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STRUCTURE OF A PUBLIC SPEECH AND STRATEGIES OF DELIVERY

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Abstract: We are now living in a world in which there is a great deal to be said about life and human existence. Public speech making is one of such public relations strategies where awareness, enlightenment and education take place in large groups talking about life issues affecting either the past, present or future condition of mankind. The major objectives in this, are to convince, inspire, persuade or even to entertain depending on the context situation. Every speech making attempt wishes to succeed but it is not every public speech making that succeeds. When a public speech fails, it is attributed to either the ignorance of the speaker or his over presumption of his target audience. When there is speech failure, a huge gap of communication is created and therefore needs to be filled. It is this gap this paper is out to fill by way of examining and explaining public speech making principles and its attendant strategies of delivery. The paper uses the Pragma-Rhetorical Theory as a background. The Pragma-rhetorical theory investigates the totality of the speaker's use of every available rhetorical strategy in the communicative process and the intended effects of these strategies on the participants in a given context, speaker's intention and the beliefs he shares with his target audience. The Paper is out to wage 'war' against attendant Public Speech Making Failure.

Key words: Public, Speech, Strategies, Delivery, Characteristics

INTRODUCTION

Public Speech making and delivery is an art. It is an art because it requires skills which make use of the imagination to make things of aesthetic significance happen or take place. The technique(s) and theory involved are brought into play. This implies therefore that it has rules and regulations as first enunciated by Aristotle in his book, "The Rhetoric in 300 BC". This means therefore that the art of Public Speech making is very ancient. As it is with other aspects of ancient civilization, the Romans took off from where the Greeks stopped. In our society today in Nigeria, the art of Public Speech is recognized and highly feared yet respected responsibility. In the Nigerian University system today, we have professors of Rhetoric and Oratory who are busy teaching and doing research in the discipline of Public Speech Making. The Roman scholar, Quintilian who lived between 35 AD and 95 AD wrote the most exhaustive work on the subject of public speech, the 12 volume Institute of Oratory (see Barrett 1973).

In our normal life from time to time, every one of us may be called upon to perform some public function or play a social role which may require public speaking. The range of tasks may vary from addressing a family meeting in our native Nigerian languages to giving a public lecture on our area of expertise, giving a keynote address, a welcome address or moving the vote of thanks, moving a toast or giving an after dinner speech, reading a funeral oration or reading a citation especially in English as a first or second Language as the case may be. In doing so, public speech making must have some characteristics that are essential for our notice

Characteristics of Public Speech

Public Speech making is pragmatic use of language. This implies that a speaker produces some strings of oral sounds that convey meaning. For a Public Speech to be made therefore, the speaker has to undergo or undertake a series of practical processes from the production of words and putting these words into meaningful structures to organizing his ideas in paragraphs and pages of texts.

Public Speech making is a social use of communication between humans. The sociolinguist Fishman (1970) observes that in Public Speech making communicates his or her ideas, emotions, beliefs or feelings to B as they share a common code that makes up the language. In this encounter, there may be gestures, nods, winks, flags smiles, sirens, acting, miming, dancing etc. Public speech making is so important that it is difficult to think of a society without it for it showcases people's thoughts and their activities. According to Abiola O.O. (2012), Public Speech making is a carrier of civilization and culture as human thoughts and philosophy are conveyed from one generation to the other. Public Speech making is as important as the air we breathe and the most valuable possession of man as it helps to unite or disorganize human society.

Public speech making is systematic, it is not amorphous, disorganized or chaotic combination of sounds or language items. Every Public Speech maker must master the conventions of the language before being able to successfully communicate with other members of the social group in which he or she finds himself or herself. In all, the Public Speaker should be well informed about the context and intention of his speech. He should also have a grip of the world view of his target listeners. A more detailed explanation of these elements would suffice.

