

Chapter 21
Persuasive Language
from
PUBLIC SPEAKING: AN IDEA PERSPECTIVE
W. Clifton Adams
© 2012

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

General Educational Objectives: This chapter helps you to:

1. identify varying types of wording and structuring devices used in persuasive speeches.
2. use better wording and structuring devices in your speech.

Specific Testable Objectives: As a result of studying this chapter, you should be able to:

1. list, define, identify and/or provide example of wording devices..
2. list, define, identify and/or provide example of structure devices.

In most speaking situations, persuasive language is the word choice and structure that links the motives of listeners with the desired behavior without calling attention to that language. As expressed in the previous chapter, if individuals accept as their own a cause or a classification bridge to action, they will have strong tendencies to act. Similarly, the acceptance of an **analogy** that symbolizes the link between motives and behavior, especially when captured in **metaphor**, generally produces long-term behavior change.

However, at times, the occasion calls for, and the audience expects, something special in the language style. On these special situations, like eulogies, presentations of awards and after-dinner speaking, special effort is required. On these special occasions, which are often as ceremonial as they are practical, the audience expects creativity in language usage as well as its structure from the speaker. On those occasions, you want to enhance your message via careful word choices and language structure.

Wording considerations

A **simile** compares one item with another using “like” or “as.” “Your lips are like a red, red rose,” makes such a comparison. Similes make clear and potentially vivid comparisons. For example, when Forrest Gump said “Life is like a box of chocolates” he was able to express a profound insight in simple and instantly understood terms. Similarly, speakers on special occasions especially seek to captivate the audience with carefully worded statements. Analogies are basically extended similes.

A **metaphor** simplifies the comparison of the simile by omitting the “like” and “as.” Indeed, the metaphor may be as simple as renaming or substituting a description of one thing when talking about another. “Life is hope,” reflects a

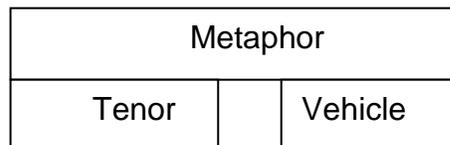
renaming. “Our task is to capture a sun ray,” to say that “our task is going to be difficult, but perhaps interesting,” would be an example of substituting a figurative description for an actual one. Comics often use one word when they obviously talking about something entirely different to elicit laughter. In that regard, **euphemisms**, the use of socially acceptable words for taboo ones, illustrate metaphors. Many of our daily expressions, such as “dead end” (from dead-end streets), “head ache,” and “superman,” are metaphors. When an object or event is given metaphorically a human trait, we are using **personification**. Obviously, the desire in using metaphors to add color to a speech is to have fresh metaphors, not common ones.

Inset 20-1

A Metaphor for I. A. Richards' Views

Richards identified that all language is metaphorical. All language helps us to link that which is known with something unfamiliar, the definition of metaphor. He termed the concept that is known, *tenor*, and the unfamiliar concept, *vehicle*. Of course, then, the metaphor is the *bridge* between the two, Figure 21-1. In a very fundamental sense, in Richards' sense, for any communication to work, someone has to reason, in my sense of *reason*.

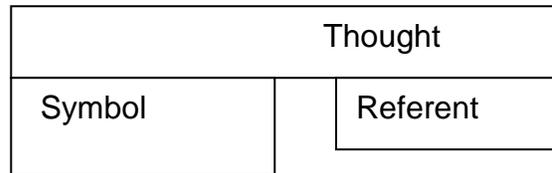
Figure 21-1
Richards' View in a Bridge Model



The same recasting applies to Ogden and Richards' *semantic triangle*, which links *symbols* with phenomena in reality, *referents*, through *thought*, Figure 21-2.

Figure 21-2

The Semantic Triangle as a Bridge Model



Intensity in language speaks to the extent to which it shows (and evokes) emotions. “I’m bothered,” “I’m upset,” “I’m mad” and “I’m outraged” illustrate increasing intensity. If we want our language to express more intense, we can add adjectives and adverbs or select provocative names, epithets or euphemisms. Also, intensity is increased when the language becomes more metaphorical and, in general, when it increases in abstraction. However, very specific language can add to intensity. Taboo words increase potency, but also introduce the risk of alienating the audience. Generally, intense language is more persuasive only if it is used by a highly credible source.

Alliteration is another way to make statements vivid in the minds of listeners. When a series of words start with the same initial sound, they often form a musical cadence and are thus easy to remember as well as captivating to listeners. For example, “Andrew always ate anchovies.” Or as Martin Luther King Jr. said, he dreamed of the day when all children would be judged “not by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.” These alliterations make the phrases memorable and thus may extend their impact on the listeners.

Internal rhyme can also add character to a speech as in the prayer from Joseph Lowery at the Obama inauguration. He said, “Lord,... we ask you to help us work for the day when black will not be asked to back, when brown can stick around, when yellow will be mellow, when the red man can get ahead, man, and when white will embrace what is right.”

Language Structure

In addition to word selection, the language can be structured to add an artistic quality to the speech. Typically these structuring depend on the use of **repetition** of the same or similar phrase to create a special emotional reaction. For example, when conducting a wedding a minister might say marriage is a new relationship, marriage is a permanent relationship, marriage is a responsible relationship and marriage is a loving relationship. The repetition of the words marriage and relationship provide impact to the ceremony. Repetition of key words at the beginning of consecutive phrases is called **anaphora**.

This relationship example reflects **parallelism** in structure. The term or

phrase is used in a structure where the thoughts are structured grammatical in the same way. Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" speech is generally considered the hallmark for utilizing this stylistic device.

When the structure changes the order of the redundancy to create a contrast, **antithesis** is created. John Kennedy's "ask not what your country can do for you but instead ask what you can do for your country" is often used as an example of this device. Similarly, we often hear, "you can take the boy out of the country, but you can't take the country out of the boy." I may need to say, "good speakers creative stylistic devices; recasting of stylistic devices doesn't create good speakers" not just to make the point but to create our own antithesis.

Suspended structuring (climatic order) is where words and/or sentences are arranged to place the more important information last. In word arrangement this often produces a **periodic sentence**, one where dependent clauses are placed first leaving the main thought last. Examples can be seen in many sport broadcasts, "Running down the sideline, stretching his whole body, getting his fingers on the ball, he cannot hang on." In sentence arrangement, the device will often reflect parallel structure as in the case of, "It's a bird. It's a plane. No, it's superman,"

One means of gaining and reinforcing attention is the **segregating style**, a series of short simple sentences used consecutively. For example, "The night was dark. I heard footsteps. Then I saw her." It's especially good when the sentences maintain something of a **rhythm** as in the following from Mother Moon:

Life is change. Change is life
Accept the change occurring in your life,
And you can come to feel a higher rhythm.

Summary

In this chapter, we've recalled some means of using language, both in word choice and structure, to add spice to speeches on special occasions. From an idea perspective, we may want to punctuate a speech with an artful turn of a phrase, but we never want to pollute the clarity of the phrase.

Key Sources

- Ogden, C. K. & Richards, I. A. (1923). *The Meaning of Meaning*. London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trubner.
- Richards, I. A. (1936). *The philosophy of rhetoric*. New York: Oxford University Press.