

INSIGHTS INTO THE NUTS AND BOLTS OF TAKING THE FLOOR

Andreea Iliescu
Lecturer, PhD, University of Craiova

Abstract: The present paper foregrounds the significance of acquiring public speaking skills within today's highly competitive work environment. I am inclined to believe that communication, mostly defined as 'the exchange of information', goes beyond a mere informational note as it thoroughly addresses the arduous tasks of encoding and decoding messages, with a thrilling speaker–audience dynamics, coherently unfolding. Needless to say, speakers' refined messages and their performance full of pizzazz transcend a two-way conversation stereotypes.

Keywords: elocution strategies, active learners, speech anxiety

1. Introduction

It is my firm belief that thought-provoking topics will challenge students to keep abreast of any developments. Furthermore, I single out public speaking skills as a vital tool in bridging the gap between employers and employees. Elocution strategies, inextricably intertwined with the power of persuasion, alongside the mastery of a range of topics may differentiate a university graduate from an outstanding employee.

With a view to mastering public speaking skills, as the old saying goes, where there is a will, there is a way. Practising, practising, keep practising- it is the shortest way to sail through it! A *Eureka* moment - being greeted with rapturous applause- accentuates the fact that speakers' driving ambition is mostly what fuels the audience's enthusiasm.

When it comes to speaking skills, students' lack of practice translates into a major hindrance for their future careers. Notwithstanding students' reluctance, gaining public speaking skills will undoubtedly benefit them in the long run. The greatest advantage of following a speaking skills routine is that they undergo a metamorphosis: he can who believes he can.

To my way of thinking, public speaking is all about stirring up people's interest, gaining their attention without hijacking others' ideas. In all likelihood, advancing well-articulated opinions amounts to an impressive workload. It's equally true that sticking to no preconcerted plan, not using every endeavour to make headway will equal disaster.

Students will approach the prospect of delivering a speech with a grain of salt. It's common knowledge that they are not so keen on speaking.

For the above mentioned reasons, students should not readily dismiss the idea of practising their speaking skills; instead, they need to dwell longer on the matter of broadening their horizons, polishing their speech, exploring all avenues before succumbing to speech anxiety. After all, nothing ventured, nothing gained.

2. Historical Overview

Beginning with the Sophists (500-300 B.C.E), the ancient Greeks promoted public communication in the Western tradition. The Sophists were teachers who travelled from place to place, lecturing students on how to communicate well in a democratic society.

They considered the manner of presenting ideas-delivery-the hallmark of an eloquent speaker. But effective public speaking is by no means limited to delivery techniques.

The philosopher Socrates (C. 470-399B.C.E.) and his student Plato (428-348B.C.E.) identified logic and reasoning as the basis of effective public speaking. Aristotle (384-322 B.C.E.), a student of Plato, focused on argument and audiences. Aristotle's ideas about oratory were so influential that he became a key figure in the development of communication as an academic discipline.

2.1. Aristotle's Rhetoric

Aristotle (384-322 B.C.E.) took a systematic approach to studying *rhetoric*, as public speaking was called at the time. In Aristotle's major work, *Rhetoric*, he emphasized the importance of adapting speeches to specific audiences and situations. Today this is called *audience-centred* communication. Adapting to audiences and building your credibility as a speaker form major parts of the audience-centred approach.

Another foundation of public speaking is what Aristotle called *proofs*- the various approaches a speaker can use to appeal to a specific audience on a particular occasion. Aristotle identified three types of proofs: *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos*.

Logos refers to rational appeals based on logic, facts, and objective analysis. *Pathos* refers to appeals to our emotions. Speakers use *pathos* to appeal to the audience's feelings. Appeals based on *ethos* rest on the speaker's credibility or character.

A fourth type of appeal to the audience, *mythos*, focuses on the values and beliefs embedded in cultural narratives or stories.

2.2. Cicero and the Five Arts

The Roman statesman Cicero (106-43 B.C.E.) categorized then elements of public communication into five *arts of public speaking*, or canons of rhetoric, that still apply today. Cicero argued that these five arts – *invention*, *arrangement*, *style*, *memory*, and *delivery* – constitute the groundwork for learning about public speaking. The five arts provide guidelines for speaking effectively in public.

a) *Invention* focuses on what you have or want to say. As the first art, *invention* refers to the moment when you find an idea, line of thought, or argument you might use in a speech. Choosing a topic and developing good arguments are both part of invention.

b) *Arrangement*, the second art, refers to how you organize your ideas. This art accounts for the basic parts of a speech (introduction, body, and conclusion) as well as the order in which points are presented. Good organization helps maintain the audience's attention and keeps them focused on the ideas the speaker presents.

c) The third art, *style*, involves the language you use to bring a speech's content to life.

d) *Memory*, the fourth art, refers to using your memory to give an effective speech. Memory goes beyond simple memorization, referring instead to the importance of practising public speaking skills. That is, when you present a speech, you rely on everything you've learned about public speaking, your topic, the audience, and the occasion.

e) As the fifth art, *delivery* is the moment when a speech goes public – when it is presented to an audience. *Delivery* involves how you use your voice, gestures, and body movement when giving a speech.

