ETHICAL AND STYLISTIC IMPLICATIONS IN DELIVERING CONFERENCE PAPERS

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Years ago the writers of a speech textbook complained, "A speech is not an essay standing on its hind legs" (James Albert Winans and Hoyt Hopewell Hudson 17). Well, people in speech and those in rhetoric disliked each other enough in those days to use such imagery in their comparisons of speaking and writing. But in recent years those in written communication and those in speech communication have accepted their common roots in rhetoric, a philosophy of language and its contexts that can teach some things to most of us.

Aristotle told us that language intended for the ear differs from language intended for the eye. He said:

> Compared with those of others, the speeches of professional writers sound thin. . . .Those of the orators, on the other hand, are good to hear spoken, but look amateurish [to] a reader. This is because they . . . contain many dramatic touches, which, being robbed of all dramatic rendering, fail to do their own proper work, and consequently look silly. Thus strings of unconnected words, and constant repetitions of words and phrases, are very properly condemned in written speeches: but not in spoken speeches—speakers use them freely. . . . (197)

Aristotle also suggested that the *ethos* projected by the speaker forms the most powerful influence in spoken rhetoric.

Although delivering conference papers is not quite the same as delivering ringing oratory, I believe Aristotle and other classical rhetoricians have much to teach us about the oral delivery of written discourse. It is true we're attracted to voices in our profession that speak to us and for us, voices that speak as scholars and teachers of English and rhetoric, with all the humanity this implies. We can analyze essays by such people as Jim Corder, Richard Lloyd-Jones, Paul Bryant and see how *pathos* and *logos* are subsumed under *ethos*. These voices are authentic voices. They function in the classical sense of *ethos* by creating and then fulfilling expectations.

I've been wondering as I go to more and more conferences what makes some voices carry authenticity, what makes them create expectations during an oral presentation and others not, importance of subject matter and its arrangement and development a given, of course. And even authenticity of voice aside, why do we follow some readings of conference papers and in others—perhaps most—find our attention wandering? I hope to show how the too-long-lost fifth canon of rhetoric, *pronuntiatio*, is the realm of ethical appeal more than either *logos* or *pathos*.

First, I'll briefly and historically discuss the virtual disappearance of *pronuntiatio*, or delivery. Then I wish to give reasons why we scholars and teachers in our conference papers need to revise our written discourse that we plan to read at conferences.

In the sixteenth century Ramus distributed the traditional parts of rhetoric between logic and rhetoric. *Inventio* and *dispositio* he gave to the province of logic. *Elocutio* and *pronuntiatio* he left within rhetoric. Up until the early twentieth century, we had many textbooks and lectures by Blair, Campbell, and Whately that included the canon of delivery. But perhaps the most popular text on delivery was Sheridan's in the eighteenth century. However, Sheridan concentrated mainly on *actio*, the concern for the management of the voice and gestures.

When in 1914 English and Speech split into separate departments, the split in education supposedly was to bring about proficiency in verbal expression. Today, then, we have English composition courses to help us learn to write and speech courses to help us learn to speak. No longer, as in ancient times, is there

only one art of rhetoric for both speaking and writing. Just as the appearance (*actio*) of a manuscript is important both to advance argument and project *ethos*, so does the speaking voice persuade using ethical appeal arising out of the style of discourse written to be spoken.

The way in which the audience perceives the rhetor is what Aristotle means by *ethos*. But as Bob Connors already has pointed out, the speaker and the writer are faced with very different sets of conditions. "Assuming at the onset that each is unknown to the prospective audience, the speaker is surrounded by a far richer context for establishing the intelligence, character, and good will which make up ethical appeal. Nonverbal methods of procuring a favorable *ethos*—manner of dress, personal appearance, types of gestures—are available to the speaker as are the purely verbal methods: tones of voice, richness and loudness of speech, speed of delivery" (285). The writer, however, is severely limited in the ethical appeals she or he can offer. The possibilities may be fewer then, but they are more controllable; mostly they depend on both the kind of argument chosen and the style.