Context

Lawal, A. et al (2003) contributing to the pragmatic use of Language such as in public speech making agrees with Austin (1962), Searle (1969), Grice (1975), etc. These authors have come to terms with a pragmatic model of language use for public purposes, which are in two hierarchical structures of "surface" and 'background', with four constituents: contexts, competencies, background information and speech acts respectively. These should form part of knowledge of the Public Speaker. The 'contexts' and 'competencies' columns, are symmetrically related and have six levels in which the speaker should be well grounded. They include the linguistic (which involves the lexical, phonological, morpho-syntactic and micro-semantic knowledge), the situational (which refers to the knowledge of and familiarity with the topic of discourse, location, objects and persons in the physical setting), the psychological (which involves the awareness of and sensitivity to the speaker's mood, attitude and disposition), the social (knowledge of social factors and principles governing conversation and communication), the sociological (which is the knowledge of the socio-cultural and historical background to the utterance), and the cosmological contexts/competencies(which refer to the language user's knowledge of the world, his factual knowledge and general world-view in relation to the utterance).

Although we agree with Babatunde's (2000:25) argument that Lawal et al (2003) has justified the separation of the social and sociological levels, for the purpose of his work, the social contexts/competencies are usually treated as a part of the sociological contexts/competencies. Our understanding of contexts/competencies therefore, include the linguistic, the situational, the psychological, the sociological and the cosmological contexts/competencies that a public speaker must be well informed in order to create the necessary communicative effect in public speech making. However, the success achieved at this level depends on the intention of the speaker.

Intention

Intention here refers to the goal proposed to be achieved by a public speaker. It is very important in understanding utterances because in interactional exchanges, people have different intentions. Adegbite (2000) explains that intention can change as interaction progresses and can be modified in the course of interpersonal interaction. Intentions are often intermediate; that is, they may not be easily accessible and the addressee in a communicative exchange often tries to recognize the speaker's intention. Deductions about the meanings being communicated by

the speaker are often based on the context of interaction and interpretation of the intention of the speaker. Here, the speaker should make his intention clearly stated so that his listeners can understand him better. Again, the ability of the speaker to make his intention well known by his listeners depends on his world view and knowledge.

World Knowledge

World knowledge in public speaking involves the interlocutor's acquired experiences and perception of the world which affects their interpretation of conversations. Osisanwo (2003:84) opines that such knowledge of the world is acquired by man through acculturation, observation, personal experience of different socio-cultural, socio-political and socio-economic events as well as linguistic interaction with people. The world knowledge is perceived as the background knowledge, which the speaker has and is responsible for the smooth running of a communicative event. It is also believed that the stronger the world knowledge shared by interlocutors, the easier the encoding and decoding of the message in the speech situation. Therefore, in public speech making, the possession and the understanding of the elements of context, intention and world knowledge by the speaker is not only essential but also necessary.

Speech Acts

Searl (1969) divides illocution into five classes:

- (i) Assertive: Commit Speaker to the truth of some proposition (e.g. stating, claiming, reporting, announcing);
- (ii) Derivatives: Count as attempt to bring about some effect through the action of hearer (e.g. ordering, requesting, demanding, begging);
- (iii) Commissives: Commit the Speaker to some future action (e.g. Promising, Offering, swearing to do something);
- (iv) Expressive: Count as the expression of some Psychological state (e.g. thanking, apologizing and congratulating)

Declaratives: Speech acts whose successful performance brings about the correspondence between the propositional content and reality (e.g. naming a ship, resigning, sentencing, dismissing, christening, excommunicating etc). The application of any of these speech acts depends on the objective and philosophy of the Public Speech. This is to say, speech acts are contextualized in Public Speech Making.

Affective Elements

This involves the affective use of language. Hayawaka (1974) submits that the required "flow of sympathy" for the establishment of community and consequently co-operation in a society is established by the means of "affective use of language". This can lead to verbal hypnotism, which is a state in the listener when fine-sounding speeches, and impressively worded sermons, speeches, etc, captivate the listener to the point that the listener is swayed by the 'musical phrases' of the verbal hypnotist. Some of the tools of a verbal hypnotist are the use of affective elements such as: repetition, direct address, parallelism, metaphor and rhetorical elements (ethos, logos and pathos).

Structure of a Public speech

Pope (2002) gives the structure of a speech as being:

- (a) Deeply embedded in other non-verbal aspects of face-to-face communication.

