Chapter 5
Rhetoric

As a medium, writing is a million times weaker than speech. It's a hieroglyph competing with a symphony (Menand, 2004, November 8, p. 104).

Chapter Prospectus

Chapter 5, *Rhetoric*, engages the spoken discourse of experienced speakers and their ability to simulate spontaneity even in their reading aloud. Such discourse is communicatively meaningful precisely because it is consequential for their lives rather than a task performed under laboratory conditions. Our own research gradually has led us to the foundations of spontaneity through the examination of these skillful simulations. Similar devices are used rhetorically in reading aloud and in spontaneous spoken discourse. Considered psychologically, current rhetoric, including religious, political, and artistic forms, pursues an ideal delivery which is not so much syntactic in its focus as communicative, cogent, persuasive, pro-social, and conversational. It is the listener's or audience's expected reaction that must dictate the speaker's strategies, precisely because the purpose of the speaker must always be effective communication. The chapter ends with a discussion of the overarching importance of literacy and orality as twin foundations for a contemporary rhetoric of spoken discourse in both the public domain and in everyday social interaction.

What Rhetoric Is All About

Somewhat more than a decade ago, Gill and Whedbee (1997, p. 157) began their chapter on rhetoric by stating, "There is little consensus as to the meaning of the word *rhetoric*." A look at *Merriam-Webster's collegiate dictionary* (11th ed., 2003, p. 1069) confirms their statement insofar as it provides a variety of usages of the word:

> **1 :** the art of speaking or writing effectively: as **a :** the study of principles and rules of composition formulated by critics of ancient time; **b :** the study of writing or speaking as

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> a means of communication or persuasion **2 a :** skill in the effective use of speech **b :** a type or mode of language or speech; *also*: insincere or grandiloquent language **3 :** verbal communication: DISCOURSE

In other words, one must be very careful to specify what one means in using the word *rhetoric*, precisely because it can mean so many different things. Some would wish to begin dismissively with the *also* in the quotation above: Rhetoric is unworthy of upright people and is instead characteristic of sly, unprincipled politicians. That is hardly the place we wish to begin. In fact, it was partly the didactic teachings of traditional rhetoricians regarding the use of such devices as pauses of longer duration and repetition that led us to recognize the potential of such means for either effective or ineffective oral discourse. However, the bulk of the teachings in ancient Greco-Roman rhetoric have consistently been on the preparation of the text itself, typically written first and then delivered as if produced spontaneously (Quintilian, ca. 95/1958). Nonetheless, the *actio* and *pronuntiatio*, i.e., the nonverbal and verbal enactment of the presentation, have always been acknowledged as important.

Our own primary preoccupation with regard to rhetoric in the following is in accord with the dictionary definition **2 a**: "skill in the effective use of speech." The reader should note that the skill in question here is a dialogical or communicative skill on the part of the speaker, but with a view to the listener or audience. It is ultimately the listener who is the arbiter of the effectiveness of the speaker. Still, we are not in the business of evaluating speech, but of characterizing the use of rhetorical devices in a variety of settings. Our preoccupation with public and particularly, political spoken discourse is not intended to exclude other spontaneous spoken discourse in more private everyday settings from the realm of rhetoric: The youngster pleading with a parent for an addition to his or her weekly financial allowance and the geriatric patient arguing for the extension of his or her driver's license will both choose to make use of whatever rhetorical devices they can muster to accomplish their communicative goal. In other words, it is our assumption that rhetorical devices play a role in every utterance.

To return once again to political rhetoric, more than 20 years ago, Atkinson (1984a) noted the burgeoning conversational style characteristic of modern political oratory – a consequence of the new setting of TV oratory, the informality of the family living room. In this respect, he was following Ong's (1982) emphasis on secondary orality as the consequence of modern technology. In a similar vein, Jamieson (1988) has entitled a book on modern rhetoric *Eloquence in an electronic age* in acknowledgement of the fact that TV has indeed changed the way both speakers and audiences approach rhetoric. Both Atkinson and Jamieson have referred to former U.S. president Ronald Reagan as the ideal representative of this style of political oratory. According to Atkinson (1984a, p. 167), Alistair Cooke has described Reagan's first inaugural speech "as the first 'conversational inaugural' in American history." In our own view, Reagan's second inaugural has provided an even better example of the shift

to a conversational style of political rhetoric. His second inaugural contained a passage, certified by his speech writer Peggy Noonan (1990) as spontaneously substituted for the prepared script during the speech itself, in which he masterfully and humorously referred to the last-minute change of location:

