

CoR Workshop 2: Concepts (12th December 2017)

University of Birmingham (local host: Dr Henriette van der Blom)

Introduction to the Network (Henriette van der Blom and Alan Finlayson)

1. Henriette van der Blom is a Lecturer in Ancient History at the University of Birmingham and is the Principal Investigator for the Crisis of Rhetoric network. Van der Blom's research on Cicero led her to think more broadly about political speech, which resulted in the establishment of the Crisis of Rhetoric network. Alan Finlayson is a Professor in Political and Social Theory at the University of East Anglia and is the Co-Principal Investigator for the Crisis of Rhetoric network. His research analyses how people think and communicate about politics, and uses rhetoric to understand what political actors are doing.
2. The Crisis of Rhetoric workshops encourage the audience to participate in the discussions and to help generate lessons. The theme of the second workshop (in a series of six) was "concepts", which assessed how different disciplines study rhetoric and how academics can help practitioners develop their understanding of political speech. The second workshop drew from the findings of the first workshop, which questioned what political speechwriting is and how it can be improved. A summary of the first workshop can be found on the network website: www.birmingham.ac.uk/cor

Session 1: Language Studies - Remarks from Deborah Cameron and Joe Bennett (Chaired by Henriette van der Blom)

3. Deborah Cameron is the Rupert Murdoch Professor in Language and Communication at the University of Oxford. Cameron co-authored *Gender, Power and Political Speech: Women and Language in the 2015 UK General Election* with Sylvia Shaw. Joe Bennett is a Lecturer in Applied Linguistics at the University of Birmingham. Bennett researches the relationships between language, communication, and society.
4. Bennett questioned what makes a linguistic approach to political rhetoric distinctive and summarised the three continuities that govern the way linguists perceive political rhetoric. Firstly, linguists perceive political rhetoric as a language. Tools and conceptual frameworks that are used to analyse other types of language can be used to analyse political discourse. Secondly, there is metalinguistic continuity. The terms linguists use to describe political rhetoric and other types of language are drawn from other disciplines. Linguistics is a relatively small discipline so there is a need to use tools from a wide range of contexts. Thirdly, there is ecological continuity. Linguists link political rhetoric to all the parts of language that are formed before and after it. They question what happens after a politician gives a speech and how audiences react to it.
5. Bennett considered that it is difficult to explain what political language is and does. He suggested three defining features traditionally used by linguists to

identify political language. Firstly, political language is inherently produced by political institutions. Secondly, political language boils down to relationships between individuals or social groups that are governed by an unequal distribution of power. Thirdly, political language is identified by linguists through certain patterns and signifiers. Examples of these indicators are defined by Isabela and Norman Fairclough in *Political Discourse Analysis: A Method for Advanced Studies* (2012). Finally, political rhetoric is not about the language used, but about the political significance that the analyst can find in the language used.

6. Bennett noted that it is difficult for linguists to identify a crisis of rhetoric as they are not critical of language. Linguistics take a descriptive approach to studying what happens with language. Therefore, linguists are not equipped to identify whether there was a Golden Age of speechmaking or whether there is currently a crisis of rhetoric.
7. Cameron agreed that linguists are descriptive and the ways that they analyse political discourse are multidisciplinary. An example of work by linguists is tracking diachronic changes in language in the UK Parliamentary Debates from 1945 onwards. Yet, their descriptions can sometimes take an explanatory direction, such as explaining why people perceive a politician in a certain way. However, explanations garnered from language can also generate criticism. For instance, debate surrounds the metadiscursive concept of speech as audiences do not always perceive the patterns in speech in the way they are intended.
8. Cameron listed the various methodologies of linguistics and noted that most linguists search for patterns when they analyse political discourse data. Corpus linguists use computer technology to analyse large collections of data. Critical discourse analysis often uses corpus methods and will select choice extracts. This method has been criticised for the cherry-picking of sources. Critical analysis studies speech sequentially and picks apart strategies used between participants in a conversation. Interactional sociolinguistics analyses how speakers signify their actions, such as Trump's use of repetition and how it acts as a form of branding to make him appear reliable. Cameron concluded that combinations of these methods can be used to analyse the various aspects of a political event.
9. Cameron suggested a base definition for political rhetoric as discourse produced in overt political settings by overt political actors. Yet, she acknowledged that a fixed definition of political rhetoric is difficult to grasp. Is it persuasiveness within a particular setting? There is difficulty in drawing a distinction between political rhetoric and other types of rhetoric. For example, politicians use storytelling as a persuasive mechanism, but so do the polity in everyday language. There is criticism that political language is becoming increasingly like ordinary language, but politicians are ordinary people too.
10. Cameron reflected that the conditions for political utterance are not what they were in the past. Political discourse analysts are increasingly using multimodal approaches to take on board the many types of media that politicians now use. For

