CREDIBILITY
Recent Recognition of a Classical Concept
Includes Contemporary Application and Discussion

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“Credibility” - Fifty years ago, this word was so seldom spoken that the speaker might well be asked to define it. Today, “credibility” is a term so common that it appears in bold, black type as the headline in newspapers and tabloids, graces the covers of various news magazines and comes into American homes via television news, talk shows and the Internet. Before examining the origin, the meaning and a modern approach to the concept of credibility, a brief discussion of the people who inadvertently made it popular seems in order.

Richard Nixon deserves the greatest credit. At the height of the Watergate investigation, a photograph of President Nixon, complete with a 5:00 shadow, appeared with the caption, “Would you buy a used car from this man?” As Nixon lost credibility, the term became better known.

In the 1980's, Ronald Reagan did much to popularize the word. Headlines of numerous news magazines questioned Reagan's role in the “Irangate” scandal. Questions of Reagan's credibility were commonplace. His ability to shed the attacks on his ethos led to his nickname, “The Teflon President.”

The Anita Hill - Clarence Thomas hearings (re Thomas’ appointment to the Supreme Court) called the attention of many Americans to the concept of credibility. As a result of these hearings on Thomas's alleged sexual harassment, Americans learned what players in the judicial system have known for years - sexual harassment cases turn on the credibility of the accused and of the complainant (Heelan v. Johns - Manville Corp). An interesting phenomenon occurred in the Hill-Thomas case. While Thomas was initially perceived to be more credible by national polls taken at the time of the hearings, one year later public opinion polls found that Hill had changed places with Thomas. The Wall St. Journal reported on its front page, “Anita F. Hill was the loser in her battle with Clarence Thomas a year ago. But as time passes, she is looking more and more like a winner.” (Abramson).

The recognition that credibility is the key to leadership in the business world is acknowledged by authors Kouzes and Posner in their text, Credibility; How Leaders Gain and Lose It, Why People Demand It published in 1993. The authors of this text assert, after surveying 15,000 people, conducting 400 case studies and 40 in-depth interviews, that “in the 1990's there is growing recognition that gaining credibility is far more important than being dressed for success. Credibility is the foundation on which leaders and constituents will build the grand dream of the future.” (Kouzes and Posner 22).

There is little doubt that, in the 1990’s, Bill Clinton gets credit for a major modification of the word “credibility”. His morally unacceptable personal behavior became the primary impetus for the development of various shadings of the term e.g. personal credibility, presidential credibility and political credibility. For many, Clinton was able to maintain “presidential credibility” while losing “personal credibility”. Regardless of the adjective used to clarify the word, “credibility” continues to be a critical factor when it comes to persuasive discourse.

These same thoughts were expressed thoroughly and eloquently by Aristotle in the middle of the Fourth Century B.C. in his Rhetoric. Teachers of rhetoric have been instructing students on the value of ethos (credibility) to effective persuasion for hundreds of years. This
article will present a brief history of Aristotle’s view of the role of ethos in persuasion and will offer a modern interpretation of the concept. Emphasis will be placed on practical applications of this ancient principle.

Aristotle defined rhetoric (speaking in public) as persuasion. He wrote that on each speaking occasion the speaker has three means of persuasion available - ethos (credibility), pathos (appeal to emotions) and logos (appeal to reason). The good speaker will examine the nature of the occasion carefully to determine how to best utilize each of the three.

Whether more pathos or logos should be used is largely determined by the educational level of the audience. Strong emotional appeals are made to less educated audiences. Educated groups need facts, statistics, quotations and thoughtful arguments - appeals to reason. In either case, both pathos and logos should be employed. Politicians usually learn this by experience and use more emotional appeals in speaking to their constituents while presenting more logical appeals when persuading colleagues.

Despite the very reasonable judgement that a person with the most proof or facts should be the most persuasive, Aristotle and numerous speech researchers in this century have concluded that the credible person, the person who is perceived as trustworthy, is most persuasive (Aristotle 38).

Just what is ethos? What are the characteristics that cause listeners to view a speaker as credible? Aristotle limited his discussion of a speaker’s character to the speech itself; he did not include the speaker’s position or reputation. Contemporary speech researchers typically include trustworthiness, expertise and dynamism in their definitions of credibility. Based upon their research, Kouzes and Posner identified individuals who are honest, forward looking, inspiring and competent as most credible.

This author has taught public speaking for more than forty years. From reading, research and experience, the following six components have emerged as critical, although not equally so. Credibility can be enhanced or destroyed by each. They are:

1. The givens
2. Reputation
3. Dress and grooming
4. Content/Analysis
5. Delivery
6. Language

The “givens”, age, sex, race and appearance, are the items over which the speaker has little or no control. Because the givens affect credibility, a speaker must be aware of them and compensate for them if necessary. However, without plastic surgery, a speaker cannot alter these physical characteristics. As to the necessity of dealing with them, it becomes essential when the speaker differs greatly from the audience. Here are two examples: 1. If a female firefighter is speaking to an all male group of firefighters, she needs to establish credibility immediately.
2. If a very young speaker is speaking to a group of seniors, it is important to quickly establish ethos. If the speaker and the audience are homogeneous, then this component can be largely ignored.

While Aristotle didn’t include the speaker’s position or reputation as a factor in establishing favorable ethos, contemporary studies have proven over and over that a good reputation enhances believability in the short run. However, most researchers have found that, in the weeks following a presentation, the audience is apt to forget the reputation of the speaker and remember, positively or negatively, the substance of the speech.

The speaker today needs to remember that a reputation is not something which is earned and unchangeable. Reputations are being made and changed daily. An excellent case in point is that of Dan Rather’s comments on Richard Nixon. Rather said straightforwardly that he had never considered Nixon a friend and that he had no respect for Nixon's role in the Watergate affair. Then he paused and stated that his opinion of Nixon had changed because he had heard Nixon speak shortly before his death and was very impressed by Nixon’s knowledge (of China), his clarity of thought, his organization, and his presentation. Perhaps this example serves to confirm Aristotle’s view that it is how you present your speech that ultimately determines your credibility. Regardless, the speaker needs to take his or her reputation into account in preparing a speech.

A speaker’s dress and grooming are factors over which he or she has total control and are significant factors in the audiences’ view of the ethos of the speaker. Generally, a speaker who looks unkempt will diminish his/her credibility. The message received by the audience is that the speaker didn’t care enough to comb his/her hair, sew on a button or wash his/her face. Of course, there could be occasions where the ungroomed or grungy look would be fashionable. As Aristotle stated, the specific occasion must be considered.

Choice of dress is very much related to the particular audience. A surfer would not speak to his/her colleagues about big wave riding wearing a tuxedo anymore than a stockbroker would speak about investing in mutual funds to the Rotary Club while wearing jeans, a tank top and rubber slippers. If a speaker is representing a profession which wears a uniform, wearing the uniform often enhances credibility. Many police departments recognize this by requiring officers to wear their uniform when appearing in court. A key factor is that dress should not distract from the message being delivered.