> *Example 5.1*
> We stand together again at the steps of this symbol of our democracy – or we would have been standing at the steps if it hadn't gotten so cold. Now we are standing inside this symbol of our democracy. (Reagan, 1985, p. 374)

Another official transcript (Reagan, 1988, p. 58) has provided an even more informal version of this passage:

> *Example 5.2*
> We stand again at the steps of this symbol of our democracy – well, we would have been standing at the steps if it hadn't gotten so cold. [*Laughter*] Now we're standing inside this symbol of our democracy.

Example 5.3 is from our own transcript of the original recording; pauses have been noted in parentheses in seconds:

> *Example 5.3*
> we stand again at the steps (.75) of this symbol of our democracy (.36) or we would've been standing at the steps if it hadn't gotten so cold (.47) and now we're standing inside this symbol of our democracy

A comparison of *Example 5.3* with *Example 5.1* shows that our transcript has eliminated "together," has contracted "have" and "are," and has introduced "and"; and compared with *Example 5.2*, it has changed "well" to "or," has contracted "have," and has introduced "and." We may also note that the laughter of the audience indicated in brackets was far more diffused throughout the passage than is indicated in *Example 5.2*, that the pauses are essential to both the conceptual orality and to the initiation of laughter, and that the articulation rate before Reagan's departure from his written text was approximately 1 syl/s faster than after it ($5.9 > 4.9$ syl/s). But the departure from his text constitutes the most basic component of this shift toward relatively more conceptual orality. Finally, one may note that laughter on the part of an inaugural audience is most extraordinary – one more indication of Reagan's dialogicality with his listeners (for more detail on laughter, see our Chapter 17).

Jamieson (1988, p. 164) has summarized Reagan's oratory as follows:

> Even the most formal of Reagan's speeches are written in a conversational style and delivered in a conversational voice. Where his predecessors brought a formal style and oratorical delivery to their inaugurals and State of the Union messages and a more casual style and delivery to press conferences and extemporaneous speeches, Reagan is consistently conversational in both environments.

The general trend toward conversational style as an ideal in modern political oratory reflects also the shift from a formal conceptual literacy to more conceptual orality, whether it must be thought of as actually simulated or genuine.

Some Typographical Helps to Rhetoric

Even in silent reading, there are many ways in which emphasis, segregation, coherence, and import can be indicated in the written text, and all of these textual devices can influence in turn the manner of reading aloud. In a sense, they can be considered a sort of adjunct or extension to the role of basic punctuation marks. Thus, variation in font, size, distribution, and even color of print can be used.

One should note that the proper use of graphics is involved even in these simple variations. The field of graphics has become an artistic specialty in recent years, largely as a consequence of the electronic revolution. Entire books can be rated from optimal to worst-case scenarios on the basis of their graphical presentation. A skillful use of graphics can enhance communication even to the silent reader, while a clumsy use thereof can make for a busy, incoherent, poorly organized presentation. An excellent example of this is the Power Point Presentation, which has become almost the universal mode of presentation at many scientific conferences (for a critical discussion, see Tufte, 2003). Bullets and pointers, however, cannot change a presentation's basic intelligibility and credibility or lack thereof. Such presentations can unfortunately become merely an ever more sophisticated version of garbage-in-garbage-out. Nonetheless, when the right words, phrases, data, or formulae are highlighted, these typographical means can be most useful. Still, some presenters seem to be lulled into thinking that the effectiveness of Power Point communication is almost automatic; in any event, an inordinate number of such presenters have fallen into the practice of mumbling into the microphone, almost as if their verbalizations were totally redundant in light of the graphics. Another example of the multiplication of useless graphics is the dumbing-down seen in many introductory college textbooks through the use of inset boxes – with the mandatory flow charts, bullets, and sense lines – for many of the concepts already presented in the text. Signage for the direction of street traffic is another special case of the practical importance of lucid graphics: Position, shape, color, size, letter and number font, and the ever present danger of spatial clutter all become relevant in the rhetoric of signage.