example, the advent of television has impacted how audiences have perceived the sincerity and affectation of speakers as their physicality is now visible.

11. Cameron assessed that language is where you may be able to find a crisis in rhetoric as language is what is fundamental to democracy. Language is often used as the proxy for the deterioration of something else like politics. However, linguists use democracy as a normative concept, which is why they may not be aware of a crisis. Linguists can use microanalysis to highlight patterns that show democracy is not working as it should, such as an assessment of how much time different individuals are given to speak in political settings.
12. Authenticity of speakers as perceived by audiences is now a key characteristic that voters latch onto. How can speakers show they are responsive to certain audiences to improve perceptions of their authenticity? Cameron viewed authenticity as constituted by affect, identity, and personality. On this basis, Cameron suggested people with accents or people of colour are perceived as distinctive and thus more authentic.
13. Cameron noted that linguists analyse speeches as data and transcriptions are merely the representation of data used to count patterns and signifiers. Linguists also take account of accents and gestures through audio-visual data and analysing pronunciation. In contrast, Ancient Historians face difficulties in piecing together the wider contexts and deliveries of great speeches, such as accents, gestures, sound dynamics, and settings.
14. The discussion following the presentations included consideration of the relationship between democracy and rhetoric (in scholarship and in politics) and the possibility that training in political speech now needs both old-style political rhetorical training as well as a new form which takes authenticity into account. Cameron noted that one of the most ‘authentic’ political leaders at the moment, First Minister of Scotland Nicola Sturgeon, learnt the trade of appearing authentic and addressing audiences from one of the best, Alex Salmond, thereby suggesting that good rhetoric and authenticity is a performance and not simply an inborn talent. This has implications for the training of political practitioners.

Session 2: Classics – Remarks from Gesine Manuwald (Chaired by Richard Toye)

15. Gesine Manuwald is a Professor of Latin at University College London. Her research interests include Cicero’s speeches and reception studies, which analyses how literature from the Roman period has been received since antiquity.
16. Manuwald reflected that the term “political speech” is widely applied in the present, but this is an anachronistic term for the Roman (republican) setting. There were three types of speech in Greco-Roman rhetorical theory and only the deliberative speech type, which was delivered in a political context, embraces policy, and persuades or dissuades, could be described as political within our current definition.

