

The Analysis of Persuasion Techniques in Impromptu Speaking Contest

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Abstract: This paper analyzes persuasion techniques in impromptu speaking. It first discusses the definition of persuasion, and then in the light of Aristotle's theory, it analyzes the roles of persuasion techniques of emotional appeal, rational appeal and ethical appeal played in impromptu speaking. Three appeals serve to achieve the ultimate goal of strengthening the persuasive force of the speakers who aim to inform, and to persuade. At last the paper analyzes these players how to use persuasion techniques to make speeches effective, convincing, and vivid in impromptu speaking. The paper has the practical purpose of offering some guidance in theory and practice to university students interested in speeches.

Keywords: impromptu speech, persuasion techniques, appeal

Introduction

Throughout history people have used public speaking as a vital means of communication. Public speaking, as its name implies, is a way of making your ideas. During modern times, through public speaking, many women and men around the globe have spread their ideas and influence (Lucas 4)^[1].

Public speaking is a vital means of civic engagement. It is a way to express your ideas and to have an impact on issues that matter in modern society. Public speaking is a useful skill that can be learned. Being able to speak effectively in public is increasingly important in business as presentations are a normal part of the modern business day. They are given, for example, to provide information to clients, to persuade customers to buy or to inform staff about new policies (Kay 4)^[2].

In the last few years, people are conscious of the importance of public speech. In China, more and more people are fond of public speech

The speaking contest has given speeches and impromptu speeches, but the impromptu speech is considered the most difficult task in public speech. To give a speech without time to prepare, practise and polish your speech is indeed a frightening thought. The impromptu speech is the most highly demanding segment and a true test of contestant's competence. Speakers often use persuasive techniques to enhance persuasion.

1. Persuasion techniques

1.1 Definitions of persuasion

Persuasion has been defined in many different ways over the centuries, and no single definition can reconcile the various versions.

The formal study of persuasion traces its roots to the ancient Greek, who were the first to systematize the use of persuasion, calling it "rhetoric". Primary among the ancient theorists was Aristotle, who defined rhetoric as "the faculty of observing in any given case, the available means of persuasion" (Larson 11)^[3].

Persuasion, according to Aristotle, can be based on a source's credibility (ethos), emotional appeals (Pathos), or logical appeal (Logos), or a combination of them (Roberts, 192)^[4].

Those early definitions clearly focused on the sources of messages and on the persuader's skill and art in building a speech. Later students of persuasion reflected the changes that accompanied an emerging mass media world. Winston Brembeck and William Howell, Communication professors, described persuasion as "the conscious attempt to modify thought and action by manipulating the motives of men toward predetermine ends" in 1952.

Wallace Fotneringham defined persuasion as "that body of effects in receivers" caused by a persuader's message in 1966. Kenneth Burke literary critic and theorist, defined persuasion as the artful use of the "resources of ambiguity" in 1970.

1.2 Three appeals

In the Rhetoric, Aristotle focused on what he called the artistic proofs or appeals that the persuader could create or manipulate.

We can say that listeners will be persuaded by a speaker for one or more of four reasons:

Because they perceive the speaker as having high credibility.

Because they are won over by the speaker's evidence.

Because they are convinced by the speaker's reasoning.

Because their emotions are touched by the speaker's ideas or language (Lucas 428)^[1].

From these four sentences, we know persuasion techniques, including building credibility, using evidence, reasoning, and appealing to emotions.

Above all, in the light of Aristotle's rhetoric theory and Lurcas's theory, the paper attempts to analyze the roles of persuasion techniques of emotional appeal, ethical appeal and rational appeal played in the impromptu speeches.

1.2.1 Emotional appeal

Effective persuasion often requires emotional appeal. Emotional appeals-what Aristotle referred to as paths-are intended to make listeners feel sad, angry, guilty, afraid, happy, proud, sympathetic, reverent, or the like. There are often appropriate reactions when the question is one of value or policy. Few people are moved to change their attitudes or take action when they are complacent or bored. As George Campbell wrote in his philosophy of Rhetoric, "when persuasion is the end, passion also must be engaged" (Lucas 449)^[1].