Even considering the choices available to the speaker or to the writer who intends to deliver a paper, both can begin to recognize speaking and listening as *actions*. During oral readings intricate changes occur in both speakers and listeners, changes that, according to Carroll C. Arnold, are defined by the peculiar conditions orality sets up (60-73). As writers we may be more concerned with the meaning of our precise message than with audience, but as oral readers of these same messages we cannot put audience interest secondary. Aristotle was aware of the ways personalized interaction affects generation of style, because of its immediacy.

We can say rhetorical speech acts are personal because they are interactions or identifications between active beings. They are not, as Arnold says, "confrontations of impersonally symbolized concepts"—such as some literary papers (65). The distinction is important because both speaker and listener define their commitments. One's personal presence, whether speaker or listener, is a rhetorical action. Verbal and physical behaviors merge to represent the speaker. A self that is not an abstraction but is there in body authorizes the discourse.

Too many times, then, when we read papers, are our voices

diminished because we read *writing* instead of reading *speaking*? What are the distinctions between writing as speaking and writing as writing? Walter Ong contrasts the oral with the literary in terms of grammatical structure. Our oral speech chiefly is formulaic while in literary texts there is little formulaic composition. Oral we know is typically nonperiodic, proceeding in an adding or cumulative style. On the other hand, literary composition tends more to the periodic. Oral composition usually uses well-established themes and ideas that can be placed in standard patterns. Literary composition uses typically newer themes or combines older themes in ways more novel than in oral composition. While Ong draws a distinction between actually speaking and writing, Walker Gibson in his well-known *Persona* compares two kinds of written discourse, a speaking style and a writing style, taking his illustrations from Salinger's Holden Caulfield and Dicken's David Copperfield. (Gibson continues his work with style in *Tough, Sweet, and Stuffy*.)

Research suggests that when *speakers* introduce more oral elements, they increase the intelligibility of their speech by ten percent. I would suggest that when *writers* introduce oral elements into their papers intended for delivery, they increase comprehension by an even greater percentage. And I would argue that we deliver papers at these conferences to impart information; thus comprehension is crucial. I would offer here, then, seven things we can draw from when we are in the process of revising a paper for oral delivery.

1. Probably most of us in English Studies do not use the classical disposition, the art of arrangement, in our conference papers. Yet if we analyzed the papers of those we find ourselves listening to time and again, we'd find most of the time they arrange their papers in the classical rhetorical six parts: *exordium, narratio, divisio, confirmatio, confutatio, ad peroratio*. These six parts, consciously arranged, somewhat formulaic, present coherent and progressive patterns that listeners can anticipate and follow.

2. Following an oral argument puts less strain on listeners' memory if the paper has been deductively structured. Inductive structure also places a greater burden on listeners' short-term memory because it requires listeners to hold too much in abeyance while mentally moving toward resolution.

3. Our short-term memory, to be effective at all, requires more

formulaic patterns than we'd ordinarily use in written discourse. E. D. Hirsch's work with long- and short-term memory illuminates even more what we're discovering about the way words, phrases, and clauses work within the sentence. As listeners, we can hold far fewer words and clauses in our short-term memory than we can as readers.

4. Keeping principles of short-term memory in mind, we can revise our conference papers so that most if not all sentences primarily are loose, not periodic. The standard pattern of oral discourse is nouns and verbs at the beginning of clauses and sentences, seldom separated. Hirsch calls this familiar pattern clause closure. We can listen more attentively and with more comprehension if clause closure is rapid and stable because this strategy reduces "processing" time by the listener and reduces the burden on short-term memory. In other words we should avoid holding back our verbs till the end of the clauses.

5. Besides clause structure we probably should increase coherence and skillfully work in repetition. If we consciously increase linkage both in and between sentences in our conference papers—almost to the point where this linkage seems to become redundant—we adopt not only an appropriate speaking style but also reinforce what's already in our listeners' short-term memory. And we can include more appositives, more interruptors (but not between subject and verb) that strongly advance meaning and reinforce a speaking style. Incremental repetition, because it repeats one idea that is presented in successive stages of development so that the last increment is the fullest and most complex, also decreases the burden on listeners' short-term memory and advances more concretely toward closure. To be sure, Winston Weathers' *A New Strategy of Style* is a text that reminds us how effective some oral rhetorical patterns can be when used in written discourse. Thomas M. Sawyer reminds us that "because the listening audience is sure to miss portions of live speech and cannot preserve it for review, oral communication simply must be redundant—repetitious—to be memorable" (45).

