JEANNE STRUNCK
Aalborg University
Denmark
i12js@hum.aau.dk

The presence of audience and public in the rhetoric of political speeches

Introduction

Traditionally, the purpose of rhetoric was to help speakers, typically politicians, philosophers and judges, to persuade and convince an audience of the justice of a statement. In more recent times rhetoric still helps communicators to ensure the consent of readers or listeners to specific messages, but as discipline and tool rhetoric is nowadays also regarded in a broader sense as communication. Embedded in contexts such as culture, situation and media, rhetoric enables readers and listeners to perceive ideas, selves, interpersonal relations and purposes of genres in specific ways. Communicators convey impressions, advocate for ideas and influence their audience and public using rhetorical strategies tailored to the subject, the contextual aspects and the audience and public. Regarded from this perspective the audience and the public are embedded in the rhetoric, but at the same time the rhetoric may construct a public that the communicator especially wants to address by his or her communication.

How communicators adjust their rhetoric to audiences and how rhetoric may construct a public of importance to the matters focused on in speeches imply a discussion of the notion 'public', which has been, and still is, of relevance to rhetorical studies. The New Rhetoric developed by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca[1] as well as The Rhetorical Criticism introduced by Black [2] and developed by theorists working within rhetorical discourse and situation[3] both focus on the public as the central element when studying rhetorical texts.

An analysis of the rhetorical strategies related to the representation and the creation of audience and public involves another great subject within rhetorical studies: the question of speech genres which goes back to Aristotle's 'Rhetoric' and his definition of three main speech genres: the deliberative, the epideictic and the jurisprudential genre, which have provided a basis for further genre theory.

Empirical examples

Focusing on the importance of genre, audience and public for the rhetoric, the purposes and the messages in speeches, examples from two speeches made by a French minister will be analysed in this article. The two speeches were made by the French minister of environment and sustainable development, the first one on March 1, 2006 and the other one on April 4, 2006.In March the minister made her speech at a press conference on the topics that she intended to talk about at the World Forum for Water in Mexico later that month. In April the same minister made the opening speech at a political conference, a speech in which she referred to the negotiation of a political bill on sustainable management of the water resources in France as well as to the World Forum for Water in Mexico in March. Both speeches were reported in French mass-media and full texts were placed at the web site of the government[4]. As it is important to study full texts and examples embedded in co-text to be able to get an idea of the audiences and the public, the written full text web versions are the objects of study in this article even if it implies the inconvenience that the texts were meant for oral presentations.

Two political speeches – one genre?

Of Aristotle's three speech genres the deliberative and the epideictic ones seem both, at first, relevant for a genre characterization of the speeches in question. When following Aristotle's definition of the deliberative genre we find that it concerns the rhetor's advice to the listener about what is useful to do or not to do in a specific situation. As for the epideictic speeches Aristotle finds that the genre concerns a rhetor who praises or blames and who refers to what is beautiful or ugly. These definitions though seem not to be completely appropriate for a characterization of the speeches in question. But as Aristotle's work has been developed, they might still be relevant.

Genre in The New Rhetoric

Perelman points out that traditionally the epideictic genre was meant to praise for the competent rhetor[5], but in the New Rhetoric the genre appeals to find consensus on values common to the rhetor and a public by a rhetoric that persuades and convinces a public to something it can answer for. The question now is how a rhetor is able to know what the audience[6] and a public can answer for?

---

[1] Traité de l'Argumentation. La nouvelle rhétorique (1958) ; L'empire rhétorique. Rhétorique et argumentation (1977).
[2] Rhetorical Criticism. A Study in Method (1965); The Second Persona (1970).
[3] E.g. Bitzer, Campbell, Jamieson, Miller.
[4] The titles of the speeches are: Discours de Nelly Olin pour la conference de presse du Partenariat Français pour le 4ème Forum mondial de l'eau de Mexico, 1er mars 2006 ; Discours de Madame Nelly Olin pour l'ouverture du Colloque : « Les nouveaux enjeux de l'eau : Quelle gestion durable d'une ressource rare ? », 4 avril 2006. http://www.ecologie.gouv.fr (copies made on April 7, 2006)
[5] Perelman 2005: 53
[6] The reader might have noticed that in the present article not only the notion 'public' is used as does Perelman, but also the notion 'audience' which is not used by Perelman. It is on my account only to have introduced the two notions from the start because of the article's discussion of the notion 'public' that follows.