17. Manuwald reminded the audience that oratory was the main medium of communication in the Roman (and Greek) world, supported by the occasional pamphlet. Oratory was perceived as an essential skill and was taught to elite male Romans (who engaged in political life) from a young age. Emphasis was placed on both performance and content. Orators were also expected to have a detailed knowledge base of the topic they were discussing.
18. Manuwald noted that there are no records of audience reactions to speeches in the corpus of Roman speeches and an orator's success is judged by whether they managed to shift policy. Contemporary historians did discuss the success of certain speeches from the Greco-Roman world, but these accounts only provide insights from individual perspectives. For instance, our knowledge is Cicero-centric as available evidence only gives us a small insight into the rich range of oratory that existed. Historians need to be careful in generalising as there is too little data.
19. Romans had divergent opinions on whether there was a “Golden Age” of oratory and whether the art of speechmaking had a place within post-Republic Rome. Under the rule of Caesar, Cicero attests that the opportunities for oratory diminished. A setting which encouraged higher levels of democracy was perceived as an environment within which oratory thrived and politics were unstable. A setting governed by demagogues was perceived as a setting in which politics became more stable, but oratory declined. In Tacitus' *Dialogus de oratoribus* (published c. 102 AD) a conversation is presented in which one participant attests that there is a huge crisis in the quality of oratory because of imperial surveillance, whereas a counter-participant suggests that oratory is thriving.
20. Some believe that any speech can be rhetorical. Manuwald argues that Romans would have agreed with this and viewed rhetoric as the only method through which to be successful in politics. Rhetoric was not a neutral entity. Rhetoric was used by Cicero and his contemporaries to retain the Republic and was used by demagogues to uproot the Republic. Plato's main criticism of rhetoric was that it was concerned with opinions (*doxa*) rather than something more solid like “truth”. Through the lens of Cicero, we are aware that Romans believed there was a difference between your innermost beliefs and what you speak about, but also acknowledged that a sense of authenticity could contribute to the success of a speech. Methods used to persuade an audience did not have to come from a political handbook. They included exuding personality and altering your performance to appeal to a particular kind of audience.
21. Ancient Rome had no political parties, so political image and credibility was ascribed to individuals. Politicians could not rely on the party allegiance of their audience, but groups of people did hold allegiances to certain social groups. There is no evidence of political advisers or any of the machinery that revolves around today's politicians. Rather, orators had *consilia* (pl. of *consilium*), which were

groups of friends/advisers with whom they could discuss their position or bounce off ideas.

22. The discussion following the presentations included consideration of whether rhetoric can be seen as a radar for perception about quality of a political culture, whether the Romans had an idea similar to the modern of something being ‘mere rhetoric’ (they didn’t), and the further Greek and Roman contexts for speechmaking and writing about oratory (the practice of speechmaking) and rhetoric (the teaching of speechmaking).

Session 3: Political Theory & Political Science – Remarks by James Martin and Alan Finlayson (Chaired by Sophia Hatzisavvidou)

23. James Martin is Professor of Politics at Goldsmith’s, University of London. Recently, Martin has been working on rhetoric and its relationship to emotions and affects in contemporary politics. He is the co-editor of *Rhetoric in British Politics and Society* (2014), and author of *Politics and Rhetoric: A Critical Introduction* (2014).
24. Finlayson acknowledged the tendency in political science to neglect linguistics in favour of a focus on political outputs. Finlayson is pushing for the study of rhetoric through political theory. Deliberative political theory questions how fair and just the arguments of politicians are and how much they are imbued with reasoning and rationality. Political theorists assess what kinds of power are at play and what is being done with language.
25. Finlayson summarised three approaches used by political theorists. Firstly, a history of ideas approach that contemplates how history can add to our understanding of contemporary politics. For example, how rhetoric in the Ancient and Renaissance World influenced the establishment of the British Parliament and US constitution and institutions. Secondly, an institutional approach which analyses how political institutions work and how they make possible certain rhetorical moments. For example, PMQs are a moment that has evolved to create rhetorical exchange. Thirdly, the study of ideologies and technologies. Ideologies are rhetorical assemblages that are formed through a combination of theory, practice, and history. Technologies are the mediums through which ideologies are communicated. For example, socialism is an ideology that was formed in the 19th century in conjunction with the emergence of the pamphlet as a technology. Technologies in turn can reflect and shape ideologies.
26. Finlayson discussed the balance of appeals within political rhetoric that are labelled as ethos, pathos, and logos. Ethos encompasses propositions about what good character is and politicians aiming to embody their politics (showing rather than telling). Blair and Trump are pertinent examples. Pathos encompasses ideologies that act as emotional appeals to how we feel about certain politics and offer propositions of how to use emotions. Logos encompasses the logic behind

rhetoric (the argument), which is dialogical in how it appeals to, and draws on the beliefs of, audiences.

