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Public Speaking Nowadays in the Academic Field

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to present public speaking in the academic field within the contemporary context of the influence of social media public speaking videos. Today's world context can be understood as containing certain particular features related to the way we expect public speeches to look like and to the way we understand that it is best for us to give them. The focus will be on the way lecturers and students in the academic field can benefit from incorporating elements of social media public speeches and style, and to use them as templates or as common references when the topic of public speaking comes into discussion. Public speaking skills can be used in plenty of domains and on plenty of occasions. A universal structure of a public speech can be the one including the components of *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos*, as proposed by Aristotle ever since ancient times.

Keywords: public speaking, influencers, political speeches, lectures, motivation

1. Introduction

Public speaking classes nowadays are gaining popularity in our contemporary world, since there are many situations when students will need to give a speech, in any domain they work.

We witness the emergence of workshops, conferences, symposiums, which may not be restricted to academic and business events. Gradually, such events are organized for entertainment purposes, and, in this case, the speaker should have the necessary skills to motivate those in the audience to take part in learning something new, such as taking foreign languages, painting, or origami classes, or in getting their interest to listen to a talk about aromatherapy. Mass online open courses require the professors to deliver motivating courses, in video and written materials. Progressively, the teaching format for academic courses is becoming interactive, and students prefer to gain practical skills and to communicate with the professor, not just listen to lectures. The current lecture format is encouraged to be interactive, and the lecturer should be delivering the material in a manner that could get improved from applying public speaking techniques. Feedback from students about the course of lectures and seminars is a usual practice nowadays in universities, and the way the information has been presented by the lecturer and worked through with the students is an essential part. When presenting at an academic conference, those presentations that use visual support, combined with public speaking skills, with the speaker showing a connection with the audience, through addressing them directly and capturing their attention, are the most appreciated. In advertising, public speaking skills are combined with catchy slogans. At the level of universities, advertising has acquired a constant presence, as universities in Bucharest, where the author of the present paper lives, start an advertising campaign with university lecturers going to high school students to give presentations to them about the opportunities for their future that studying at the respective university and within a certain Batchelor's Degree level can bring. Here, public speaking skills help persuade high school students to choose a certain university and a certain career. Lecturers need to give an attractive presentation, and they are

often accompanied by current students at the respective university, also giving speeches about their experience there, and by students that have graduated and who talk about their impressions of how useful studying there has been.

Everything needs to be thought well about at university level, given the current situation of the large availability of all information. The Internet and access to it has meant a complete change in the way classes can be held. The information given during classes should be well thought, for instance by presenting it from the personal perspective of the lecturer, based on his/ her own research. Teaching skills should combine with public speaking skills, as both explaining and convincing students of the significance and attractiveness of the topic are needed. The information given can be understood as a basis for practical activities, from where students can be encouraged to present their own opinion organized in structured arguments.

The need at the academic level for public speaking skills comes from the need to persuade, in the case of courses where students can choose from, students to attend the course they have designed. This need for public speaking skills for academics is also visible when they hold courses that are not compulsory, as they have to do their best in order to maintain the interest of their audience.

In the case of politicians, public speaking skills can help in creating their public image and in persuading citizens to vote for them.

Public speaking skills could be used, therefore, by anyone. It is a recognized fact that "Almost every profession requires public speaking" (Parvis, 2001, p. 44). These skills have always been used, but we have not been made aware of the techniques at work. Nowadays, we have a variety of motivational and self-help books that can help us give memorable speeches. We need to keep in mind not only the needs of the audience, their expectations, to understand the way they are feeling about the speech by looking at their reactions, but also the specific features of the contemporary audience's mindset. We need to keep the information given short when we talk about it, in order not to lose the audience along the way. Theories about the predominance of the visual sense, our attention time span and the way speakers showing vulnerability can captivate the audience are currently well-known through popular science articles and books.