- (b) Heavily dependent on context-sensitive words e.g. 'I', 'you', 'this', 'that', 'here', 'over there', 'now', in a moment'.
- (c) Persuasively organized by variations in stress and in intonation often resulting in words being drawn out or clipped e.g. 'I r-e-e-ally like that! D' you?'
- (d) Full of suspended, mixed or reduced grammatical structures, often with an emphasis on loose grammatical co-ordination (and... and... but). It also includes false starts, half-formed statements and reinforcements as speaker's switchy structures in mid-flow (e.g. perhaps, if you'd be... or rather would you...), fillers like 'erm' and 'ah', phatic communicators like 'you know' and tag questions like 'isn't it?' – the last two being checks that the listener is listening.

Strategies of Delivery

Planning

The planning stage of any public speaking engagement is the most crucial for it determines whether the speech will be a success or a failure. In planning, the speaker should reflect on his assigned role, the purpose of the speech, the occasion, the nature, background and composition of the audience, the likely mood of the audience and the optimum length of the speech.

It is important to stick to the role assigned to you because one of the things which irritate listeners is digression by a speaker from his assigned role or topic. If your role is to give the keynote address, a proper assessment of your assigned role should help you to correct, delimit your topic and the scope of your speech. You should bear in mind that relevance is one of the criteria by which the success of your speech is assessed by the listeners.

The purpose of the speech will largely determine its content. Is your purpose to inform the listeners, say by giving a talk on a subject on which you are an expert and the listeners consists of laymen? Is your purpose to persuade your listeners to accept your point of view or abandon their own, to canvass for support for a given cause or to draw the attention of the listeners to some danger which threatens their interest in order to get them to counter it? Or is the purpose merely to entertain the listeners? Your purpose will not only determine the content of your speech but also your tone.

It is also important to take into account the nature, background and composition of your listeners in planning your speech. How sophisticated are your listeners? What is the average educational qualification of its members? Are you preaching to the converted or are there some hostile people in the listeners? What is the mood of the listeners: festive, jocular, sober or solemn? Answers to such questions should guide you towards an appropriate choice of words, tone and style of delivery.

Sensitivity to the occasion and good judgment should also help you to plan your speech well. A funeral oration should never contain any humorous material which could cause laughter, unless of course the particular sub-culture in which you operate allows this. Conversely, an after dinner speech is usually given in a light-hearted way with plenty of good humour and sharp wit.

A speaker should always exercise good judgment in determining the length of his speech. A good rule of thumb is that a speaker should always aim at brevity for, no matter how eloquent a speaker may be, if he goes on for too long he will bore his listeners. A speaker should always aim at making judicious use of the precious time available by holding the time creditably. However, even brevity is relative. For example, if a speaker asked to give a public lecture on a subject which he is an expert at an occasion where this is the main event, a ten-minute talk will be adjudged inadequate by most of the listeners. Nigerian listeners seem to expect a speaker to speak for between half an hour and one hour on such occasions. However, an introduction of the guest of honour or a vote of thanks which takes up to ten minutes may be found too lengthy by most Nigerian listeners.

A speaker's plan should be concretized in the form of an outline which has an introduction, the main body and a conclusion. Each main idea in the outline should be supported by illustrative details which will give flesh to the text when written or spoken.

The speech, whether read from a script or delivered orally without notes, should have a coherent and well-ordered structure which the audience can follow and which is closely tied to the purpose and the occasion.

Accomplished speakers manage to deliver excellent speeches on topics with which they are familiar without recourse to a script, and sometimes without recourse to notes either. However, even speakers have to structure their speech mentally in advance of its delivery if it is to be any good. Beginners are advised to start by writing up their speech in full and reading it out. When they become more experienced, they will find that on certain moderately formal occasions, they can speak from notes very effectively. Indeed, it has been found that freedom from text releases the speaker's hands to be used in making appropriate gestures which reinforce the communicativeness of the speech (Atkinson 1984).

Writing

Writing is the next stage after planning and outlining a speaker's speech, assuming that he is going to produce a written speech to be read out. The most important consideration to bear in mind when writing your speech, apart from all the basic decisions which would have been made at the planning stage and which now require implementation, is the fact that a text written to be spoken should bear close resemblance to spoken language, that is to say, it should be easy on the ear, fairly straightforward and euphonious.

The introduction should be closely related to the purpose and the occasion and should set the tone for the speech as in the following extract taken from an after dinner speech on Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP).