The components of credibility discussed thus far, the givens, the speaker’s reputation, and dress and grooming, are all important factors in a speaker’s ethos but they are not as significant as the next three, identified in a study by Samuel Becker of the University of Iowa in the 1950’s. In a survey of speech instructors across the United States, Becker found that content/analysis, delivery and language were the most significant determiners of effective speaking - but not equally so. Content/analysis and delivery equaled about 45% each of the perceived speaking effectiveness while language constituted 10%. In this author’s opinion, these three factors are the critical determiners of a speaker’s credibility.
Content/analysis means very simply that a speaker needs to have something of substance to say (content) and must organize it well (analysis). Do speakers actually speak and say little or nothing? They sure do! We've all had to listen to such speakers and we've all reflected negatively on their credibility. Brevity is a highly regarded characteristic of effective speakers. Remember that the best known American speech, “the Gettysburg Address” by Abraham Lincoln, took approximately three minutes to deliver.

How does a disorganized presentation affect credibility? Organization of speeches has been the most frequently studied component of credibility. Study after study has found that disorganization = poor credibility. The old minister’s or didactic approach to organization is a simple and effective organizational tool. That is - “Tell ‘em what you’re going to say, Say it and tell ‘em what you've said.” You may be tempted to use the method of implication and put your thesis sentence at the end of your presentation. Be cautious. Because it takes talent and careful planning to maintain an audience's interest until the speaker reaches the concluding thesis, this method is seldom used.

Equally important to a speaker's ethos as content/analysis is delivery. Delivery includes the body, the eyes (certainly a part of the body but so significant as to require separate mention) and the voice.

A discussion of the body needs to begin with the feet. The ideal is to stand comfortably erect with one's weight equally balanced on both feet. Feet should be about six inches apart with more weight on the balls of the feet. If the speaker rests on his/her heels, the pendulum effect becomes quite mesmerizing to the audience. The football center's stance is as unstable as the ankles together stance. An occasional few steps forward or to the side or back serves two purposes: to get the audience's attention and to use up adrenaline.

The knees are important because bending one can cause quite a distraction. A speaker can rest on a bent knee for no more than a minute or so before shifting weight. The constant weight shifting that ensues can be more attention getting than the presentation.

Moving up the body, the speaker needs to be aware of his/her arms. The easiest and certainly most natural place for the arms is hanging at the sides of the speaker. There they are available for use if necessary. It’s important to remember that gestures are more effective if they are strong and above the waist. If gestures don’t feel natural, the audience will view them as unnatural.

A speaker frequently has the use of a podium (rostrum). A podium is a convenient place to put one's hands, as well as one's notes, which should be on cards and in outline form. Hands should be placed at the side of the podium rather than gripping the top as audiences may find white knuckles distracting. A podium is not the place for forearms or elbows. A speaker leaning on a podium hoping to look more friendly and conversational, in fact, looks sloppy, disrespectful, and weak.
The classical orator and rhetorician, Cicero, in his *De Oratore* stated that “delivery is wholly the concern of the feelings; these are mirrored by the face and expressed by the eyes... nobody can produce the same effect with the eyes shut.” Looking into the eyes of the audience continues to be a powerful means of establishing credibility. Reading from a script or notes or even looking over the heads of the audience sabotages the speaker’s ethos. Because the aim of a speaker is to persuade and direct eye contact makes a speaker much more persuasive, it is imperative for a speaker to know his/her material so well that eye contact is natural and notes serve only as occasional reminders. Evangelist Billy Graham is a master at this; members of an audience of 50,000 are said to believe Graham is looking and therefore speaking directly to each of them.

As for the voice, a credible speaker is loud enough to be heard, slow enough to be understood and not monotonous. The vocal technique that can greatly enhance a speaker’s ethos is, strangely enough, the judicious use of the pause. A few moments of silence gives the audience time to reflect and the speaker a brief respite. Giving the audience time to think gives them time to understand the message. The audience’s understanding of a well-planned message enhances the speaker’s credibility. However, the vocalized pause (ahh, ummm, OK, you know) can have the opposite effect of the silent pause. Practice is the best way to effectively use the silent pause and eliminate the vocalized pause.

Finally, a discussion of language is in order. Of the six, this component has the potential to do great harm to a speaker’s credibility. Interestingly, audiences will forgive an accent, a speech disorder, mispronunciation, pidgin, creole, or grammar errors—if the rest of the components are well presented. Audiences will not forgive the blanket generalization which they know to be false. The reasoning of the audience is “If I know that the speaker is wrong about this, how can I believe anything else that she or he says?”

To illustrate this, the following are three examples this author has observed:

1. A language arts teacher asserts that “any student who misses more than two days of class does not belong in college.”

2. A correctional officer claims that “Last year, all crimes committed with a handgun on the island of Oahu were committed with unregistered guns.”

3. A college dean alleges “In my twenty years as an administrator, I have never been unable to answer any question about any department I’ve supervised.”

The tragedy in these three cases and in the case of most blanket generalizations is that the speaker could have made his/her point and have been believable by simply putting a qualifier in front of the absolute term or by substituting a word that qualifies slightly.

Once again, to illustrate with the three examples:

1. **MANY** students who miss.....

2. **ALMOST** all crimes.....

3. I have **SELDOM** been unable.....
This discussion of language began with a statement which indicated that an audience is likely to forgive many language errors with the exception of the blanket generalization. Nevertheless, the speaker who wishes to be as credible as possible should do his or her utmost to correct language errors before the occasion of the speech and not pray for the audience's forgiveness afterward. Before the subject of language is concluded, the prospective speaker needs to be made aware of four types of rhetorical language which can greatly enhance the effectiveness of a speech: repetition, the metaphor, antithesis, and tricolon.

Brief definitions of these terms follow:

**Repetition** – Deliberately repeating a word or phrase three or more times in a speech (as in “I have a dream.”)

**Metaphor** – A figure of speech in which a word for one idea or thing is used in place of another to suggest a likeness between them (as in “the ship plows the sea”)

**Antithesis** – The opposition or contrast of ideas expressed in words or phrases (as in “rich or poor”).

**Tricolon** – Concluding a sentence with three or more parallel words or phrases (as in “life, liberty and property”).

The importance of these rhetorical techniques is well illustrated by speeches given by President George W. Bush within the first several days of the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001. These speeches culminated with the President's speech to the nation on Thursday, September 20; a speech acclaimed by Democrats and Republicans, friends and foes and people from all nations and walks of life.

What made Bush's fourth speech so highly regarded? A close examination reveals that Bush's “Speech to the Nation” included many more instances of rhetorical language than did the previous three speeches. Examples of each, taken from the “Speech to the Nation,” follow:

**Metaphor**: “I will not forget the wound to our country.”

**Metaphor and antithesis**: “Freedom and fear are at war.”

**Antithesis**: “Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists.”

“An attack on one is an attack on all.”

**Tricolon**: “The advance of human freedom, the great achievement of our time and the great hope of every time…..”

**Tricolon and Repetition**: “I will not yield, I will not rest, I will not relent in waging this struggle.”

“We will not tire, we will not falter and we will not fail.”

**Repetition**: Throughout the speech, Bush's speech writer introduced each new section with the statement—“**Americans are asking**…..”