27. Finlayson noted that rhetorical occasions dramatise the common sense of the audience being addressed. They intensify everyday understanding and affirm or challenge thoughts. Moral assumptions are tested and debated in application to policy issues. Rhetorical activity invites a community to reflect on what it believes about the world and act upon it. What are the conditions by which that process happens? What can democracy do at a fundamental level? The crisis in rhetoric may not be about the quality of speech, but may extend to whether speech practice enables democracy by enabling a discussion about ideas than form policy. Institutions are neglecting their role of enabling democracy and communities no longer have shared common beliefs.
28. Martin reflected that rhetoric as a contemporary interest within political science is marked by the dualism of the mind and body of a speaker. The body becomes the surface packaging of the speech and the mind works through the process of constructing and delivering the speech. Speech is viewed as the projection of a disembodied mind that has to measure up with reality. This encourages scepticism of speech as it can be partial or deceptive.
29. Martin acknowledged that the body is not given credit in the creation of meaning, which diminishes the importance of speech as experienced and expressed in a bodily sense. This could be described as the crisis of rhetoric. A meaningful world is mediated through the body. The meaning of speech is transmitted by bodies through tone and gesture, Furthermore, spatial metaphors of movement and place within speech draw upon the bodily experience. Bodies are not just transmission vehicles, they are markers of corporate identity and a common ethos.
30. Martin suggested that this crisis of rhetoric emerged after the French Revolution when ethos was no longer embodied by the King. Bodies that represented ethos are now only in office temporarily. Furthermore, the diversity of bodies in the polity means that we are never fully aligned with the ideals of the community as a whole. Rhetoric denies the plurality of bodies and there is anxiety about why many bodies are not being recognised.
31. Could productive forms of rhetoric help with social crises? Martin suggests that rhetoric provides opportunities for imaginative reinvention of a community and that nostalgia for moments of community cohesion is built into good rhetoric. However, the immediacy of current political life, the lack of political leadership, and the amount of sniping within communities, makes it difficult for rhetoric to bring society together. The current failures of rhetoric have been bred through inequalities in society, individualisation, different technologies, the decline of particular institutions in which rhetoric was organised (e.g. political parties), changes in the effectiveness of institutions, and speech becoming less effective in the era of social media.

32. The discussion following the presentations included a debate between political scientists and linguists about the material and methodology used to approach political speech, consideration of individualisation in society and therefore also in politics and political communication (whether from the centre or from constituents), and the change in technologies and how to deal with this change in assessing political speech.

Closing Discussion and ‘Next Steps’

33. There are differences in the approaches of linguistics, classics, and political science that are worth clarifying and exploring further. Linguistics focuses more intently on specific examples to infer pointed conclusions, whereas the evidence analysed by political scientists feeds into larger and more generalised questions about politics. This boils down to linguists having a more positivist approach than political scientists. Classicists absorb approaches from both linguistics and political science. Rhetoric is defined by classicists as the theory of speechmaking (e.g. presented in handbook-format), and oratory as the practice of speech. There are also examples of classicists applying their knowledge to contemporary politics, such as the work of Mary Beard. Across the discipline representatives present at the workshop, there was desire to increase consideration of the polity outside of political institutions. How can academia create interventions and impact for the polity?

34. Does rhetoric fit within a specific discipline? Is politics the appropriate discipline for rhetoric? Different disciplines have different ways of defining rhetoric. Is rhetoric a way of doing politics? Is rhetoric a kind of language? Rhetoric does not name an easily definable concept. A ring-fencing of rhetoric as its own area of study varies internationally. For example, the US has professorships in the study of solely rhetoric.

35. The first workshop for the Crisis of Rhetoric network highlighted that many speechmakers receive no formal training. Perhaps the conclusions generated from the second workshop suggest that speechmakers should not use a traditional style or be classically trained. Books of great speeches can lead to the ossification of rhetoric. Yet, there are some methods of rhetoric from the Ancient World that continue to work and perhaps they can be used in a speech to add a distinctive edge.