When, about three weeks ago a colleague who also teaches at Bayero University approached me with a request to be the Guest Speaker at Tonight's Annual Dinner of ICAN, I was as astonished beyond description. How could such a distinguished body of Chartered Accountants ask a teacher of English who can hardly tell the difference between a balanced and a deficit budget to address its members on the structural Adjustment Programme? Ladies and Gentlemen, it is only now, after having filled myself up with a varied blend of African Oriental and European delicacies that I realize the wisdom of ICAN's choice of speaker: since the diners are busy digesting their food, they cannot digest a learned discourse on the subject of SAP simultaneously. So, a light-hearted layman's innocent talk is preferred in the circumstances.

This is at once humorous, modest and curiosity-arousing. The audience would keep wondering if indeed the speaker would be pedestrian or well-informed.

Another type of introduction which is suitable for citations is that which concentrates all the positive qualities of the recipient of honour in an elongated list which is intimidating to the audience by its sheer length as in the following extract:

I present to you as a candidate for the conferment of the degree of Doctor of Letters, honoris causa, Alhaji Yusuf Maitama Sule, Danmasanin Kano, former teacher and visiting teacher, former Chief Information Officer, former member, Federal House of Representatives, the youngest Federal Minister ever, former Federal Minister of Mines and Power, first Kano State Commissioner for Local Government, former Kano State Commissioner for Forestry, Cooperatives and Community Development, former Kano State Commissioner for Information and Cultural Affairs, first Chief Public Complaints Commissioner of the Federation, former Permanent Representative of Nigeria at the United Nations, former Minister of National Guidance, political sportsman, African cultural and political nationalist, Islamic scholar, orator and man of letters.

In developing the main body of the text, according to Jibril, M. (1992) the logical sequence of building up an argument or idea should be followed. It should always be remembered that although the words and sentence types used in a speech are important, they are not as important as the idea, argument or thought being conveyed in the speech.

The words that you choose should be not only appropriate to the occasion but also easy on the ear. Where a string of them is used, they should, as much as possible, sound alike. For example, instead of saying "I offer my gratitude to you for your hard work and vigilant disposition" it would be better to say "I offer my gratitude to you for your diligence and vigilance".

When choosing sentence structures, it would be better to avoid long, complex sentences which involve multiple subordination of clauses, especially where the subject and the main verb are separated by long, intervening structures as in the following extract:

The gentleman that I have just been talking about, who incidentally is my mother's nephew on her maternal grandmother's side, and who I think has achieved sufficient notoriety in this drug-pushing business which is destroying the potential of our youth who seem to be so addicted to these substances that they see nothing else worth doing in life, is in fact under arrest.

Now, this is a sentence that has no fewer than seven clauses, six of which are subordinate clauses which intervene between the subject of the main clause (The gentleman) and the main verb (is... (under arrest)). Since so much information is packed into the sentence, the audience may lose the trend of the sentence before the end is reached. For this reason, the preferred sentence type, in speech, has a simpler structure. Although it may be long, the elongation should arise out of co-ordination of phrases or clauses rather than out of subordination. The following extract is a good example of a long but easy-to-follow sentence whose parts are linked through co-ordination:

For our greatness to be complete, it has to be all-round, and for it to be all-round we have to lead the Nation in sports, and for us to lead the Nation in sports we have to have standard sporting facilities, and for us to have standard sporting facilities, we have to build them ourselves. Ladies and Gentlemen, let us build, let us donate!

Skillful speech writers also seek elegance by using parallel structures to create contrast or to make lists as in the following extract:

The fact that Ibadan has the highest ratio of professors to other teaching staff in the Nigerian University system is a reflection of achievement rather than failure, of strength, than timidity, of excellence rather than mediocrity.

By far the most accomplished master of the art of parallelism and contrast is, of course, late President Kennedy, who observed, for instance, how he offered America a hand of fellowship to the USSR in this extract from his Inaugural Address:

So let us begin anew – remembering on both sides that civility is not a sign of weakness, and sincerity is always subject to proof. Let us never negotiate out of fear. But let us never fear to negotiate.

Let both sides explore what problems unite us instead of laboring those problems which divide us.

Let both sides, for the first time formulate serious and precise proposals for the inspection and control of arms – and bring the absolute power to destroy all nations under the absolute control of all nations.

Let both sides seek to invoke the wonders of science instead of its terrors. Together let us explore the stars, conquer the deserts, eradicate disease, tap the ocean depths, and encourage the arts and commerce.