In sum, the use of rhetorical language polishes a speech and makes a good speech great. The serious speaker needs to consider using metaphors, antitheses, tricolons, and repetition.
This concludes a brief discussion of the concept of credibility. The concept was articulated by Aristotle in the middle of the Fourth Century B.C., taught by rhetoricians for over a thousand years, re-recognized by the general public in the 1970’s and 80’s, studied by management consultants in the early 1990’s and simplified and written for your use by a speech instructor at the turn of the Twentieth century. The material presented is by no means inclusive. The more an individual speaks in public, the more techniques to enhance credibility will become evident to him or her. How exciting to learn that we can make valuable use of the concept of ethos, enunciated in 350 B.C., by utilizing these principles today!!

Works Cited


CHAPTER TWO

The Rhetoric of Barack Obama; A Teaching Tool

Introduction

Although Barack Obama attended Punahou School for four years during the time that my husband was teaching photography there, they never met or had knowledge of one another. It wasn’t until a very warm day, July 27, 2004, as my husband and I vacationed in Vancouver, British Columbia that we were introduced to Senator Obama via television. That afternoon we had retreated to our air-conditioned hotel room to avoid the heat. We turned on the television and found that speeches were being given at the Democratic National Convention in Boston. When the keynote speaker approached the podium, we decided to listen to this young man who was unknown to us. What a delight! As a teacher of rhetoric, I was so excited to hear a speaker utilize numerous of the speaking tools that I had taught for over 35 years.

It is now 2008 and, because Senator Obama is running for president of the United States, people of all political persuasions have had the opportunity to evaluate his speaking ability. For the first time in more than 40 years, a vast number of the American public is praising the speeches of a presidential candidate. So are almost all of the members of the media. Even more surprising are the compliments of his colleagues in the presidential race. As a teacher of rhetoric, I was very happy and very curious about this phenomenon. This paper will be an attempt to answer the question -- Why is Barack Obama such an admired speaker? More specifically, to what extent does he utilize rhetorical techniques? In addition to running for President of the United States, Senator Obama makes an excellent teaching tool for rhetoric professors.

This paper will be divided into two sections -- a standard critique and a rhetorical critique. To provide examples of Senator Obama’s speaking, I will examine his keynote speech at the Democratic convention in Boston on July 27, 2004 and his victory speech after winning the Iowa Caucuses on January 3, 2008.

A STANDARD CRITIQUE

When ordinary citizens critique (evaluate), a speaker, they almost universally tend to evaluate the same qualities. These were identified more than 50 years ago in a study by Samuel L. Becker of the University of Iowa. In examining thousands of speech critique sheets utilized by thousands of speech teachers, Dr. Becker found that all of the characteristics desired in an effective speech could be summarized into three categories. The categories and the percentage of importance of each characteristic to the overall effectiveness of the speech follow:

#1. Content/analysis (having something to say, and organizing it well) -- 45%
#2 Delivery (presenting the speech) -- 45%
#3 Use of Language -- 10%

Before examining the rhetoric of Senator Obama, I will briefly examine his speaking effectiveness by using Becker’s three categories.

Content/analysis

Thus far, the content we all have been hearing has been geared at promoting the Democratic Party, in general, and his qualifications for the presidency, in particular. To assert that his content has been satisfactory is justified by the acclaim with which his speeches have been received.
He definitely considers his audience in preparing the content of his speeches. As for analysis (organization), he begins with an appropriate, attention-getting introduction, has a clear-cut thesis, main points that flow well in his body and a sincere sounding conclusion. Examples of his first sentences in the two speeches critiqued in this paper are:

**Keynote** -- On behalf of the great state of Illinois, crossroads of the nation, land of Lincoln, let me express my deep gratitude for the privilege of addressing this convention. Tonight is a particular honor for me because, let’s face it, my presence on this stage is pretty unlikely.

**Iowa** -- You know, they said this day would never come. They say our sights were set too high. They said this country was too divided, too disillusioned to ever come together around a common purpose.

Now, having given examples of his attention-getting introductions, the conclusions to these two speeches will follow:

**Keynote** -- Tonight, if you feel the same energy I do, the same urgency I do, the same passion I do, the same hopefulness I do -- if we do what we must do, and I have no doubt that all across the country, from Florida to Oregon, from Washington to Maine, the people rise up in November, and John Kerry will be sworn in as president, and John Edwards will be sworn in as vice president, and this country will reclaim its promise, and out of this long political darkness a brighter day will come. How reminiscent of Martin Luther King!

**Iowa** -- The same message we had when we were up and when we were down; the one that can save this country, brick by brick and block by block, calloused hand by calloused hand -- Together ordinary people can do extraordinary things. Because we are not a collection of red states and blue states, we are the United States of America. And in this moment, in this election, we are ready to believe again. The conclusions of both speeches provide examples of strong, memorable endings.

In summary of his content/analysis, the Senator chooses content which is appropriate, supports his purpose, and is clearly stated. He begins and ends strongly. He appears to be mindful of time and is not redundant; a trait we all appreciate. However, before leaving “content,” the subject of plagiarism needs to be addressed.

Senator Clinton, who was Senator Obama's opponent in the race to become the Democratic candidate for the presidency, provides an opportunity to discuss what plagiarism is not. She said in the debate with him that plagiarism is xeroxing pages of someone else’s speech and presenting the material as your own. In that statement she was correct. However, the comments under scrutiny were not pages, but paragraphs, and they were not word for word. As you compare the two, it can be clearly seen that Senator Obama was borrowing a format from a friend who, by the way, encouraged him to use it.

Senator Patrick in the 2006, Massachusetts governor’s race:

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal’ -- just words? Just words? ‘We have nothing to fear but fear itself’ -- just words? ‘Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.’ Just words? ‘I have a dream’-- just words?”

Senator Obama in the 2008 race for the Democratic nomination:

“Don't tell me words don't matter. ‘I have a dream’ -- just words? ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal’ -- just words? ‘We have nothing to fear but fear itself’ -- just words? Just speeches?”

What Senator Obama did was to borrow a format from a friend who was also an advisor. It is a format that Senator Patrick used when he, too, was accused of being long on rhetoric and...
short on substance. It is interesting to note that in neither case are the quotations given in the alleged plagiarism attributed to their authors. The reason is simply that these quotations are well-known to the vast majority of Americans. Something that most Americans don’t know is that John F. Kennedy’s very famous quotation, “Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country” did not originate with Kennedy’s headmaster at Choate as Kennedy indicated. In fact, it is attributed to the famous Roman orator, Cicero. No one knows who Cicero may have borrowed it from! This controversy was a good example of a speaker borrowing a format from a friend. It was a bad example of plagiarism.

Delivery
In my observations, it has been unusual for a politician to be skilled in both content/analysis and delivery. Senator Obama is an exception to that rule. In viewing both of the speeches considered in this paper, the Senator’s delivery was excellent. An examination of his use of the qualities of an effective delivery follows.