As the term suggests, emotional appeal can touch listeners' emotion. There are three aspects in the use of language, such as using language accurately, using language clearly and using language vividly. But the powerful tool for persuasion is the use of language vividly in the public speaking. Bring your speeches to life by using vivid, animated language. Although there are several ways to do this, here are two of the most important-imagery and rhythm. Speakers can use imagery in much the same way to make their ideas come alive. Three ways to generate imagery are by using concrete words, simile and metaphor. Speakers sometimes seek to exploit the rhythm of language. By catching up their listeners in an arresting string of sounds, speaker can enhance the impact of their words and therefore of their ideas. Using parallelism, repetition, alliteration, antithesis make rhythm.

These words call up mental impressions of sights, sounds, touch, smell, and taste.

The concrete words create images of sights and sounds, feelings and emotions that pull us irresistibly into the speech.

The speaker can use simile and metaphor to create imagery in the speech.

For example, “Thanks to the expanded enrollment, we can say goodbye to those days when going to college was like passing over a narrow bridge, with only a few, a very few, able to make it to the other side.” Using simile, the speaker describes the fact that the examination for college is fierce, which makes speech persuasive (qtd in He 53)^[6].

1.2.2 Ethical appeal

It’s important to remember that ethical appeal is an attitude. It exists not in the speaker, but in the mind of the audience. The speakers use ethical appeal to build their credibility.

Above all, a speaker’s credibility is affected by two factors:

Competence-how an audience regards a speaker’s intelligence, expertise, and knowledge of the subject

Character-how an audience regards a speaker’s sincerity, trustworthiness, and concern for the well-being of the audience

The audience’s perception of whether a speaker is qualified to speak on a given topic. The two major factors influencing a speaker’s credibility are competence and character (Lucas 429)^[1]. One way to enhance your credibility is to advertise on the speech topic. Did you investigate the topic thoroughly? Then say so. Do you have experience that gives you special knowledge or insight? Again, say so. Another way to bolster your credibility is to establish common ground with your audience. You do not persuade listeners by assaulting their values and rejecting their opinions.

In the impromptu speech, speaker can use expertise on the speech topic and person experience to enhance persuasion. President Harry Truman once said that in speaking “sincerity, honesty, and a straight forward manner are more important than special talent or polish”. If you wish to convince others, you must first convince yourself. If you want to others to believe and care about your ideas, you must believe and care about them yourself, let your audience know you are in earnest-that your speech is not just a classroom exercise. Your spirit, your enthusiasm, your conviction will carry over to your listeners.

In addition, the use of quotations, idioms and proverbs is to colour and help explain meaning. It also can enhance speaker’s persuasion.

“The celebrated historian, Toynbee, once declared, ‘All progress comes from correspondent response to challenges.’” The famous person supports the speaker’s argument. University students should catch challenging opportunity and face competition bravely.

In the impromptu speech, according to telling person experience, it can prove that the speaker has good knowledge and great ability and we can trust the speaker’s speech.

1.2.3 Rational appeal

The two major elements of rational appeal are evidence and reasoning. Evidence is one element of what Aristotle referred to as logos-the logical appeal of a speaker. The other major element of logos is reasoning, which works in combination with evidence to help make a speaker’s claims persuasive (Lucas 437)^[1].

So it’s very popular to use evidence and reasoning as persuasion techniques in the impromptu speech. Different kinds of evidence vary in strength or persuasive power, depending on the context in which they are used. In some situation, for instance, statistics have a powerful effect; in others, pictorial evidence persuades us; and in yet others, vicarious or retold experience most effectively delivers the persuasive message of the content premise. In these and other case, persuasion relies on the assumption that people can learn about and act on information gained indirectly and via the central information-processing route (Larson 188)^[3].