Some Prosodic Principles

Prosody is one of the most important tools of oral rhetoric. In ancient rhetoric, it was subsumed under *pronuntiatio*. In the cases of both reading aloud and spontaneous spoken discourse, the implicit generalization that louder, bigger, and more frequent are all better must be avoided. For example, TV commercials are often televised with a louder volume and at a more rapid articulation rate than is regular programming; and it is not uncommon for viewers to make use of the mute button in these instances. Listeners generally do not wish to be browbeaten. The subtle, infrequent use of special prosodic means avoid this pitfall. In recent years, former President Bill Clinton has provided two dramatic

negative instances that bear a certain analogy to "The lady doth protest too much, methinks" (Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, III, ii, 239). The inordinate increment in loudness, accompanied by a number of nonprosodic devices such as the use of emblematic finger pointing, leaning forward, and scowling, has pinpointed both his lying (Upchurch & O'Connell, 2000) and his defensiveness (Fox News, September 24, 2006, interview with Chris Wallace). On the other hand, the very selective use of long pauses and of extremely slow articulation rate as part of the local organization in two of the most famous citations from the inaugural speeches of U.S. presidents manifests how rhetorically effective such devices can be (see Kowal, O'Connell, Forbush, Higgins, Clarke, & D'Anna, 1997, p. 25 f.). The first of these two citations is from Franklin Delano Roosevelt's first inaugural (with measured silent pauses indicated in parentheses in seconds):

Example 5.4
The only thing we have to fear is (1.18) *fear itself* (1.30).

The second citation is from John F. Kennedy's inaugural:

Example 5.5
And so, my fellow Americans: (1.12) *ask* (0.24) not (1.04) what your country can do for you.

Such a concentration of pauses considerably longer than a second in duration is most unusual. And the articulation rates with which the italicized words were uttered (2.78 and 2.50 syl/s, respectively) were extraordinarily slow. Once again, we are not dealing with mean rates in these instances; we are dealing with outliers, devices deliberately chosen for rhetorical effect. It is no accident that both these passages could be heard several times a week as recently as 2007 on the David Letterman Show as contrasts with the stumblebum absence of rhetoric in short passages of spontaneous speech by President George W. Bush. Obviously, these passages by President Bush were deliberately sampled for humorous impact on Letterman's TV audience, not for an objective presentation of Bush's style.

Some Other Relevant Measures of Rhetorical Performance

We have already mentioned two such measures above, duration of silent pauses and articulation rate, measured in syllables per second (syl/s); both are typically used rhetorically to slow down the speech rate, i.e., the overall number of syllables spoken within a period of time. In these cases, we are not interested in means and standard deviations, but in exceptionally extreme outliers. Still, one must know the statistical context in dealing with the outliers. With regard to the *Example 5.4* and *5.5* given above from inaugural speeches (Kowal et al., 1997), across all the inaugurals for which audio recordings were available at the time of this research, from F. D. Roosevelt's first inaugural (March 4, 1933), to Bill Clinton's first inaugural (January 20, 1993), the mean duration of all silent pauses was 0.97 s (SD = 0.15) and the mean overall articulation rate was 4.37 syl/s (SD = 0.39). In

other words, the silent pauses in the crucial positions of the rhetorically successful passages by Roosevelt and Kennedy were all about one standard deviation longer in duration than the overall mean. And the articulation rates of "*fear itself*" and "*ask*" were several standard deviations slower than the mean.

But rhetorical devices can also be specific to various genres. Kowal et al. (1997, p. 14) have compared additionally the overall means of inaugural addresses with those of spontaneous spoken discourse, both in German and in American English. The articulation rate of the inaugurals was strikingly slower than that of either German or American spontaneous spoken discourse ($4.37 < 6.09 < 6.55$ syl/s), and the mean silent pause duration in the inaugurals was similarly longer than the German or the American means ($0.97 > 0.55 > 0.38$ s).