Concerning the audience we might state that the rhetor and the audience may be members of the same discourse community which implies a certain common knowledge and to some extent common values. As for a public it seems much more complicated to talk about common values and knowledge, unless we include common culturally founded topoi. On the basis of the common values important in Perelman's theory the intention is, in other words, to influence a public, to modify its beliefs and to instigate action. Perelman also states that the epideictic genre is to be regarded as a very important genre because its role is to move the audience and public and to make them act. The genre has as its goal to increase the feeling of common values between rhetor and audience, values which guide future actions[7]. This way of regarding the epideictic genre makes it (perhaps) possible for us to characterise the speeches as belonging to the epideictic genre, on the one hand, and to the deliberative genre on the other. The arguments for such a proposal are that the topic of both speeches is political and that the rhetor is a minister. If we then turn to the situations in which the speeches were held there are obvious differences between the two.

The speech of March 1 was held at the occasion of a press conference related to the future World Summit on Water and the present audience was reporters. But as the speech was broadcasted both politicians and the public may have been listeners too, and we may interpret the communicative purpose as an opportunity to inform the press and the public of the minister's (and the government's) work in the worldwide partnership who's purpose is to ensure the access of water for the world's poorest. At the same time the purpose may be interpreted as an effort to make the audience and the public consent to the minister's points of view concerning the partnership and its work.

(1) "*Notre réussite ou notre échec ne se mesurera pas en millards d'euros investis, mais en nombre de personnes pour lesquelles l'accès à l'eau et à l'assainissement ne sera plus le premier souci quotidien"*

Even if the speech is political / deliberative the rhetoric is emotional as the quotation shows, and speaking of common values we have to rely on a common topos like 'to help others is the right thing to do'. Furthermore, the minister praises the contribution of the partners, of France and the government, as well as she praises her own dedication to the ideas of the partnership:

(2) "Je me félicite que la préparation de la contribution de la France [..] ai pu se faire dans le cadre d'un partenariat" , "Je salue ce travail, et je remercie tous les participants."

Again the same topos is relevant and we might add that 'praising others is good and polite'. As we shall see later on the mentioned features and an analysis of the role of audience and public can bring the discussion further.
The second speech (April 4) concerns a bill brought in by the same minister of environment. The topic of the speech and the bill is the sustainable management of the water resources in France. The speech was held at a political conference having reporters and members of the parliament as audience and as the analysis of the audience and public will show later on, a constructed public is of importance. This text is of course political too:

(3) "Cette loi a été longuement concertée et négociée. Elle doit maintenant voir le jour [...] "

But as it calls, at several occasions, for action through a personalised rhetoric and a rhetoric that intends to move the audience and the public, we might perhaps propose to characterise the genre as being epideictic as well:

(4) "Tout d'abord, et je l'appelle de mes voeux, le vote de la loi sur l'eau [...] "

Situation and genre

Above, we have tried to make a short analysis of the speeches according to Perelman's approach to Aristotle's genre theories, but to elaborate the analysis we may turn to The Rhetorical Criticism with a focus on the situation. To Black, Bitzer and Miller[8] repeated rhetorical situations in which the speeches occur make it possible to define genres. This means that situations can be classified in types and that these types of situations demand certain types of rhetorical responses implying specific rhetorical forms, language usage and style. Furthermore, Bitzer states that problems are inherent in the situations, problems which ask for changes and which can be fulfilled by communication to an audience or public who is able to create the change[9]. The rhetorical response depends on the possibilities or constraints of the situation. In other words, situations that are alike contain the same types of expectations in the audience and demand the same types of responses, and the categorisation in genres depends on the situations as well as on the function of the utterances. Furthermore, this way of regarding genres entails that rhetors over time understand the situations and the expectations of the audience in the same way and respond in the same way[10]. When communication is able to motivate an audience to create changes, we can regard genres as social and culturally based actions that regulate people's ways of acting[11]. The described approach to genre opens another perspective to the discussion of genre categorisation of the two French speeches.