The social media platforms seem to offer a wide opportunity for us to follow book reviewers, foreign language learning tutorials, videos made by persons passionate about certain domains such as painting who analyse them, make-up tutorials, speeches held by lecturers in domains such as literature, and others. We could use social media speeches as examples for efficient public speaking. The author of the present paper has noticed, in the case of a Public Speaking class within the Project Management in English Master Degree's Programme at the National School of Political and Administrative Studies from Bucharest (which she attended in the academic years 2019-2021) how her colleagues' speeches resembled in body language and way of addressing the audience those speeches that we can find on social media by users we follow. Since the class was held online, as it took place during the pandemic, the author of the present paper noticed the use of background visual material, colloquial way of speaking and addressing, as well as lively talk showing the enthusiasm for the topic, which are specific to the social media videos posted by various users. We can see how the effect of their speech on the audience is felt, as they have lots of followers and lots of likes.

Since social media is such a large part of our lives, especially for students, we could benefit from watching others present their speeches there and understand why they are appealing. Moreover, TED talks are also a given part of our world. The relevance of these talks for anyone is ensured by the topics, chosen from Technology, Entertainment and Design, and by the duration of 18 minutes, which was chosen by the "organizers based both on neuroscience and strategy" (Duarte, 2023).

Generally, when teaching public speaking, or when offering feedback for oral presentations, teachers can find it helpful to give students examples of exemplary, extremely motivating, speeches, held either by politicians, influencers and speakers at TED talks. Examples can offer a good completion of various theories about what makes a good presentation and what makes a good public speaker.

2. Materials and Methods

We could have, as a timeless theoretical basis for a good speech on any occasion, the following template in mind, based on the ancient *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos* devised by Aristotle in his work Rhetoric (Braet, 1992). To summarize, "*ethos* refers to persuasion based on the credibility or authority of the speaker, *pathos* refers to persuasion based on emotion, and *logos* refers to persuasion based on logic or reason" (Thesaurus.com, 2022). This is a timeless template for any speech, and it has been set up ever since ancient times. However, it is now popularized for the use of everyone interested in the art of public speaking, and, as we shall see, applicable to all domains. It offers the three landmarks we need to take into account when we give a speech. The purpose, using these three landmarks in a speech is for us to persuade the audience (Edlund, 2014).

Taking each of the landmarks into analysis, ethos can be translated as "image" (Edlund, 2014), in the sense that

the person talking about a certain topic should be an expert in the field, or knowledgeable about the subject, which would make him/ her credible to the audience. In the case of the academic lecturer, the person giving the lecture is, obviously, an experienced researcher in the field. If we listen to an influencer, or to any other YouTube or social media user having a channel, we expect him/ her to be very much passionate about the subject and also knowledgeable, based, in some cases on personal experience (with makeup products, fashion, gadgets, books, travels), and in other cases based on readings (e.g. about paintings and their interpretation).

The concept of ethos can be considered "an important factor in advertising, both for commercial products and in politics." We, as members of the audience, always wonder about the experience and, therefore, the authority of someone to speak about a certain topic: "For example, when an actor in a pain reliever commercial puts on a doctor's white coat, the advertisers are hoping that wearing this coat will give the actor the authority to talk persuasively about medicines." In the case of advertising, of course, we can realize that it is all an act, an illusion that is given by the actor playing the character of a doctor: "Of course, in this particular instance the actor's ethos is a deceptive illusion, but the character, background, and authority of the speaker or writer can be a legitimate factor in determining whether we find him or her credible" (Edlund, 2014). Similarly, we expect, by reading a certain lecturer's curriculum vitae, or brief biographical notice, in the case of a public lecture, or conference presentation, that he/ she has experience through research done over the years in a certain field. The academic authority on a certain subject can come from writing books in the respective domain, or getting a doctorate degree in a certain topic.

Once students simply practice giving a speech, publicly, in front of the class, as an assignment, the element of *ethos* can be disadvantaged, considering that there are limited ways in which they can be authorities in a certain topic, since they are so young and just starting on gaining experience in research. Unless they choose to talk about a topic that they have been preoccupied with since their school years, as a hobby, e.g., science fiction or fantasy literature, then they may not be able to use ethos properly. This can be true unless they decide to act and to go for make-believe, as in the previous example with advertising by having an actor impersonate a doctor.