Observe the contrast and structural balance between, for instance, "Let us never negotiate out of fear" and "Let us never fear to negotiate" or between "the absolute power to destroy all nations" and "the absolute control of all nations".

The conclusion of any speech should re-iterate the thrust of the main idea developed in the body of the text in as forceful and memorable a manner, as possible.' For example, the conclusion to the after dinner speech on SAP which was quoted earlier went like this:

SAP is a wrong policy instrument, an inaccurate prescription based on a false and misleading diagnosis of our economic malaise. Any civil engineer would tell you that if you observe a major structural defect in your building, the best thing to do is to pull it down before it collapses on you. By the same token, if we agree that the defects in our economy are structural, we should pull it apart and start afresh. No structural adjustment will do. Thank you for listening.

Similarly, the closing paragraph of the citation whose introduction was quoted earlier was as follows:

If any man ever deserved to be honoured for services to his country and to mankind, that man is he who now stands before you. Which teacher deserves more honour than he whose student is now a University Professor, Vice-Chancellor or Military General. And Politician deserves more honour than he who serves not himself and His family but his people, expecting no reward or recognition except From the Almighty God? Which orator deserves more honour than he who uses his skills to move mankind to attain greater heights? Which man of letters deserves more literary honour than he whose Erudition humbles scholars? I beseech you, then, to confer the Degree of Doctor of Letters, honoris causa, on Alhaji Yusuf Maitama Sule.

Delivery

The final stage in speech-making is the actual delivery. Whatever careful planning may have gone into the preparation and writing of a speech it could be overturned by poor, inelegant, sloppy or incompetent delivery. I have seen excellent speeches (written, of course by professionals) marred by poor delivery on the part of those for whom they were written owing to their incorrigible incompetence.

The first thing that the beginner has to overcome is shyness. It is not easy for the uninitiated to face a crowd even of thirty people and address them. One should build up confidence in oneself and convince oneself that one is indeed superior to any member of the audience especially on the subject of the speech. This tends to have a re-assuring effect on one's nerves and one is then better able to face the audience. Once you are used to it, you will find that even if you are reading from a script, you can take time off to actually scan the faces in the crowd and get some feedback on the impact your speech is making or not making. However, until you become a veteran speaker, you should avoid direct eye contact with individual members of the audience with whom you are acquainted, for the experience can be quite unsettling.

You should aim at audibility and clarity of voice during delivery. If you remain calm, your voice should sound steady and confident. Do not shout at the audience. Modulate your voice to suit the physical setting. If you have a deep, loud voice, reduce its volume and raise its pitch and if you have a shrill, high-pitched voice, lower its pitch and if your natural tempo is fast, slow down in order to make your articulation more precise and therefore more intelligible.

You should also speak in an accent that is likely to guarantee not only maximum intelligibility but also maximum empathy with the audience. However, you must always sound natural for affectation tends to alienate your audience from you when you sound either condescending or insincere.

Nothing irritates an audience more than persistent hesitation in a speech – e.g. Uh-uh-uh,em,em or mannerisms such as "I mean" and "you know". If you are fond of such mannerisms, which reflect mental laziness, you should get rid of them. If you think about your ideas carefully in advance, you are not likely to be stuck for words even if you are speaking from notes. In other words, fluency can be cultivated through hard work and conscious effort.

When you speak, you project your personality across. By working hard at speech-making by painstakingly researching your topic, planning outlining and writing up your speech and delivering it in a pre-rehearsed and admirable manner, you can enhance your personal status in whatever you do. History is full of examples of people who rode to greatness on the back of their tongues, so to speak.

Conclusion

This paper presents the picture of the public speech maker as a man who uses every available opportunity to assert his contribution to the growth and development of human affairs. He is also seen as a lover of words who says the same thing over and over again to give vitality to ideas and situations.

The Paper has also shown that language use for effective communication is important for Public speech making that intends to achieve a goal. The Public Speaker needs to as the context situation demands admonish, encourage, dissuade or persuade his audience to either take certain actions or refrain from them. This mobilization can be achieved through the use of apt expressions for effectiveness. Language as the paper unfolds, is therefore seen as that tool of aptness and effectiveness which is capable of mobilizing the people towards a desired cause or inhibiting them from taking Particular actions.

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