The point to be made from these data is that rhetorical devices can be applied quite differentially from genre to genre and from one setting, context, or purpose to another. The discovery of appropriate units of measurement and indeed of performance measures themselves is an essential stage in developing a methodology for the investigation of any corpus of spoken discourse.

To return for a moment to rhetorical devices used in written political speeches, Kowal et al. (1997, p. 10) have found that even the rhetoric of the written text changed over time in presidential inaugurals. In their comparisons of the written text of the inaugurals before F. D. Roosevelt with those from F. D. Roosevelt on, the following striking differences were to be noted in measures involving words (W) and syllables (S): W/paragraph ($155 > 51$), W/sentence ($35 > 20$), W/discourse marker ($920 > 199$) (as defined by Schiffrin, 1987); S/paragraph ($252 > 77$), S/sentence ($57 > 30$), S/word ($1.60 > 1.50$), and S/discourse marker ($1481 > 303$). In other words, one trend was found to be in the direction of simplification: shorter paragraphs, shorter sentences, and shorter words. Another trend was found to be in the direction of the increased use of discourse markers. These particles (e.g., *oh, well, but,* y'know) are operationally defined by Schiffrin (1987, p. 31) as "**sequentially dependent** elements which bracket units of talk." Both these overall trends reflect what has been termed conversational style in modern political rhetoric (see Atkinson, 1984a, p. 166 ff.). The reader should note that all these differences are statistically highly significant and of large magnitude. As a corollary, these *written* differences necessitate different rhetorical devices for reading aloud. Unfortunately, the absence of acoustic recording in the earlier period makes an actual empirical study of such differences impossible. What is surprising in these data is the constancy of punctuation across the two chronological periods: W/punctuation ($13 < 14$) and S/punctuation ($22 = 22$). Another comparison involves only first-person pronominals: The percentage of singular/total first-person pronominals decreases over time ($43.4\% > 14.8\%$), whereas the overall use of first-person pronominals (first-person pronominals/1,000 W) increases ($39 < 64.8$). In other words, *I* yields dramatically to *we* – which one may well construe as an indication of the use of conversational style. All these measures must be taken into account if one is to understand the baseline of the written text as foundation for possible rhetorical devices of reading aloud. Finally, one

should note that these measurements constitute a quantitative approach to rhetoric rather than a qualitative one.

The measurements exemplified above must not be taken as the sole mandatory measurements relevant to rhetoric in written texts. For example, in poetry the W/line may index much better what rhetorical devices are possible or appropriate in reading aloud. In dialogue, the W/turn or S/turn may characterize a corpus better than any of the measures discussed above for the inaugural corpora. In dialogue too, the type of transition at turns can be extremely important as a rhetorical characterization of a corpus; the percentages of successful and unsuccessful interruptions, overlaps, and smooth transitions (with or without silent pauses) can shift such a characterization very notably. In short, the rhetorical methodology applied to written text and its reading aloud as well as to spontaneous spoken discourse must be flexibly adapted to the corpus that is to be characterized rhetorically. Such methodologies are necessarily complex, even as rhetoric itself is complex.

A final example of how a competent journalist can enlist a variety of hesitations in the service of rhetoric is to be found in a long interview question asked of Ronald Reagan by Walter Cronkite, a prominent American TV journalist of the late twentieth century. The efficiency of his questioning method can be appreciated from the fact that Reagan answered willingly, even jovially, while laughing aloud, although the gist of the question might well have been considered impertinent (in parentheses, duration of pauses in seconds):

Example 5.6

What what really philosophically is different (.8) from (.3) our (.43) going down to help a a (.3) democratic government uh (.37) sustain itself against guerilla activity (.27) promoted from the outside (.43) uh Soviet and Cuban uh uh aid as we believe it to be (.27) or as your your (.33) administration says it is (.7) and (.43) Afghanistan (.27) uh the El Salvador is in our sort of geo (.4) political sphere of influence Afghanistan on the border of the Soviet Union is certainly in their geo (.43) political sphere of influence (.47) uh they went in with troops uh to uh uh to support a Marxist government friendly to them (.63) what what's where where's the where why isn't that a parallel situation. (Kowal, Bassett, & O'Connell, 1985, p. 15)

On paper, the "what what's where where's the where" sequence appears to be simply outrageous. As spoken, it constitutes the core of the buffer function served by Cronkite's long, hesitant run-up to his simple, bold question: "Why isn't that a parallel situation?" In our Chapter 23, we will return to Cronkite's question as an example that instantiates all the theoretical principles that we emphasize throughout this book and develop in detail in Part IV.