The essentials of delivery focus on the body and voice. Senator Obama, in all aspects of delivery, appears cool, calm and collected. He stands comfortably tall and walks across the stage at will. He gestures naturally when appropriate. Seldom, if ever, are his gestures distracting. He has an unusual ability to present an impassive facial countenance when listening and pausing. He has neither the forced facial expressions of his opponent nor the uncomfortable frowns and tics of the current president. He also maintains excellent eye contact with his audience and, when necessary, with his opponent. When he does use notes, and that is rare, he is very subtle.

His voice, like his body, is well-controlled. He is easy to understand because his rate and his volume are adjusted to the size of his audience. His vocal variety is pleasant to the ears of his audience. By varying his pitch and volume, he not only makes his content more effective, he maintains the interest of his audience. He will not be labeled monotonous. A final vocal technique that he has mastered is the use of the pause. This gives the audience time, if only a few seconds, to reflect on what he said. He is extremely effective in using this important technique.

Language
While Professor Becker has concluded that language is only 10% of perceived speaking effectiveness, it can spell disaster when avoidable mistakes are made. For one example, there is little doubt that Senator Obama is quite intelligent. Yet, he reaches all levels of society in his speaking. This was not the case in the last century, when the governor of Illinois, Adlai Stevenson, lost the Presidency to Dwight Eisenhower twice—in 1952 and 1956. It was generally believed that his losses were due to the fact that he was too intelligent to speak effectively to the ordinary American citizen. He was labeled negatively “an intellect”. Senator Obama appears to have avoided that problem by adapting his speeches to his various audiences. It may be that the education of the average citizen has improved in 60 years. Let’s hope so.

In my experience, one of the most deadly mistakes of language use is the blanket generalization. That is, using all-encompassing terms such as all, always, never, and entirely when qualifiers such as almost always, seldom, and rarely would suffice. In this case, it is the Senator’s wife, who provides an example of what not to do. Her statement that “for the first
time in my adult lifetime, I am really proud of my country” unnecessarily disturbed many Americans. It would have been so easy for her to use a qualifier. Senator Obama suggested she might better have said. “This is the first time that I have been proud of politics of America.” Just one blanket generalization that the audience believes is incorrect can destroy the effect of a beautifully crafted and delivered speech.

A more complete discussion of Senator Obama’s use of language follows in the next section which will address the rhetoric of Barack Obama.

**A RHETORICAL CRITIQUE**

This discussion of the rhetoric of Barack Obama will first examine his keynote speech in 2004 and his victory speech in 2008 to determine whether and to what extent Senator Obama has utilized Aristotle’s three means of persuasion in developing his content (ethos, pathos and logos). Next, it will examine whether he utilized the Black ministerial style and/or the Classical style of rhetorical language (repetition, metaphor, antithesis, and tricolon).

**Aristotle’s Three Means of Persuasion**

Before illustrating Senator Obama’s use of Aristotle’s three means of persuasion, I will briefly review them. This information can be found on page three of Chapter One. Aristotle defined rhetoric (speaking in public) as persuasion. He wrote that on each speaking occasion the speaker has three means of persuasion available - ethos (credibility), pathos (appeal to emotions) and logos (appeal to reason). The good speaker will examine the nature of the occasion carefully to determine how to best utilize each of the three.

Whether more pathos or logos should be used is largely determined by the educational level of the audience. Strong emotional appeals are made to less educated audiences. Educated groups need facts, statistics, quotations and thoughtful arguments - appeals to reason. In either case, both pathos and logos should be employed. Politicians usually learn this by experience and use more emotional appeals in speaking to their constituents while presenting more logical appeals when persuading colleagues.

Despite the very reasonable judgment that a person with the most proof or facts should be the most persuasive, Aristotle and numerous speech researchers in this century have concluded that the credible person, the person who is perceived as trustworthy, is most persuasive. Whether a student of Aristotle or not, Senator Obama clearly considered his audience in preparing his speech.

**Ethos**

His use of ethos was very evident at the convention in Boston, where he was relatively unknown. He spent the first quarter of his speech establishing his own credibility, in order to more effectively establish that of Senator Kerry. He began with his second sentence: *Tonight is a particular honor for me because, let’s face it, my presence on this stage is pretty unlikely.* He concluded establishing his ethos three paragraphs later, when he said: *I stand here knowing that my story is part of the larger American story, that I owe a debt to all of those who came before me in that, in no other country on earth, is my story even possible.* Throughout this speech, his ethos was reinforced by his use of the word, “we”, and by stressing common dreams, values and goals.

In the Iowa speech, where he spoke to an enthusiastic crowd of supporters, his need to establish his ethos was greatly diminished and this was reflected in his presentation.
Unlike his other speeches, it wasn’t until his concluding remarks on hope that he reminded the audience of his family background: *Hope—Hope is what led me here today. With a father from Kenya, a mother from Kansas, my story could only happen in United States of America. As in his other speeches, he consistently uses inclusive terms such as we and our thereby effectively reinforcing his commonality with his audience. Without a doubt, Senator Obama considers his audience when determining his need to establish his credibility (ethos).

Pathos

Both speeches are laden with pathos, appeals to emotion. In his keynote speech, given in a convention hall full of Democrats, he seemed have two purposes: first, to reaffirm both the greatness of the United States and the ways in which, together, all Americans can work to improve their lives and, second, to persuade all Americans that John Kerry was the candidate to lead America to “a brighter day.” To attain his purposes, he stressed both patriotism and religion. An example of a patriotic reference appears early in his speech, right after his personal ethos was established. He cited from the Declaration of Independence: “that all men are created equal. That they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights. That among these are life liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” Patriotism continues to be a theme throughout this speech, as does religion. A faith in God is implied in most of the speech and enunciated in the second to the final paragraph where he begins his sentence. “In the end, that is God’s greatest gift to us, the bedrock of this nation; a belief in things not seen; the belief that there are better days ahead.” Senator Obama’s speech to the convention is replete with individual stories. In addition to his own story, he tells that of his parents, workers in Galesburg Illinois, a woman from East St. Louis, John Kerry, Shamus from East Moline and makes reference to numerous others. It is these stories that provide his most powerful use of pathos in this speech.

The Iowa victory speech, which was prepared in far less time and likely with more assistance from a speechwriter, continues to be underwritten with patriotism and religion. It does not contain individual stories. It focuses on the matters at hand—Senator Obama’s need to affirm what he will do as President and his need to emphasize how all Americans can participate and be benefited. As a result, this speech balances his use of “I” and “we.” His concluding two sentences provide excellent examples of his use of “we” and his use of pathos: *The same message, we had when we were up and when we were down, the one that can save this country, brick by brick, block by block and calloused hand by calloused hand -- that together, ordinary people can do extraordinary things. Because we are not a collection of red states and blue states. We are the United States of America. And in this moment, in this election, we are ready to believe again.* After examining Senator Obama’s use of pathos in both of his speeches, the only conclusion one can come to is that it is remarkable and is exceptionally well suited to his audience.