Evidence consists of supporting materials-examples, statistics, testimony-used to prove or disprove. Most people are skeptical, and they are suspicious of unsupported generalizations. They want speakers to justify their claims. If you hope to be persuasive, you must support your views with evidence, whenever you say something that is open to question, you should give evidence to prove you are right (Lucas 433)^[1]. Evidence in persuasion is a powerful tool, and it will achieve the maximum effect in the speech.

The use of data also can play a persuasion role in the speech. I can give you an example: it's that the GDP of Asia only stands less for a quarter of the world's GDP. And its population is more than 60% of the whole world. So in this very terrible basic of economy, it is really very hard for us to develop a new currency (qtd. in He 52)^[6]. These dates state that the speaker doesn't support the adoption of a single currency for Asian Union.

2. Analysis the use of persuasion techniques in impromptu speaking

Having selected one impromptu speeches from Speaking Contest, we analyze the use of persuasion techniques in the impromptu speech.

2.1 For an example which is from Hu Fang's speech

(1) Yes, to some extent, we can. (2) Look at those people in the fitness centers and the gyms. (3) With strong financial support, they have good access to modern facilities and advanced technology to build up strong body. (4) To be truth, to tell the truth, I wish one day I could be one of them, to enjoy the exercises in the gyms. (5) However, can money only, can health only be bought with money? (6) The answer could be negative. (7) A survey issued by WTO, WHO-World Health Organization, indicated that of most of, of all the longest living people in the world, few of them are millionaires. (8) On the contrary, heart attacks and some other fatal diseases are more likely to attack rich people. (9) As is said in an old proverb: "Many dishes, many diseases." (10) So look at me. (11) I cannot afford the luxury. (12) I cannot afford going to the swimming pool or fitness centers every day. (13) But clear air and water, well-balanced diet, regular physical exercises outdoor, a little walk and sunshine and a good night's sleep keep me fit, energetic and happy. (14) Obviously, right? (15) Isn't it wonderful to have good health in both mind and body without paying much? (16) So to conclude, money can contribute to our health, but it is never a sole determinant of good health .

2.2 Analyzing articles

This is a very good impromptu speech, with a clear organization. The speaker's answer to the question is rather sophisticated instead of a definite "yes" or "no". She expressed this position clearly at the very beginning with the clever combination of a "yes" and the qualification "to some extent". She then supported her personal experience indicating that richness is not always in positive correlation with good health.

The speaker also use rhetorical question to make a persuasive argument. A rhetorical question is one that does not need an answer, for the answer is suggested by the speaker, or presumed by the speaker to be fairly obvious or probably known to the audience.

In a sense it is the equivalent of a statement, sentence (5) and sentence(15)are both rhetorical questions. Using rhetorical question, the speaker support that good health could not be bought with money.

In the impromptu speech, the speaker use lots of persuasion techniques to support her opinion, such as using person experience, appealing to authority, appealing to proverb using rhetorical question. These persuasion techniques play a important role in the impromptu speech. Those techniques build the speaker s credibility, making the speech vivid, persuasive.

We also can come to a conclusion speakers often use rational appeal, because reasoning, expert

testimony and examples are a part of rational appeal. For these speakers, they may think rational appeal is a effective persuasive technique.

3. Enlightenment from the use of persuasion techniques impromptu speaking

3.1 Several common persuasion techniques

The skillful use of supporting materials often makes the difference between a poor speech and a good one. Using supporting materials is not a matter of haphazardly tossing facts and figures into your speech. Speakers use examples to support their argument. Brief examples-also called specific instances-may be referred to in passing to illustrate a point. Extended examples are often called narratives, illustrations, or anecdotes. They are longer and more detailed than brief examples. In the speech, these examples can make lots of good results. It can clarify ideas, reinfince ideas, personalize ideas.

