability.

In 1979, Goodwin and Wenzel (10, p. 291) said: "One has the impression that proverbs are not so widely used nowadays as once they were." This study would suggest that memorable messages, often catalogued in the memory of but a single person, are a potentially rich quarry.

REFERENCES

1. Abrahams, Roger D. and Barbara A. Babcock. "The Literary Use of Proverbs." *Journal of American Folklore* 90, 1977, pp. 414–429.
2. Bahrick, Harry P., Phyllis O. Bahrick, and Roy P. Wittlinger. "Long-Term Memory: Those Unforgettable High-School Days." *Psychology Today* 8, 1974, pp. 50–55.
3. Berne, Eric. *Principles of Group Treatment*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1964.
4. Brunvand, Jan Harold. *The Study of American Folklore: An Introduction*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1968.
5. Burke, Kenneth. *The Philosophy of Literary Form*. New York: Vintage, 1957, pp. 252–262.
6. Carter, Jimmy. *Why Not the Best?* New York: Bantam, 1976.
7. Cooper, James Fenimore. *The Deerslayer*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925.
8. Cushman, Donald P. and Gordon C. Whiting. "An Approach to Communication Theory: Toward Consensus on Rules." *Journal of Communication* 22, 1972, pp. 217–238.
9. Goffman, Erving. *Frame Analysis*. New York: Harper & Row, 1974.
10. Goodwin, Paul D. and Joseph W. Wenzel. "Proverbs and Practical Reasoning: A Study in Socio-Logic." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 65, 1979, pp. 289–302.
11. Gottlieb, Gidon. *Logic of Choice: An Investigation of the Concepts of Rule and Rationality*. New York: Macmillan, 1968.
12. Haley, Jay. *Uncommon Therapy: The Psychiatric Techniques of Milton H. Erikson, M.D.* New York: W. W. Norton, 1973.
13. Harris, Linda. "The Analysis of a Paradoxical Logic: A Case Study." Paper presented to the Conference on Human Communication from the Interactional View, Asilomar, California, 1979.
14. Harris, Richard J. and Gregory E. Monaco. "Psychology of Pragmatic Implication: Information Processing Between the Lines." *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* 107, 1978, pp. 1–22.
15. James, Muriel and Dorothy Jongeward. *Born to Win*. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1971.
16. Keenan, Janice M., Brian MacWhinney, and Deborah Mayhew. "Pragmatics in Memory: A Study of Natural Conversation." *Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behavior* 16, 1977, pp. 549–560.
17. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara. "Toward a Theory of Proverb Meaning." *Proverbium* 22, 1973, pp. 821–827.
18. Linton, Marigold. "Memory for Real-World Events." In D. A. Norman, E. D. Rumelhart, and the LNR Research Group (Eds.) *Explorations in Cognition*. San Francisco: W. H. Freeman, 1975, pp. 376–404.
19. Linton, Marigold. "I Remember It Well." *Psychology Today* 13, 1979, pp. 81–86.
20. Loftus, Elizabeth. *Eyewitness Testimony*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980.
21. Loftus, Elizabeth. *Memory*. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1980.
22. Loftus, Elizabeth F. and Geoffrey R. Loftus. "On the Permanence of Stored Information in the Human Brain." *American Psychologist* 35, 1980, pp. 409–420.
23. Loftus, Geoffrey R. and Elizabeth F. Loftus. *Human Memory: The Processing of Information*. Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1976.
24. "Memory: The Unreliable Witness." *Time*, January 6, 1981, p. 89.
25. Mieder, Wolfgang. "The Use of Proverbs in Psychological Testing." *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 15, 1978, pp. 45–56.
26. Ong, Walter J. "Literacy and Orality in Our Times." *Journal of Communication* 30(1), Winter 1980, pp. 197–204.
27. Rogers, Carl R. *On Becoming a Person*. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1961.
28. Shimanoff, Susan B. *Communication Rules: Theory and Research*. Beverly Hills, Cal.: Sage, 1980.
29. Watzlawick, Paul. *The Language of Change*. New York: Basic Books, 1978.