Logos

In my introduction to this section, I wrote that politicians used more pathos when speaking to their constituencies and more logos when persuading in Congress. Both of these speeches were designed for the public. As a result, they are lighter on logos than on pathos or ethos. The type of logos that the Senator uses in these speeches contains appeals to reason rather than facts, statistics and/or quotations. One example of Senator Obama’s use of reason will be given from each speech. In Boston, he stated. *“From his heroic service in Vietnam*
to his years as prosecutor and lieutenant governor, through all two decades in the United States Senate, he has devoted himself to this country. Again and again, we’ve seen him make tough choices when easier ones were available. His values and his recent his record affirm what is best in us.” He presented a similar reasonable appeal in his Iowa speech: “The time has come for a president who will be honest about the choices and the challenges we face, who will listen to you and learn from you, even when we disagree won’t just tell you what you want to hear, but what you need to know... I will be that president for America.” There can be little doubt that large audiences, such as Senator Obama addressed in Boston, in Iowa and, concurrently, on television, prefer reasonable arguments over facts and statistics. In choosing his type and his use of logos, Senator Obama considered his audience.

Classical and Black Ministerial Styles of Speaking

For more than 25 years, my advanced public speaking students have studied the two traditions, classical and Black ministerial, most frequently used by acclaimed orators. Classical rhetoric probably began in Greece. Chronologically, a student of this style of speaking, could begin by studying Demosthenes, then Cicero, followed by Abraham Lincoln, John F. Kennedy and, perhaps, William Clinton. To study the Black ministerial style, one might begin with Frederick Douglass, followed by Sojourner Truth, Martin Luther King, Louis Lomax, Malcolm X. and most recently, T.D Jakes. My students critiqued these speakers on their use of Aristotle's three means of persuasion and their use of rhetorical language. Before continuing this section, I will review the four types of rhetorical language which can greatly enhance the effectiveness of a speech: repetition, the metaphor, antithesis, and tricolon.

Brief definitions of these four terms (found in Chapter 1) follow:

Repetition – Deliberately repeating a word or phrase three or more times in a speech (as in “I have a dream.”)

Metaphor – A figure of speech in which a word for one idea or thing is used in place of another to suggest a likeness between them (as in “the ship plows the sea”)

Antithesis – The opposition or contrast of ideas expressed in words or phrases (as in “rich or poor”).

Tricolon – Concluding a sentence with three or more parallel words or phrases (as in “life, liberty and property”). Two words or phrases do not constitute a tricolon.

It is not uncommon for these four types of language to overlap. A sentence containing three types of rhetorical language can be found rather easily.

Over the years, my students and I have reached some very general conclusions regarding these two styles and the use of Aristotle’s means of persuasion and rhetorical language. We would argue that classical speakers attempt to balance the means of persuasion, while Black speakers tend to rely most heavily on pathos. While this is not a fact, we have found it to be generally true. We also have concluded that classical speakers seem to use more tricolon’s and antitheses while Black ministerial speakers tend to use more repetition and metaphors.

An examination of Senator Obama’s use of Aristotle’s means of persuasion and rhetorical language using our conclusions does not place him solidly in either style. His use of pathos may be a function of his analysis of the two audiences or may be the influence of other black speakers. His use of rhetorical language confounds the conclusions above. He seldom uses the metaphor, but uses repetition, tricolon and antithesis with great frequency. Examples
of his use of rhetorical language in the two speeches under consideration follow, beginning
with his keynote in Boston.

**Tricolon:**

The most recurrent type of rhetorical language in the Boston speech was the tricolon.
More than two thirds of his paragraphs contained a tricolon. Several examples include:

* “I stand here knowing that my story is part of the larger American story, that I owe a debt
to all of those who came before me. And that in no other country on earth is my story even
possible.”

* “John Kerry understands the ideals of community, faith, and sacrifices because they’ve
defined his life.”

* “If you feel the same energy I do, the same urgency I do, that same passion I do, the same
hopefulness I do…” This final example combines repetition with tricolon.

**Antithesis**

Antithesis is used very frequently too. I don’t think I have studied a speech that contains
more antitheses. Examples from the Boston speech include:

* “There are patriots, who opposed the war in Iraq and patriots who supported it.”

* “Again and again, we’ve seen him make tough choices when easier ones were avail-
able.”

* “More to do for the young woman in East St. Louis, and thousands more like her, who has
the grades, has the drive, has the will, but doesn’t have the money to go to college.”

This example combines tricolon, repetition and antithesis.

**Repetition**

Senator Obama uses repetition well, but not extensively. Further, each use of repeti-
tive speech in his keynote address is confined to one paragraph. His first use of repetition at
Boston was “that we can.” He begins four sentences in one paragraph with these three words. In
subsequent paragraphs, he repeats. “John Kerry believes”, “the hope” and concludes with “I
believe.” His use of repetition, while skillfully presented, is not nearly as lengthy or as frequent
as that of a Black ministerial style speaker.

**Metaphor**

In his keynote speech, Senator Obama uses only a handful of metaphors. One sentence
contains several instances. It reads: “But they sense, deep in their bones, that with just a change
in priorities, we can make sure that every child in America has a decent shot at life, and that the
doors of opportunity remain open to all.” In his concluding sentence, he uses a familiar meta-
phor – “Out of this long political darkness a brighter day will come.” Once again, the Senator is not
following a black ministerial, rhetorical technique.

Moving to his Iowa victory speech, Senator Obama’s use of rhetorical language is once
again extensive and once again tricolon and antithesis dominate, repetition is used moderately
and metaphors are used lightly. Examples of each follow:
Tricolon
* “It comes with little sleep, little pay, and a lot of sacrifice.”
* “We beat back the policies of fear and doubts and cynicism.”
* “The time has come for a president who will be honest about the choices and the challenges we face, who will listen to you and learn from you, even when we disagree, who won’t just tell you what you want to hear, but what you need to know.”

Antithesis and Tricolon

Antithesis
* “We are choosing hope over fear.”
* “9/11 is not a way to scare up votes, but a challenge that should unite America and the world against the common threats of the 21st century.”
* “Hope is the bedrock of this nation. The belief that our destiny will not be written for us, but by us, I all those men and women who are not content to settle for the world as it is, who have the courage to remake the world as it should be.”

Repetition
As in his keynote, his use of repetition is limited to individual segments. In chronological order, he used the following repetitious beginning phrases:
“l’ll be a president who”
“This was the moment”
“When”
“Hope is what”

Metaphor
In this Iowa speech, metaphors are few. Here is one of two or three:
“The same message we had when we were up, and when we were down, and one that can save this country, brick by brick, block by block, and calloused hand by callous hand. Together, ordinary people can do extraordinary things.”

In previous writings, I have written that rhetorical language makes a good speech great. Barack Obama utilizes rhetorical language better and more often than do most speakers. He compares favorably with John F. Kennedy, the classical tradition, and Martin Luther King, the black ministerial tradition. Although this paper examined just two of his speeches for rhetorical style, I believe that the same level of rhetorical ability could be found in most, if not all, of his speeches. Senator Obama does make a good speech great.