There is another dimension to *ethos*, however: "Aristotle says that if we believe that a speaker has good sense, good moral character, and goodwill, we are inclined to believe what that speaker says" (Edlund, 2014). The ethical, moral dimension can be ensured by the image of a speaker knowledgeable in his/her field.

Ethos and logos seem interrelated, as the authority of the speaker can impress the audience, followed by a well-structured discourse from the point of view of logical argumentation. Reason is used in such way of arguing, and reason in this case is simply a natural continuation of the speaker's being knowledgeable in a certain domain. Yet, "Rhetorical arguments are often based on probabilities rather than certain truth." What is more, "Persuasion, to a large extent, involves convincing people to accept our assumptions as probably true and to take appropriate action." (Edlund, 2014).

In the case of *logos*, we can expect a lecturer in any scientific field, such as engineering or humanities, to have a well-structured course of lectures material. The lecturer should give students an example of how to explain certain issues and how to argue in favour of them.

Similarly, pathos is also connected with ethos and logos, as pathos, being the emotional component, can be a natural feature of a speech once someone is knowledgeable in the topic, as well as reasonable, but should also be passionate about the topic in order to attract the audience's attention and to transmit to them the same passion for the subject presented in the speech. While "Most of us think that we make our decisions based on rational thought," we can see how "Aristotle points out that emotions such as anger, pity, fear, and their opposites, powerfully influence our rational judgments. Due to this fact, much of our political discourse and much of the advertising we experience is directed toward moving our emotions" (Edlund, 2014).

An enthusiastic attitude of the lecturer towards the topic he/ she teaches can help, by showing students how interested he/ she is in the subject, and, by extension, how such a topic can be fascinating, both from an emotional and from a rational, well-argued for perspective.

Regarding politics, and political speeches, these can influence the audience, mainly not from a balanced, authoritative, rational and emotional point of view. The balance can be seen as specific to academic lectures, as the lecturer needs to instruct, motivate and afterwards help students think for themselves, arguing for their own opinion in the case of practical applications. In the case of politics, the balance is not at work, as it seems that political speeches have a higher emotional component than an academic lecture: "Many political decisions have an emotional motivation" (Edlund, 2014). Indeed, political speeches can determine masses to resort to an attitude of revolt and protest. What is more, we can consider the following example: "when a gunman with an assault rifle shot up a schoolyard full of children, people were suddenly interested in banning such weapons. In this case, several emotions are involved, but perhaps the strongest one is pity for the small children and their families." This, however, is not to say that the rational arguments had changed; they were, instead, taken over by the

emotions, as "people were emotionally engaged with the issue after this event and wanted to do something" (Edlund, 2014).

Generally, when considering public speeches meant to make the audience join a certain cause and start acting right away, in order to get mobilized through a powerful emotional reaction of solidarity with other members of the audience, we notice that *pathos* is a predominant element. An example can be given by the necessity of the public speaking skills in the case of promoting environmental health. Here, Parvis (2001, p. 44) refers to improving the degree of persuasion of "environmental health participants" and to encouraging them to "satisfy an audience," along with the idea that they should "perform professionally" and "enunciate well." Professional performance refers to *ethos*, while enunciation refers to *logos*. All three elements are present, yet the *pathos* should be underlines and prominent.

There can be a variety of emotions involved within *pathos*. Thus, "not all appeals to *pathos* result in violence or political action" (Edlund, 2014). Moving towards other domains where public speeches are needed to persuade the audience through using emotions, we can notice the following: "Advertisements for consumer goods often aim at making us insecure about our attractiveness or social acceptability and then offer a remedy for this feeling in the form of a product. This is a common strategy for selling mouthwash, toothpaste, chewing gum, clothing, and even automobiles" (Edlund, 2014). We could claim that in advertisement, the balance among the three elements of a good speech, *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos*, is turning in favour of *pathos*, priviledging the primacy of emotions in making clients act towards buying certain products over others.