The fifth art refers to how to achieve the natural, conversational delivery style today's audiences expect and prefer; it is based upon discovering what you want to say in a speech, such as by choosing a topic and developing good arguments; the way ideas presented in a speech are

organized; the language or words used in a speech; using the ability to recall information to give an effective speech; the presentation of a speech to an audience.

3. *Communication Techniques*

Is there a particular set of rules that provides a thorough grounding in the essentials of communication? It might not be an infallible pattern, yet, based on influential speakers' versatility, for instance Warren Buffett's, I assume that would-be orators can develop their skills and speak authoritatively by choosing to be active learners, and rely on startling statistics, engaging quotes, rhetorical questions as well as brief anecdotes: 'Audience members cannot reread, *rewind*, or put a speaker on *pause*, so help them to stay on track: *preview main points*. In the introduction, preview your main points and summarize what you want listeners to gain from the speech. *Use clear transitions*. Transition words, phrases, and sentences that tie speech ideas together will help audience members follow your points. *Use repetition*. Repeat key ideas and concepts to help listeners grasp and retain information. *Use internal previews*. Forecast key points and internal summaries to revisit them.' (O'Hair, 2010:176)

I am inclined to believe that communication, mostly defined as 'the exchange of information', goes beyond a mere informational note as it addresses the arduous tasks of encoding and decoding messages, with a thrilling speaker-audience dynamics, coherently unfolding. Needless to say, speakers' refined messages and their performance full of pizzazz transcend a two-way conversation stereotypes: '*The situation* is the place, time, occasion, and cultural context of the communication. The *place* of communication might be your home, office, car or bus, the park, a restaurant, or a classroom. The *time* might be early in the morning, late at night, right before class, or right after lunch. [...] And the *occasion* might be a board meeting, a social gathering, a special occasion such as a birthday or anniversary, or a ceremonial occasion such as [...] a graduation. These situational factors are all influenced by the *cultural context*. Culture has to do with the attitudes, beliefs, and values shared by a group, as well as their informal rules for behaviour. The cultural context is important for public speakers to consider because it governs certain communication rules as we speak.' (Sellnow, 2005: 13)

What is more, the underlying criteria of public speaking encompass *learning to listen, knowing your audience, organizing and structuring your message, and paying attention to your nonverbal skills*: "The ability to speak confidently and convincingly in public is a valuable asset to anyone who wants to take an active role in the world. Now, more than ever, public speaking has become both a vital life skill and a secret weapon in career development. Recruiters of top graduate school students report that what distinguishes the most sought-after candidates is not their 'hard' knowledge of finance or physics, but the 'soft skills' of communication. Dozens of surveys of managers and executives reveal that ability in oral and written communication is the most important skill they look for in a college graduate. In a recent survey of employers, for example, oral communication skills ranked first in such critical areas as teamwork, interpersonal competence, and analytical skills." (O'Hair, 2010: 2-3)

As effective listening is not deeply embedded in people's behavioural paradigm, and since it also represents one half of any communication process, speakers obviously have to increase their awareness of such a critical skill.

Additionally, Jeff Davidson maintains that 'today in business, people increasingly feel pressed for time, regardless of their title, to whom they report, the size of their support staff, the tasks and responsibilities they face, and even the education and training they bring to the job. Studies show that effective use of time is a critical aspect of management effectiveness. Your

success now and in the future depends on your ability to maintain control despite accelerating change and an explosion of information and communication.’ (Davidson, 2003: 241)

By the same token, Ali *et al.* bring to the fore the fact that ‘to help’ people ‘on the path to achieving’ their ‘vision’, one ‘may find it useful to employ the Japanese techniques of *kaizen* and *kaikaku*, or continuous improvement and radical change. *Kaizen* involves constantly looking for ways to improve any element of your performance [...]. *Kaikaku* takes place less often.’ (Ali *et al.*, 2009: 21)

People often claim that communication skills provide the foundation for the development of other important skills. Along the same lines, Stephanie J. Coopman and James Lull have devised an array of public speaking skills, emphasizing the way these can become inextricably intertwined with our everyday life.