Conclusion
Just as he is black and white genetically, black-and-white educationally, and black-and-white culturally, so he is black-and-white in his use of rhetorical language. His language contains the antithesis and tricolon most often found in the classical style of rhetoric. His use of repetition is reminiscent of the Black ministerial style. His delivery and his use of language combine the best of both of these rhetorical traditions. Each time he speaks, he models a more inclusive style of rhetoric; a rhetoric that could be called “American”. 
CHAPTER THREE

Rhetoric, Oratory, Eloquence and Articulacy; Misuse in 2008 A Teaching Tool

Who would be concerned about the misuse of the terms rhetoric, oratory, eloquence and articulacy? Why would these words, whose origins were in ancient Greece and whose use for hundreds of years was limited to the classrooms in higher education, appear so prominently on the recent United States political scene? The answers to these two questions are:

*a teacher of rhetoric
*pastors and commentators were searching for terms to discuss or dismiss the outstanding speeches of Senator Barack Obama.

As a teacher of rhetoric for more than 40 years, I would like to believe that this misuse was simply a misunderstanding of these terms. After all, since the 1960s and the speeches of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Americans haven't heard speakers of the caliber of Senator Barack Obama. However, I am not quite so naïve. During the intense 16 month campaign for the Democratic nomination recently completed, the terms "rhetoric" and to a lesser extent oratory, eloquence and articulacy were used by many national commentators and aspiring candidates as derogatory words. Whether the reason was political or a lack of understanding, the usage was not correct. As a retired speech teacher with a bachelor's degree in speech and a Masters degree in rhetoric, this constant misuse convinced me to write this clarifying paper for my students and friends.

Three e-mails provided the motivation I needed to begin this article. I became very aware of the necessity of a discussion of the academic meaning of these terms when I received a response to an article I had written at the beginning of the primary race entitled "The Rhetoric of Barack Obama; A Teaching Tool." After reading the nine page article, which was an analysis of Obama's speaking skills and use of rhetorical language, this colleague responded to this very complimentary piece by writing "Assigning rhetorical constructs to a politician's speech may be a sly way to call the speaker untrue." I was disappointed to think a colleague of mine would suggest such a thing. Slyly or openly, this method of attack appears to be failing.

I was also motivated by two e-mails that I received on the morning after Senator Obama's primary victory. Having read the same nine-page article on Senator Obama's rhetoric, these former students, one from Japan (a retired businessman) and another from Indonesia (Post Doc) wrote to let me know that they were happy that Senator Obama had won and that they are looking forward to his future speeches. As the Japanese businessmen put it, "Today, I would like to send you the celebration of Mr. Obama's victory in the preliminary election of the Democratic Party. I hope he will become the next US President. I would like to listen to his statements." Their responses, as citizens of other countries, illustrate that, while rhetorical criticism exists outside of the political arena, it can be appropriately and positively applied to politicians' speeches. Many citizens of the world can and do appreciate the rhetoric of Barack Obama.

RHETORIC
Pronunciation is a good place to begin this discussion. When pronouncing the word rhetoric, the accent is on the first syllable. Rhetoric is a noun. When used as an adjective, it is rhetorical as in the fairly common phrase rhetorical question. A student of rhetoric is a rhetorician who may or may not be an orator. As to the definition of rhetoric, it is best to start at
the beginning in ancient Greece and Rome with the three most famous classical rhetoricians, Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian.

Aristotle, in the third century B.C., wrote the “Bible” on rhetoric aptly entitled, Rhetoric. The concepts presented by Aristotle in his Rhetoric are still valid and useful. In fact, the first assignment given to students in the Master’s degree program in Rhetoric at the University of California at Davis was to outline Aristotle’s Rhetoric. I did and I acquired a strong foundation for my future studies. Aristotle viewed speaking in public as persuasion. He defined rhetoric as “Deciding in any particular case what are the available means of persuasion.” He offered ethos, pathos and logos as the three means of persuasion. That is:

Ethos = Ethical appeal = Credibility
Pathos = Pathetic appeal = Appeal to emotions
Logos = Logical appeal = Appeal to logic

Depending on the nature of the audience, a speaker would choose more or less pathos and logos but must always consider ethos.

Cicero, a noted Roman senator, orator and author, who lived in the years preceding the close of B.C., was a student of Aristotle’s work. He took rhetoric one step further and discussed delivery in his De Oratore. He defined rhetoric as: “Rhetoric is one great art comprised of five lesser arts: inventio, dispositio, elocutio, memoria, and pronunciatio.” Rhetoric is “speech designed to persuade.” Cicero is noteworthy in that he was both a rhetorician and an orator. His speeches, which illustrate a careful use of pathos and logos in addition to multiple examples of ethos, are quite interesting and readable today.

Quintilian is the author of a twelve-volume textbook on rhetoric entitled Institutio Oratoria, published around AD 95. This work deals not only with the theory and practice of rhetoric, but also with the fundamentals of a model educational system. Quintilian defined the orator/citizen as “a good man speaking well.” An overbroad summary of his thesis would state that the ideal citizen would be an orator who was ethical. This is the principle that he taught in his school of rhetoric. He was a student of Aristotle’s Rhetoric and of Cicero’s two books on rhetoric. He viewed Cicero as a model speaker. His books are considered the foundational books of both rhetoric and education.

All three of these classical rhetoricians believed that rhetoric was persuasion and that ethics was the most important component of rhetoric. To simplify this one might say that, even if you want to inform your audience of something, you must first persuade them to listen and they won’t listen if they don’t regard you as credible (believable). The books on rhetoric written by these rhetoricians survived the Middle Ages. They must have survived with credibility because sometime during the Renaissance the writers of fine literature adopted the term rhetoric for their works. Today the word rhetoric can refer to fine speaking, fine writing or both.

Until the concluding years of the nineteenth century, studies in college humanities were usually listed under rhetoric (including those at Yale and Harvard). With the advent of technology and science, the rhetorical model was disbanded into separate disciplines e.g. speech, poetics, writing, ethics and morality. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the scientific model had replaced the rhetorical model in higher education. This occurrence was enunciated in The Good Society, by Robert Bellah, a highly respected sociologist and his co-authors (1991). Seventeen years later, in the March 2008 edition of Commonweal, Bellah, now a professor emeritus at UC Berkeley, wrote the following on the subject of rhetoric, With a sense
of the centrality of rhetoric to the Western political tradition from Aristotle and Cicero to Jefferson and Lincoln, I have never accepted the derogatory use of the word. I believe that speaking well and thinking well usually go together, and vice versa, as the incumbent president so vividly illustrates. It will be easier for John McCain to attack Obama’s “rhetoric” than to equal it. This quotation is from a sociologist not a rhetorician. To Bellah, as with many of his colleagues, the pejorative use of the word rhetoric is unacceptable.

The next important question is, when and how did rhetoric take on a negative connotation? Because of my professional and educational background, I am always very alert to the use of the term rhetoric. During the 1960s and 70’s, news commentators frequently referred to speeches by African Americans as black rhetoric. This probably would be acceptable today, but at that time, white people gave speeches and black people spoke rhetoric. It was very clearly used to minimize the effect of the speeches by powerful speakers such as Malcolm X. and the Black Panther leaders. It obviously didn’t diminish the brilliant oratory of men such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Louis Lomax but it may have been the beginning of the questionable use of rhetoric as a slur.