6. We could also become more conscious of passive constructions. In an oral presentation I think we would agree passive voice deadens style and, worse, removes authenticity from the speaker's voice.

7. Finally, I would suggest that, because our language stems

from metaphor, we use more metaphors more consciously to present ideas concretely, thus increasing listener attention span. Figures, schemes, tropes are simplifying devices that also increase the amount of information imparted.

Most of these seven things to consider as we revise for oral presentation are predictable, pattern-like, in their formulaic nature. They are different at least in degree from our usual style where we take pride in variety of structure and style. But the oral reader is creating an image while in the act of reading just as the writer is creating an image and a voice. The image I'd hope would be the same; the audience is helped by different rhetorical strategies to "see" the image, to "hear" the voice. Thus we achieve identification both with our subject and our listeners as we speak out our papers.

I suggest that we make these revisions for oral delivery after the paper has been accepted for reading. If we submit papers written for oral delivery, the selection committee may think the oral elements look amateurish or silly, as Aristotle pointed out. Or better yet, we can send two versions of our papers. The advantage of this is that we'd already have a version to submit to a journal for publication if we later chose to do so.

I have concentrated on revising for oral presentation. But we also could reach into rhetoric's fifth canon to help us in the actual delivery. I mean such things as practicing presenting our paper orally, reading it to project *meaning*. We can also consciously learn to look at our listeners from time to time during our presentation; we can orally group words into phrases; we can underline words and groups of words we want to stress. We can practice avoiding falling inflection, keeping our pitch up except for full stops. And we could read more slowly than we think we should.

Mentioning that we slow down our oral reading leads me to one last observation. Most of us, if not all of us, have commented at one conference or another about readers not staying within their time limits. Comparing time restraints between speaking and writing, Sawyer says, "The very first thing that is likely to strike one about the difference between oral and written communication is the constraint that time imposes on the speaker. The writer can be as verbose as he likes; a listening audience is likely to go to sleep or walk out after about twenty minutes" (45). Hugh Rank, in a forthcoming article, defines "outside limits" in various kinds of com-

munication. Interestingly enough, we conference speakers seem to be the ones who most often do not observe the outside limits of oral readings. Yet we seem to agree with the twenty-minute limit of any audience's attention span for listening to discourse, the very reason for limiting conference papers to twenty minutes' reading time. Professor Rank found that in nine of the ten sessions he attended at the Conference on College Composition and Communication last year most presenters' papers were far too long to be read in the allotted time (*Rhetoric Review*). An audience knows when the speaker violates a limit; listeners become restless, irritated, resulting in distraction from the worked-up-to resolution of the paper. But while many of us who have been restless listeners then present our own papers, blindly and blithely too often we extend our papers' time limits, perhaps believing that our own papers will keep the audience as entranced as we creators are.

I want to connect our all-too-often rejection of "outside limits" to the earlier one about the need for slowing down our reading. Obviously, what happens too many times is that we speed up instead of slowing down in a futile attempt to fit that thirty-minute paper into its allotted fifteen- or twenty-minute limit. Sometimes this happens because we don't realize that it takes twice as long to effectively speak out an essay than it does to read it. We can read silently a seven-page paper in about two minutes a page, but it takes twice as long to read the essay aloud if it has been written for reading rather than speaking.

I'll end with the reminder that the spoken is temporal and spread out through time. As listeners we do not know the exact pattern in the speaker's mind; thus, we are at a disadvantage. We usually cannot say: "Wait a minute; let me go back over that part again" as we can say when we're reading fixed discourse and want to back track and pick up what we lost.

I asked at the beginning why *do* we listen to some and not others. I would suggest that in part the answer lies in the speaker who, conscious of *ethos*, attends to at least some of the principles outlined here. But, of course, skill in delivery can best be acquired not by listening to a paper like this but by actual practice and by analysis of the delivery of those we *do* listen to. Once we're drawn to a conference session because of subject matter, we then listen, I think, also to sense a combining of self and subject, an identification with audience and subject.

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