Literacy and Orality

Walter Ong's (1982) *Orality and literacy* has served to introduce a wide audience of his readership to some important differences between a literate and an oral culture. But there is also a sense in which literacy and orality become relevant

within an almost entirely literate culture, a theme that has been taken up in turn by Koch and Oesterreicher (1994, p. 587; our translation) from the point of view of linguistics. By limiting themselves to what Ong (1982) has referred to as secondary orality, an orality derived from the use of modern technologies such as telephone, radio, and television within a literate culture, they have distinguished two types of orality and literacy: *medial* and *conceptual*. Medial orality and medial literacy have to do with the modality in which communication is delivered – phonic or graphic – and always constitute dichotomous variables. Conceptual orality and conceptual literacy have to do with aspects of linguistic variation, "referred to in research vaguely as 'colloquial language/literary language', 'informal/formal', 'levels of elaborateness' etc." Koch and Oesterreicher have emphasized that conceptual literacy and orality constitute a continuum, and in a similar vein, Raible (2002) has noted that any clear-cut distinction between conceptual orality and conceptual literacy is blurred by the very fact that they are in a continuum. According to the anthropologists Scollon and Scollon (1995, p. 20), this overlap between the two terms *orality* and *literacy* "has made both of them all but obsolete" and at the same time has made the usefulness of the term *orality* "for the characterization of speech events and cultures" questionable. But the availability of Koch and Oesterreicher's (1994) distinction between medial and conceptual orality has made it possible for us to use orality in a far narrower and precise sense for purposes of empirical research.

The historical roots of literacy and orality have been traced in a much broader, largely anthropological context by Khosrow Jahandarie (1999, p. 1 f.) in his *Spoken and written discourse: A multi-disciplinary perspective*. The importance of this book lies in the author's effort to present a comprehensive overview of the history of "Oral Theory" as it has developed in classical studies, history, media studies, literary criticism, anthropology, and psychology:

> This volume presents a systematic, reasonably exhaustive, and critical review of the scientific literature on the differences between speech and writing and, particularly, the cognitive and cultural implications of these differences. It is unique in its multidisciplinary scope and analytical depth as it brings together, for the first time, this multiplicity of theory and evidence from varied disciplines.

And indeed, Jahandarie has brought together a significant discussion of 1455 references for this purpose. It should be noted, however, that all of his references are in the English language and also exclude most of the authors that we repeatedly advert to in this book (e.g., Graumann, Hörmann, Koch & Oesterreicher, and Linell).

Jahandarie has listed as "the six [actually seven] theorists most closely associated with the orality–literacy contrast": Milman Parry (1971) and Albert Lord (e.g., 1991), "the principal formulators of the 'Oral Theory' "; Eric Havelock (e.g., 1986), Harold A. Innis (e.g., 1951), Marshall McLuhan (1962), Walter Ong (e.g., 1982), Jack Goody (e.g., 1987), and David R. Olson (1994). The works of Boas (e.g., 1940), of Claude Lévi-Strauss (e.g., 1964–1971), and of Edward Sapir (e.g., 1921) have been mentioned only in passing by Jahandarie

(1999, p. 280 f.; but see Bringhurst, 1999). His claim that "probably the biggest blindspot in the oral–literate theories has been their almost total disregard for the findings of cognitive psychologists over the past three decades" (p. 151) puts him squarely in the corner of mainstream psycholinguistics. And yet, he has acknowledged that "it is obvious that we are still largely in the dark about the exact processes and mechanisms that determine the cognitive handling of spoken and written discourse" (p. 196).