Actually, rhetoric used as a derogatory term didn’t appear in the dictionaries until the last decade where, if the term were given, it was either a sub point or the final meaning in a list of meanings. Why were the terms rhetoric, oratory, eloquent and articulate used so inaccurately? One factor to consider is that it had been more than 40 years since political commentators, candidates for political office and some faculty had heard and/or written about such a charismatic, gifted speaker. I believe ignorance is one significant reason why many in the world of politics used rhetorical language as demeaning. On the other hand, I also believe that politicians and pundants were trying to determine whether negative attacks on the Senator’s speaking would be effective. Although these attacks on his speaking ability could have been a political liability, they didn’t work. Now that the Senator is a candidate for president, not surprisingly, his rhetorical ability is once again considered noteworthy and an asset.

A little book published in 2008 entitled Semantic Antics offers a discussion of the changing meanings of words. In his initial chapter, Sol Steinmetz offers reasons why words change. At first reading, it would seem that the use of the word rhetoric as a derogatory term might be labeled as “degradation of meaning”. Steinmetz explains “this happens when meanings with a positive connotation are replaced with disparaging or unpleasant ones.” However, in the case of rhetoric, the original meaning was not replaced; rather the positive and negative meanings have coexisted for about 20 years. Interestingly, in some cases after a period of time, the derogatory meaning was replaced by the original positive meaning. For example, black rhetoric became a very respectable collegiate discipline and Senator Obama’s rhetoric resumed its powerful and commendable status. With this in mind, I would suggest that Steinmetz’ label “distortion of meaning” which he explains as “lack of familiarity with the word leads people to guess at its meaning which also often leads to a distortion of both the word and its meaning” is more fitting. This might help to explain the reason why rhetoric used derogatorily can, over time and with better understanding, become positive as it has with Senator Obama. If after reading this discussion, the reader still wishes to use the term rhetoric to indicate a speech with little or no content then I would suggest that it be labeled appropriately with a preceding adjective such as empty, mere or meaningless. In his first autobiography, Senator Obama uses nationalistic rhetoric, an appropriate choice of words because it identifies the type of rhetoric.
In summary, rhetoric is a vibrant, active term for the study of public speaking. A student of rhetoric studies content, organization and language with regard to ethos, pathos and logos. A student of oratory studies the same materials in preparation for and presentation of a speech. A student striving to be eloquent and articulate studies rhetoric and practices aloud in order to deliver a speech which attains her/his goal. Eloquence and articulateness are components of delivery which, in turn, is a component of oratory and rhetoric. Because these four terms are intertwined, the previous discussion of rhetoric includes much of the background of oratory, eloquence and articulacy.

**ORATORY**

Oratory, like rhetoric, came from the ancient Greek and Latin traditions where it was studied as a component of rhetoric and was an important skill in public and private life. Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian all wrote on oratory as a component of rhetoric. The term oratory then and now means the art of public speaking. Traditionally, only fine public speaking deserved to be called oratory. A lack of orators in the last several decades has meant the term oratory has not been used as frequently as has the broader term rhetoric. For this reason, oratory was not as frequently misused as rhetoric. That is, until Senator Obama's oratorical successes were denigrated by the uninformed and the opposition. He was called an orator as though that were a criticism. As discussed earlier, when Senator Obama achieved his goal of being the Democratic nominee for the Office of President of the United States, these same commentators began to speak of his oratory with respect.

**Eloquence**

To be called eloquent is one of the highest forms of praise for a public speaker. An eloquent speaker is fluent, forcible, elegant, powerful and persuasive. She/he uses Aristotle's three means of persuasion in a well prepared and polished text coupled with a dynamic delivery to achieve eloquence. At the height of the derogatory use of rhetorical terminology just a few months ago, even eloquence was cited as a liability for a politician. An excellent example of this comes from Obama's political opponent, Senator John McCain, who stated that I will work hard to make sure Americans aren't deceived by an eloquent but empty call for change. By definition, eloquence is not empty. In another example, ABC used Buried in Eloquence to imply that eloquence could be used to hide the truth. In fact, a speech couldn't, or more likely wouldn't, be called eloquent if it were substantively flawed. For the writer of the Buried in Eloquence phrase, the words Buried in Delivery would have been a better choice but not as clever. As Aristotle said in his Rhetoric, the ethos of a speaker is determined by his/her audience. Some listeners will view a speech as eloquent and some will not. Partial eloquence is not a term of choice.

**Articulacy**

If the term articulacy is new to you, then you are in good company. It is the seldom used root word for the study of articulation. Because several political commentators berated Senator Obama for his articulate speech, I felt compelled to include articulacy as a final example of misuse of a perfectly good rhetorical term. Basically, an articulate person speaks clearly and distinctly with careful pronunciation and enunciation. The reason Senator Obama was chided for his articulation is disturbing. He was told that by speaking articulately, he was putting down
citizens who do not speak as well as he does. The implications of criticism like this are revolting to anyone with an open mind.

Conclusion

This short discussion began by suggesting that the misuse and misunderstanding of rhetorical terms applied to political candidates was due in part to a lack of knowledge. With this paper, I have tried to provide the reader with rhetorical knowledge by means of a brief chronological introduction to four rhetorical terms. They are presented in order of their importance. Rhetoric is the patriarch (Aristotle is the father of rhetoric). Oratory is the child (product) of rhetoric. Elocution and articulacy are offspring of Oratory. The four together produce outstanding speeches such as many given by Barack Obama.

Two authors cited in this writing provided words to remember. Quintilian’s definition of an orator as “a good man speaking well” affirms a modern-day caution: if the speaker is not credible, his/her speaking skills will not be persuasive. As a professor of rhetoric, I was delighted with Professor emeritus Robert Bella’s words re rhetoric: “thinking well and speaking well usually go together and vice versa.” I couldn’t agree more! Although I’m not certain yet for whom I will vote in the presidential election, I do know that Senator Obama gets my vote as one of the most outstanding speakers in the last one hundred years.

References


Introduction

As a speech teacher for more than 40 years, I mentally critique every speech I hear. Whether political, religious, educational or social, I cannot stop the process. Usually I can sit quietly and listen. However, if a speaker has a problem that I can correct and appears amenable, I approach him or her to first compliment and then try to gently point out ways she or he might improve. If I have strong positive or negative feelings about a speech I have seen on television, I will likely share my thoughts with my speech classes. If I believe that the speech offers a good learning opportunity, I will put my critique on paper and use it as a powerful learning tool.

One such incident occurred on July 27, 2004, while I was channel surfing and happened upon the then Senator Obama keynote address at the Democratic National convention in Boston. I was so impressed and delighted, that I have used that speech and subsequent speeches by now Pres. Barack Obama as examples of outstanding public speaking.

On February 7, 2010, I had a similar experience. This time it was negative. I turned on the television just as Sarah Palin was in the process of delivering the keynote address to the Republican National Tea Party convention. After listening for about 10 minutes, my first thoughts were "What happened to her speaking??" I reasoned that someone must have given her bad advice. I decided then that Sarah Palin’s speech would be a good teaching tool. What will follow is a listing of the problems that I would have discussed with her had she been my student followed by an explanation of each concern.