Focusing on the use of public speaking skills in the academic domain, we can see, from research papers and from popular science articles, that both students and lecturers could benefit from using them in their activity at university.

For lecturers, articles such as the one by ACS Distance Education (2023) gives important advice on how important pathos can be during any lecture: "You will note that we tend to respond emotionally to things that interest us, and to be interested in things that arouse an emotional response. If a teacher can create an emotional response to some or all of a lecture, that lecture is more likely to be found interesting." Generally, any lecture can be seen as a means of establishing a dialogue between teacher and students, and also as a means to set students to think further of the topics covered and about the questions that they have, as well by solutions to exercises given during and after the lecture. The need for balance among ethos, pathos and logos for any lecture is further suggested, by showing how all these elements should complete one another. None should be missing, but pathos should not be neglected: "Good lecturers not only have in-depth knowledge of their topic; they communicate that knowledge clearly and in an interesting manner, and communicate enthusiasm for the topic. They inform and entertain, not in the way we usually think of entertaining, but in the sense that they arouse, stir, and stimulate." The topics of considering students' needs for devising a course of lectures and of motivating them to study a certain course and be active are well-known in teaching and learning activities. Using pathos can be one way to give a start to motivation. Raising students' interest can lead to their natural curiosity to explore the topic further, and to bring up questions and discussions when the lecturer asks them to. Just as in the case of a political speech, by using pathos, through communicating students certain emotions on various topics in the lectures, the lecturer can make the students resort to action and to read given materials or to further explore certain topics.

What are some obstacles we can encounter in giving a good public speech? One of them is the fact that "It is estimated that 75% of all people suffer from fear of public speaking" (Yale University, 2021). With respect to the academic field, and for the training of future lecturers, "speaking skills are rarely taught in any formal sense, which may increase anxiety and discomfort" (Yale University, 2021). In spite of all this, "public speaking is one of the most important skills for scholars, and hence a skill which is commonly tested—from lectures to formal research presentations" (Yale University, 2021), which is why this skill needs to be improved in the case of academics.

When it comes to lecturers, the members of the audience can be students having a variety of reactions, function of various factors. They may be caught up in discussions with colleagues, they may be preoccupied by sending text messages or checking their social media accounts, they may be thinking of going out with colleagues later that evening, they may have realized that they have not completed their assignment for the deadline which is the next class and be hurrying to complete it, and so on. The situation of a lecturer giving an engaging speech and establishing interaction with the students can, thus, be an ideal, imaginative situation which has nothing to do with reality, at some point. In the examples described, external factors can become obstacles, such as an overcharged academic curricula or the bad organization done by the students with respect to their work.

From this point of view, live classes can have a disadvantage, whereas classes based on video materials on social media can have the advantage of the teacher being able to edit the video and for students to watch the video at a good moment for them. Social media successful teaching examples with respect to public speaking and

interaction with students can be, from the point of view of the author of the present paper, who has followed their activity, Silvia Patrascu for the Japanese language learning resources, on Facebook and YouTube, and Sheilla Iaia, on Facebook for the Turkish language. The two of them are very good, engaging public speakers. Their enthusiasm combines with their knowledge of the foreign languages they teach. They also offer very well-structured and accessible materials, and they participate actively with their students in solving the exercises, the latter being visible in the periodic lessons for demonstration they hold for beginners on Zoom platform. Both of them make it clear they have expertise in the foreign languages they teach yet, at the same time, they have a very friendly attitude to their students.