A much broader, anthropological concept of *orality* has been critically discussed by Scollon and Scollon (1995, p. 27) in terms of a number of negative implications in the use of this concept. These would include: (1) a view of orality as an obstacle that has to be overcome; (2) a certain phonocentrism, i.e., the limitation to sound and the correlative exclusion of such sensory modalities as touch and vision; and (3) a logocentrism, i.e., the inordinate emphasis on words alone, to the exclusion of nonverbal material. As a possible substitute for, or at least a supplement to the concept of *orality*, they have suggested "somatic communication" in order "to make reference to the human body as the foundation of communication." We have found this notion of communication quite compatible with our own thinking and have accordingly chosen in Chapter 23 the term *somaticization of syntax* to characterize the structures of spontaneous spoken discourse that transcend sentential syntax. Nonetheless, we wish to retain the term *orality*, but without the negative implications listed by Scollon and Scollon.

Orality as a Rationale for Our Research

As the examples given above indicate, our research has always involved both medial and conceptual literacy and orality. Our first project was accordingly a comparison of reading narratives aloud with the subsequent retelling of the narrative (O'Connell, Kowal, & Hörmann, 1969, 1970). The context of literacy and orality has been continued in the comparison of political speeches with interviews of the same politicians (Kowal, 1991), and in the comparison of a more formal with a more conversational style in older and more recent inaugural speeches by presidents of the United States (Kowal et al., 1997). In addition, we have compared the speaking of interviewers with that of interviewees in radio and TV (e.g., O'Connell & Kowal, 1998). Chronologically, the projects have increasingly involved a relativization of conceptual literacy and conceptual orality, based on the fact that they are not discrete, but continuous variables. And the comparisons themselves have instantiated a gradual transition from literacy to orality.

The literacy of TV interviewers can be assessed in two ways: from the well-formedness of their sentential structures and from the fact that they can be seen to hold written notes in their hands or place them on a desk. One of the most illustrious of the post World War II German media journalists has for many

years been Günter Gaus, considered already in Chapter 3 in regard to his interview with Hannah Arendt. He has broadcasted or televised over 200 interviews in the German language. In his memoirs (Gaus, 2004, p. 189; our translation), he has characterized his preparation for an interview as follows:

> In a first draft I noted 60 or more questions, which I then reduced in the second and third pass to approximately 20 to 25.
>
> I not only sketched the questions, but formulated them meticulously word for word.

Paradoxically, although "the most interesting forms of broadcast talk have a feel of spontaneity" (Tolson, 2006, p. 11), Gaus has accomplished this goal precisely by careful scripting (see also Hilton, 1953). It is obvious from video recordings that he took notes with him into his interviews. The importance of this sort of preparation can easily be related to the fact that he received numerous awards for the excellence of his interviews. The well-formedness of his interviews can be assessed by a comparison of the changes needed in the translation of the audio transcript into a published version (Arendt, 1996) of his famous interview with Hannah Arendt: Only 20% of the necessary changes were in his own contributions, whereas 80% were in Arendt's contributions (O'Connell & Kowal, 1998, p. 550).

A Rhetorical Perspective for Everyday Talk

Our emphasis thus far has been largely on public rhetoric. We now turn our attention to rhetoric in everyday talk as emphasized in the research of Karen Tracy (2002, p. 26 ff.). Her "rhetorical perspective" regarding everyday talk has three important dimensions: (1) Above all, people are active in *choosing* means to express themselves for effective communication in various settings. (2) The fact that choices are involved makes people morally responsible as agents. (3) Such a rhetorical orientation is centered on problem solving insofar as rhetoric must always encounter conflicts of interest in the everyday setting. These three dimensions of everyday talk converge upon "building and reflecting identities," as Tracy has expressed it in the subtitle of her book. Such an emphasis, arising from the viewpoint of communication science, we have found to be quite compatible with our own psychological orientation regarding rhetoric. Tracy's first dimension appropriately orients the choice of expressive means to the needs of the listener. The second dimension is quite in accord with what we designate in Chapter 22 as verbal integrity – the moral responsibilities that interlocutors have toward one another and to society. The third dimension localizes personal growth in its interactive arena and in the sharing of personal perspective with the perspectives of one another – "interactional tension ... is part of the business of talking."