[7] Perelman op.cit: 54
[8] Black, Rhetorical Criticism. A Study in Method. Bitzer, Den retoriske situation. Miller, Genre som social handling.
[9] Bitzer: 17
[10] Kjeldsen:66
[11] Miller:20

The first speech (March 1) was held at a press conference and we stated that the purpose was to inform reporters and mass media about the content of a speech that the minister was going to hold later that month at the World Forum for Water. Press conferences as repeated situations imply conventions of typified acts such as a speech given by a person representing an institutionalised group of people – in this case the government. The audience of this speech is another institution: representatives of the mass media who ask for information that can be transformed to news for a broad group of public. We might say that the public is exposed to what is regarded as news to journalists. This entails that the minister's speech must take the journalistic writing conventions into account and pay attention to topics relevant to the public at the same time as she has to address specialists within the political aspects of the worldwide water problems. The public is addressed by phrases in which the minister indirectly appeals to the conscience of the public:

(5) *"Quelle est la situation?*
En évoquant le 4ème Forum Mondial [...], nous avons tous en tête ces chiffres effrayants : 1,2 millards de personnes n'ont pas accès à l'eau potable, 2,5 milliards d'individus n'ont aucun moyen d'assainissement : 8 millions de morts par an liés à des maladies hydriques, dont la moité sont des enfants"

These phrases and the rhetorical question form the opening of the speech which continues to emphasize, in very easily understood words, the importance of solving the problems. Politically, the focus is on the great work of the mentioned partnership, emphasizing also the economic demands for being able to help. We may interpret this as an indirect appeal to governments who constitute the institutions which have to decide the budget. In this way the speech is asking for changes at the same time as it is informative.

The second speech (April 4) takes place in another kind of repeated situation: the political conference having first of all fellow politicians as audience and reporters and the mass media public as second audiences. As the speech is the opening speech of the conference the conventions ask the minister to sum op the water problems both at an international and a national level. But at the very beginning of the speech the minister points at the aim of her speech, the political bill about the water management in France, saying that:

(6) "L'adoption definitive de celui-ci [le projet de loi] d'ici l'été constitue ma priorité absolue en matière de politique de l'eau "

The function of this phrase (as of many other phrases in the speech) is that the rhetor asks the audience to help passing the bill by consenting to her points of view. But the question is whether the mentioned main audience is able to carry out this change or whether a specific audience or public is in question – a public that the minister indirectly addresses? To answer the question we will have to get a closer look at the notion 'public'.

Audience and public

Universal and particular public

In Perelman's approach the notion 'public' covers any kind of persons or groups of people, not only a present audience, but also the imagined public that the rhetorical text produces. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca understand 'public' as both a universal and a particular public, defining the universal public as all competent and rational beings and as a mental idea constructed in the rhetorical text which tries to convince the public. The particular public represents the text's idea of a public that the speech wants to persuade[12]. In other words some speeches are meant for everyone, a universal public, and others are meant for some few, a particular public. The intentions of the rhetor make it possible to distinguish the two types of public.

Perelman also states that it is not enough to identify all the persons actually listening to e.g. a political speech and all the persons able to listen or read the speech in the mass media. We have to include the persons that the rhetor does not address in her (political) speech. The public consists of the total group that the rhetor wants to affect.

Applying these ideas to the two French speeches we may understand the audience and the public of the speeches in a more specific way than we did above.

Concerning the March 1 speech (press conference) the present audience was identified as reporters. To this particular public we can add the listeners that the minister is going to address when attending the future world summit and that she has included rhetorically in the speech. But as the speech was broadcasted we identified another type of public, the readers and listeners of the mass media – a universal public which the minister tries to convince about the importance of co-financing an international help. To these types of public we may add the neglected public - the public not included directly in the speech – and that we might interpret to be the politicians that the minister has to negotiate with in order to get the finances for the project. Connected to this is the consent of listeners and readers in the broad context which is of importance because the finances are related to the national budgets and with that to the tax system. How the rhetoric reflects the group of specialist listeners attending the world summit (7) and the group of (neglected) politicians (8) can be exemplified as follows:

[12] Perelman, 2005: 39, 47-54

(7) *"Je suis convaincue qu'il [le Forum Mondial] contribuera à maintenir la question de l'eau dans les points majeurs des agendas internationaux [...] car l'eau est un sujet où le mot environnement s'associe spontanément avec celui de social et d'économie"*

(8) *"Attention aux malentendus.[…] La gratuité de l'eau potable aboutirait à donner une aide financière à des ménages parfaitement en mesure de payer leur eau..".*

In the second text (April 4, political conference) we found reporters and members of the parliament to be what Perelman calls the particular public. As for the first text the broadcasting of the second speech entails a group of mass media listeners and readers –a universal public, interested in the development of arguments for and against the bill brought in and debated for a long time between politicians. This bill, if it passes, will affect the population too. But another public is constructed by the rhetoric, a public not being present – the water supply companies which the minister wants to convince about the positive aspects of the bill:

(9) *"Aussi le projet de loi a-t-il pour ambition de sécuriser le dispostif des agences de l'eau"*

This means that in this political-epideictic speech the rhetor is taking into account a lot of different groups of people who are all of them important to persuade and/or convince because the bill will soon come to a vote and in the long run because the minister wants to be elected at the next general election.