Caveat

This paper is entitled "the Speaking of Sarah Palin" and not the "Rhetoric; because, in my opinion, this speech is as much a speech to entertain as it is to persuade and, because, as the critique below illustrates, this speech does not rise to the level of rhetoric. Therefore, it should not and cannot be critiqued as rhetoric. Instead I will follow the attached critique sheet based upon Dr. Samuel Becker’s research at the University of Iowa in the 1950s which I have modified slightly over the years.

Critique
1. Until the listener decides the speech is intended to entertain rather than to persuade, the substance seems lightweight and not compelling.
2. The organization of the speech is loose.
3. Eye contact was poor.
4. Gestures were misplaced or too scripted.
5. Hair tossing is distracting.
6. Posturing and pausing for applause becomes unattractive.
7. Strong Midwestern dialect appeared artificial.
8. Volume is too loud at times; yet, vocal variety is poor.

Discussion

Until the listener decides the speech is intended to entertain rather than to persuade, the substance seems lightweight and not compelling

In the speech to persuade, the content should be logical, interesting and substantive. I believe Palin was correct in deciding that, because she was "preaching to the choir", this keynote speech should be lightweight and interesting. Although she was considering her audience which is essential, the result was that the speech became entertaining rather than persuasive.

The organization of the speech is loose

Instead of moving from one topic to the next, this speech seems to move from one-liners to put downs and back to one-liners. Once again, this organizational style was designed to appeal to an audience who undoubtedly wanted this type of keynote. If Palin’s choice was to present an entertaining speech, then she was correct in choosing a loose structure. However, if the audience had been other than a very supportive Republican Tea Party with expectations of being entertained, a comedic format would not be appropriate. Although speeches to entertain, to inform and to persuade usually overlap, the dominant purpose of this speech, judged by its content and organization, was to entertain.

Eye contact was poor

I was greatly disappointed when I saw that Palin was reading from sheets of paper and looking up from time to time. This is appropriate for oral interpretation but not for effective public speaking. I had the distinct impression, as I watched, that this was her way of saying “I don’t need a teleprompter.” In actuality, she was sabotaging the effectiveness of her presentation. I believe she failed to make the point that Pres. Obama was less effective because he uses the teleprompter. Rather than showing him up, her delivery suffered greatly.

Gestures were misplaced or too scripted

Although Palin gestured throughout her speech, neither type she used was effective. Most of her gestures were at waist level and therefore wasted on
the audience. The few she had above the waist seemed to be scripted in advance and unnatural. They reminded me of the planned gestures of the elocutionists in the early 1900s.

**Hair tossing is distracting**

In Palin's previous speeches, she wore her hair back and it was not an object of attention. In this presentation, she obviously decided to be "very feminine". A good speaker dresses so that the audience will focus on what he or she says rather than their attire or curls. Palin must have concluded that if a little femininity is good (and I agree), then a lot would be better (and I disagree).

**Posturing and pausing for applause becomes unattractive**

In my opinion, use of the pause, even if for a few seconds, is one of the most important tools of the public speaker. This is probably the most obvious error that Palin makes. She pauses too long for applause and she waits too long for laughter. This is to most listeners, maybe not those at the Tea Party, unnecessary and self indulgent. A Midwesterner might say she was "milking" the audience.

**Strong Midwestern dialect appeared artificial**

Palin has a folksy MidAmerican dialect that was much more pronounced in this speech than in previous speeches. Lines such as: "How's that hope-y, change-y stuff workin' out for yah?" are admired by some and deplored by many. I find this kind of speech peculiar for her because she was born and raised in Alaska. As a native Iowan, I had to address similar speech problems, dropping "G" in "ing" words such as "goin" and "doin" and saying "git" instead of "get", in order to speak standard American English. After the last Presidential election, a group of researchers at the University of Wisconsin, who had wondered about the origin of her pronunciation, studied her speaking and concluded that she uses an upper Midwestern dialect.

In her Vice Presidential Acceptance speech, Palin used a Midwestern aphorism (a short, pithy, instructive saying), “You can put lipstick on a pig…..” This one liner received a great deal of attention and laughter. I think, because of the success of the lipstick saying, she included more aphorisms in this speech. As with the troublesome areas cited above, more is often not better; in both cooking and speaking. Growing up in Iowa, the center of the Midwest and an area replete with folksy adages, I remember one that may be appropriate to this discussion. It, too, utilizes the porcine image. I have found this sentence very useful over the years. It has helped me to understand why some people make cruel remarks about others. *What can you expect from a hog but a grunt.* I leave it to the reader to determine its appropriateness in this context.

**Volume was too loud at times; yet, vocal variety was poor.**

When it comes to the volume and vocal variety, a speaker must adjust his/her voice the size of the room and the number of people in attendance. No
one setting works for everyone. I have noticed that when Palin is making a strong point she increases her volume. This causes her voice to become strident and, as she continues to speak in a loud manner, listeners tend to tune her out. My Midwestern father, the man who taught me the hog and grunt adage, had a saying for us when our voices became screechy or strident or just difficult to listen to. His advice was "If you say the word mellow, your voice will become mellow." A speaker may greatly improve his overall speaking success by learning to vary his/her voice. That means being consciously aware of the need for high and low volume, rising and falling pitch as well as pronunciation and articulation. Palin is on the way to developing an unpleasant pitch pattern that will be difficult to break.

**Expecting and waiting for laughter and applause lessens speaking effectiveness**

This concern is only inappropriate for the public speaker. It is entirely appropriate for the comedian. During the time between my completion of this paper and Palin’s speech, she has appeared, reportedly successfully, on late night television delivering a comedic act. Many of the concerns expressed in this paper are not concerns for the comedian. Perhaps she has discovered her true calling.

**Conclusion**

As discussed in the introduction, this paper is organized according to a speech critique format developed in the acclaimed Speech Department at the University of Iowa. After analyzing hundreds of speech critiques gathered from professors around the United States, the basic speech principles were produced. They were developed for use by public speakers. It is likely that such a critique is inappropriate for the speech to entertain, especially one that borders on comedy. Sarah Palin’s speech to the Republican tea party seems to offer both. Perhaps it may be called a hybrid keynote. Whatever it’s called, it can be improved. As a speech teacher with more than 40 years of experience and as a woman, I believe she can do better. Whether or not she achieved her goals as she presented her keynote speech, she did satisfy my goal. As a teacher, I am continually looking for speakers who serve as role models exemplifying good and bad speech practice. Sarah Palin, in her keynote speech to the tea party, inadvertently provided excellent examples of pitfalls to avoid.

I will sum this up by citing a few pieces of advice I would offer Sarah Palin:

*Be yourself. Most of us can spot a phony.

*Don't take the platitude "if some is good; a lot is better" too seriously.
*Use the pause to good effect. Keep it brief and don't look expectant afterward.

*If you don't want to use a Teleprompter, use note cards.

*Try comedy as a career.

ENDNOTE
Interesting but not surprising is the response of readers of this paper. People who consider themselves more liberal thought I was too easy on Palin. Those who consider themselves more conservative thought I was too hard. Since I was writing in my role as a speech teacher, I am very happy with the thoughtful reactions to my new teaching tool.