In most speeches you will probably rely on expert testimony-testimony from people who are acknowledged authorities in their fields. Expert testimony is especially helpful for students speakers because students are seldom recognized as experts on their speech topics. Citting the views of people who are experts is a good way to lend credibility to your speech. It shows that you are not just mouthing your own opinions, but that your position is supported by people who are knowledgeable about the topic.

3.2 The importance of rhetorical techniques

Using rhetoric techniques, which is a effective persuasion technique, can make speeches full of rhythm, vitality and emotion. But according to analyzing the use of persuasion techniques in the impromptu speaking, players don't use the technique frequently. Sometimes the repetition technique is used in the speech. Repetition is a powerful rhetorical device which creates good rhythm and parallelism to make the language musical, emphatic, attractive and memorable. Therefore players repeat words and sentences to make a persuasive argument. Players don't know how to use simile, metaphor, personification and metonymy in the speech. Moreover it is a difficult task to use these technique in a short time.

3.3 The use of mistaken persuasion technique

To give a speech without time to prepare, practice and make your speech is indeed a frightening though, we think it is a difficult task for most of players in public speaking. Therefore, it is common that speakers use wrong techniques, words and sentences to explain their argument.

The use of quotations, idioms and proverbs is a good way to enhance arguments. Player often use the technique, but the technique must be correctly used.

First, the use of quotations, idioms and proverbs must be relevant to the topic and to what has just been said and is about to be said. It is pointless to inject, "time is money" in a speech about economic development unless the relevance is explained: The speaker needs to show why they are saying it.

Example:

"The internet is a friend: a bridge over troubled waters.". What "troubles"? How "a bridge"? Explain it or don't use it!

Second, quotations must be correctly used. This requires knowledge of the original meaning and context. This may require research in order to check.

Example:

"To be or not to be, that is the question": this comes from Shakespeare's Hamlet where the prince is debating with himself about the meaning of "existence" and questioning whether it is better to live an unhappy life or to end it by committing suicide. Therefore it is a serious issue and should not be treated lightly.

Third, quotations, idioms and proverbs should not be overused. In a 3 minutes impromptu speech,

there is no room for more than 1 or 2.

Example:

The speaker uses a lot of parodies and quotations such as: “a friend with a cellphone is a friend in demand” ; “an invention of the people, by the people, for the people” ,“to be lazy is human, to move around, divine”. The quotations and parodies employed also shows the speaker’s language competence. But we should pay attention not to overload our speech with too many quotations, phrases and too much reference. The real meaning of the message may sometimes become buried and lost.

Fourth, idiomatic expressions should be complete.

Example:

“There can be miracles when you believe” — in what? It is necessary to say in what you believe in order that there can be miracles.

Fifth, try to use idioms that are less well known.

Example:

In competition, there seems to be a fixation with “every coin has two sides”. Apart from being boring, this often merely shows the speaker is missing the point because often issues they are talking about have more than 2 or even 3 sides! If the topic of the speech is a quotation or well-known saying of some kind, do not it. The task is to identify the issue that the quotation or saying is addressing and explore that, not the words of the quotation. For instance, “Hope brings success”. People understand what “hope” is they don’t need it to be described for them. What is needed is an exploration of how hope can sometimes lead to success but other times may not, that without hope life would be dull but that hope alone without hard work and good luck is unlikely to lead to success in anything.

4. Conclusion

Public speaking is a useful skill that can be learned. Public speaking skill is an essential addition to the human repertoire. Technical knowledge is just as vital, but the ability to speak well takes your abilities and talents beyond the borders of your own skin and into the hearts and minds of others.

Public speaking is a variety of language which is used on various occasions, persuasion techniques used in the speech is more formal and solemn. A variety of persuasion techniques, such as rhetorical question, simile, repetition, examples, expert testimony, quotations and , are employed in impromptu speeches to intensify the effect of speeches. The use of these persuasion techniques make a speech effective ,vivid and convincing.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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