In the case of students, they can feel safer than in front of the class to deliver a public speech by uploading it on social media. This could be part of their training for a good speech, yet by being sheltered by direct contact with the audience and by real-time delivery, we could claim that such an exercise does not actually help them when it comes to public speaking anxiety. It does, however, offer them a safe, relaxed environment, to thoughtfully build a good speech. We could also consider that giving speeches on social media is a sign of being part of the contemporary world and its demands, and that we should need to adapt to it. At the same time, one of the disadvantages of recording a public speaking video on social media platforms is that we do not know our audience and we cannot adapt to its needs and notice the reactions of the listeners in real time. We can only rely on likes and comments, as well as on subscriptions to our channel.

Creating a social media public speaking video, though, can be a good example of practice for students. Apriyanti and Ramadhan (2018, p. 268) analyse, their research, with respect to Indonesia, a Public Speaking course in English, one of them in the "English Department in Politeknik Negeri Padang." The purpose of the course is to build confidence for the students to present and to use "good English," which was not possible in a real-life classroom, before colleagues and teachers. Therefore, students were asked "to upload their performance in their personal instagram application." In this way, anxiety was diminished and students could focus on what they had to do in order to make a good presentation video, based on the following requirements: "state in purpose," "organize the content," "summarize the main idea," "speak clearly with appropriate vocabulary and information," "uses tone, speed, and volume as tool," and "appears comfortable with audiences" (Apriyanti & Ramadhan, 2018, p. 268).

Since students use social media platforms to watch various influencers and users, based on their interests, it could be helpful for teachers to give them the format of social media public speech videos as reference points for their presentations. The lecturers could also benefit from ways of establishing communication with the audiences and of presenting the information by using, at least to some extent, elements of presentations, such as animations and memes, and ways of colloquial address, in their lectures, to make everything sound friendly and contemporary to students.

3. Results

In order to reduce the feeling of discomfort when speaking in public, references to a usual, and common, reality for both audience and speaker can help making the setting comfortable and relatable. Thus, if students are asked to prepare a speech for public presentation, for an academic course, they could be given as reference social media speeches. They could be asked to observe particular features of these speeches, and to analyse them from the point of view of *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos*. This could be a helpful exercise in order to familiarize them with the requirements of holding a public speech. After watching a few social media speeches with the purpose of analyzing them and identifying there elements of *pathos*, *ethos* and *logos*, students can feel more confidents and more relaxed with respect to what makes a good speech. Learning through imitation is one method of teaching students to prepare a good public speech. Students likely follow the activity of various users, more or less famous, in social media, and they would likely find the example set up by social media users as relatable and easy for them to imitate. Students could imagine, in the case of such an exercise, that they have started up their own social media channel and that they are preparing their first video.

Social media videos show examples of apparently natural and spontaneous speeches, which are given in a manner similar to conversations among friends. This feature can be taken over by both students practicing holding a public speech, and by the lecturers, when addressing the lectures to their students. While the academic lecture is not colloquial, casual talk among friends, it could take some means of addressing and some expressions here and there, or a joke that could make the atmosphere more relaxed and happy for the students in the audience. Of course, an academic lecture should be serious, but, at the same time, now and then students could benefit from being prompted to relax by some brief, humorous remarks and phrases from the lecturer.

From social media examples, clear language and organization structure of a speech for a lecture could be taken over. Students can also be told that, in order to give a good speech in public, they do not need to overwhelm the audience with complicated information and phrases, as well as style of talking. Clear language and structure are appreciated all the more by the audience.