<i>Transferable skills</i>	<i>How public speaking helps you develop the skill</i>	<i>Examples of how the skill might benefit you in everyday life</i>
Being more confident and managing communication anxiety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Habituation; ➤ Using proven strategies 	Feeling more comfortable talking with people in unfamiliar social situations
Being a good listener	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Understanding listening; ➤ Listening reciprocally 	Understanding better what a friend has to say, and the friend understanding you better
Adapting to different audiences and building your credibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Knowing how to research and analyze audiences; ➤ Increasing competence and dynamism 	Being able to confront a friend or co-worker about a difficult issue without damaging the relationship
Finding and evaluating information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Recognizing appropriate and reliable sources ➤ Assessing the accuracy and validity of information 	Researching a company you think you would like to work for
Organizing ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Understanding patterns of organization ➤ Understanding how people process information 	Explaining to a classmate the advantages and disadvantages of joining a fraternity or

		sorority
Presenting ideas effectively	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Communicating mindfully➤ Knowing how to plan and prepare effective presentation	Integrating effective presentation resources into a speech about college life at your high school ¹

4. A Public Speaking Case Study

Let's consider this case: in a public speaking workshop, intermediate English students were asked to frame their views on a seemingly approachable, yet controversial topic, that is, the behavioural patterns rendered manifest by their own generation. Beyond a shadow of a doubt, a trigger for such a research is readily embodied by the resounding *Millennial* reference.

A week later, students attended the class, assumingly fully equipped to engage a fierce debate upon the pros and cons of Millennials, attempting to design the best generational trajectory ever.

I have not mentioned 'assumingly' by chance, since my expectations were not quite fulfilled by most students' grasp of the matter under discussion. They seemed completely oblivious of the following principles of paramount importance to public speaking:

- a) to thoroughly articulate the structure, in a nutshell, to reinforce their speech coherence;
- b) to intertwine their own ideas with specialists' quotes;
- c) to sprinkle the speech with connectors that would ensure a smooth transition between ideas.

4.1. The Arduous Task of Attaining the Summit while Enjoying the Journey

As an illustration of the *audience-speaker* dynamics, I suggested my students to consider an introduction like: 'Hi there! What's up? Don't you agree that taking these Millennial snapshots is both revealing and challenging? Shall we refer to ourselves as a generation full of pizzazz 24/7, an indefatigable campaigner for entertainment, or shall we put forward the overwhelming burden of coping with a shifting reality? Indeed, it's debatable whether any of the widespread Millennial labels truly captures our collective spirit.'

In the same fashion, Cheryl Hamilton's quote brings forth more guidelines on how students should embark on their public speaking journey: "*Define your exact purpose.* After you have analyzed your audience and decided on a general topic, you are ready to narrow your topic so that it will fit the time limit and the specific needs and interests of your audience. It is better to cover fewer points and thoroughly illustrate and support them than it is to skim over a large number of points in an attempt *'to say it all'*. Audiences tend to daydream when the speaker tries to cover too much material. Narrowing your topic to an exact purpose is one of the most difficult tasks a speaker faces, no matter how experienced he or she may be. An exact purpose is a clear, simple sentence that specifies exactly what you want your audience to gain (know, perceive, understand) from the speech. An exact purpose begins with *'After hearing my speech, the audience will be able to...'*" (Hamilton, 2012: 106)

¹Stephanie J. Coopman, James Lull. *Public Speaking: The Evolving Art*, Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2012, p. 12

Coupled with the above-mentioned principles, I would like to bring to the fore the following assessment criteria, intended to raise students' awareness of their progress in relation to public speaking skills as a reliable path to success.

ENGLISH FLUENCY	SPEECH COHERENCE	DATA ANALYSIS vs. DATA TRANSFER	AUDIENCE AWARENESS
HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH
SO-SO	SO-SO	SO-SO	SO-SO
POOR	POOR	POOR	POOR

5. Conclusion

In essence, this paper reaffirms my belief in students' need to have more than a nodding acquaintance with the realm of public speaking, as 'in the marketplace of ideas, the person who communicates clearly is also the person who is seen as thinking clearly'.

By the same token, it's worth considering Benjamin Franklin's quote: 'If a man empties his purse into his head, no man can take it away from him. An investment in knowledge always pays the best interest.'²

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Coopman, Stephanie J. & James Lull. *Public Speaking: The Evolving Art*. Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2012
- Davidson, Jeff. *The Complete Guide to Public Speaking*. New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2003
- Hamilton, Cheryl. *Essentials of Public Speaking*. Boston: Wadsworth, 2012
- O'Hair, Dan. *A Pocket Guide to Public Speaking*. Boston: Bedford, 2010
- Sellnow, Deanna D. *Confident Public Speaking*. Belmont: Thomson Wadsworth, 2005

Internet. Webpage

<https://www.google.com/search?q=if+a+man+empties+his+purse+in+his+head&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwi9m-687oDbAhWEblAKHS2eDgoQsAQINQ&biw=1366&bih=662>, retrieved April 15, 2018

2

<https://www.google.com/search?q=if+a+man+empties+his+purse+in+his+head&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwi9m-687oDbAhWEblAKHS2eDgoQsAQINQ&biw=1366&bih=662>