4. Discussion

We are frequently reminded that we are living in the age of communication (Lull, 2002, p. 1). Therefore, it is natural to expect, in areas as diverse as advertising, politics, and teaching and learning, with no exception, to do our best to establish a good impression and a good connection with the audience. We are reminded that, in the domain of education, we need to focus on the communicative teaching method, at least as far as foreign language teaching (Savignon, 1991; Spada, 2007) is concerned. Students need to be encouraged to speak during all classes. Unlike other activities, involving skills such as listening, reading and writing, which do not require a high degree of exposure in front of the classroom, speaking can bring about anxieties for certain students. The issue of being anxious when speaking in public is a frequently discussed one, and articles and books often deal with advice in order for those having to speak in public to control their emotions, for instance through breathing techniques, and deliver their speech efficiently. Public-speaking anxiety is defined as "the fear of speaking in front of others" (Pull, 2012, p. 32), and it can have consequences that can reach as far as ruining the speech completely, failing to persuade the audience, failing to impress them, and not show coherence in building the arguments. The speaker needs to be fully in control of his/ her emotions, in order to pay attention to a wide variety of aspects, from understanding the audience's reaction, persuading them, present to them a favourable personal image, a believable, well-thought argumentation which should also be attractive, show enthusiasm for the subject, and engage the audience to participate emotionally and intellectually. For any speech, we need to take into consideration the fact that there is a speaker and an audience, to whom the message is addressed. Once the speaker establishes a dialogue not only to deliver them the information and making sure, from their reactions, that they are still paying attention and understanding, the dialogue can continue by asking them questions or by allowing them to ask questions about the speech given, in order to add their own opinion or in order to make clear an aspect, or by getting further details from a knowledgeable speaker about the subject. The format of presentation and asking questions is the usual template for academic, business, advertising, motivational lectures and workshops, both in face to face and online settings.

We also live in the age of technology (Lull, 2002, p. 1), and this also influences the way we do public speaking. For example, during an academic lecture in a lecture hall or online, the students may be asked to connect to Kahoot application on their mobile phones and answer a quiz or simply present, in short, an opinion, or a word association to a certain question the teacher addresses. In this way, technology is used for the lecturer to establish communication with the students, as well as by helping him/ her present, with the help of a smartboard and laptop, a graphic based on the answers of the students to the questions. Based on the answers, the lecturer can see what their opinion is on certain topics, or, in the case of a multiple choice quiz, how much they know, and what they do not know, and insist on explaining those parts they have not fully understood.

Technology has changed the way we have access to, the way we perceive information, and the way we work with information. These changes can be seen at the level of any activity in any domain. The focus is, in the academic field, as well as in schools, to prepare students for gaining skills by working through the information, not only by reproducing it. Theoretical notions and practical activities should, ideally, be combined, and students should be encouraged to practice the skills they are supposed to have gained from classes for their final project or examination. The teacher is no longer seen as an authority, in the sense that he/ she only delivers information and corrects the students' answers, but also moderates class activities and discussions that students can start with one another.

5. Conclusions

Public speaking is a skill we need to use to hold efficiently our professional activities in any domain, including the educational one. Due to changes in technology, such as the wide access offered by the Internet to foreign language resources, with speaking and audio material, the teachers are expected and pressured to make more effort when teaching, which can be achieved through giving engaging speeches when it comes to explanations, with visual presentations, and then work together with the students the practical exercises. All the while, the pathos component in the structure of the speech is significant in this case, as it communicates to the students the wish to work together with their colleagues and teacher.

While communication has always been around, in all domains, the extent to which we use nowadays public speaking skills in various fields, including the educational one, is higher and of a particular sort. Public speaking style and techniques adopted from the way they are used in social media and TED talks are useful to be included in lectures and conference presentations by teachers and students at academic level, since these serve as tools to help teachers and students connect, based on the common social media culture. Otherwise, a different communication style may bring in obstacles to communication and reduce the efficiency of the teaching and learning process.

The dynamic approach to teaching at academic level is ensured by using a communication style with which students are familiar with from social media. This helps students perceive that the course of lectures is delivered

in a friendly and accessible manner, and that the information is relevant to them, instead of difficult to understand, not significant and not helpful practically in their future profession.

We could conclude that, in the case of lecturers, public speaking skills can help in establishing an efficient relationship between teachers and students, and motivate the students to study. One of the steps to help towards achieving efficient communication is reducing speaking anxiety in the classroom, for both lecturers and students. Once communication is relaxed, the teaching and learning process can take place efficiently. The relationship the teacher establishes with students, called rapport, can be improved by providing for them a relaxed environment for speaking and an engaging lecture, to maintain their interest and motivation to work.

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