To Bitzer the public consists of persons that the discourse can motivate and influence and who can realise the change that the discourse tries to create[13]. This approach to the notion 'public' is to Bitzer related to the rhetorical situation. But when looking at the two French speeches, Bitzer's approach seems to cover only some of the described groups of public – the politicians able to provide finances (text 1, press conference) and the members of parliament able to let the bill pass (text 2, political conference). These groups include the persons that the rhetor would like to agree and accept her points of view. The other groups of the public are not important regarded in the light of Bitzer's approach.

Persona

In order to interpret the observations made until now, we may consider Black's theories of the second persona in which another point of view on public is revealed. Black does not find the effect of the discourse on a specific public important, but finds it relevant to regard the discursive effect in relation to a broad context and to evaluate morally the rhetorical discourse. When studying the second persona, perceived as an implicit listener, the critic may have an impression of the kind of listener that the rhetor wants him to become and by that get an impression of how the text regards the world. This inherent ideology of the text is an object for the moral evaluation of the critic. In his article The Second Persona Black states that a speech is to be perceived as an act able for evaluation and that the text plays a role with which the listener can identify himself[14].

If we now look at the World Forum text (first text) again, we found that one group of public consists of the present reporters and that another group is the water specialists who are going to participate in the coming Forum. These groups of public are though not the interesting ones in Black's approach as they are the specific, physical and present public that the speech is meant for.

But we found two other groups - the mass media listeners and the politicians around the world including the French politicians. The mass media public is addressed indirectly in the speech by focusing on the common value included in the topos 'to help others is the right thing to do' by which the rhetor appeals to the conscience of the mass media public (5). In this appeal is implicated that the mass media public, the citizens, are perhaps not willing to cooperate financially, if not brought to the understanding that the global problems are the problems of everyone, especially with a focus on the tax payers. The text gives the impression that citizens might be only interested in keeping the taxes low and by that they neglect their moral obligation, a point of view negatively evaluated by the text.

As for the politicians the rhetor is a part of that group, but at the same time she is trying to motivate them to consent to the work of the worldwide group of specialists working to solve the water problems for the poorest, a group in which she is a member. The minister is dedicated to this work and is interested in keeping the finances for the project at a high level. Concerning this second persona the text gives the impression of a group afraid of further donation to the water project. The discourse tries to meet this point of view (8) in order to appease the attitude of governments wanting to be positively evaluated by the citizens and to keep the power. Again we see a negative evaluation which is related not only to the attitude to global water problems amongst governments around the world, but also to the national French political situation – the negotiation of a bill on water management.

This brings us on to the political conference text (second text) where reporters and fellow politicians, members of parliament, are the audience or the specific public that the text was meant for. According to Black the specific present audience is not the main interesting public, but in this text the present politicians must be motivated to vote for the bill, as this is the change that the rhetor wishes. Therefore, this public is important here as well as the mass media public and the water supply companies may play a part, but a lesser important one.

[13] Bitzer op.cit.
[14] Den andre persona:9

An interesting element of the analysis of this text is the way in which the rhetor imagines her public – the political colleagues, especially members of the opposition, and their resistance to the content of the bill and the changes that it will bring. Remembering the critical questions probably asked previously by the opposition, the rhetor uses her speech to answer these questions and to refute further negative attitudes towards the content of the bill. The text lists all the aspects of the bill point by point and explains the perspectives for the environment and the citizens. The following are examples representing the argumentation:

> *(10)"Le projet de loi sur l'eau […] facilitera l'accès à l'eau des foyers les plus modestes.[...] le projet de loi [...] interdira les coupures en période hivernale pour les plus démunis".*
>
> *(11)"Le projet de loi renforcera également notre capacité à lutter contre les pollutions diffuses, [...]*
>
> *(12) "Le défi pour une gestion durable de l'eau dans notre pays est très important. Nous sommes là pour le relever, et nous avons des moyens à y consacrer "*

As the examples show the rhetor reminds the opposition of their political responsibility and the moral obligation to help solving the water problems. This negative evaluation of the opposition creates the opposite of the positive evaluation of the government's politics regarding the sustainable management of the water resources and the environment, expressed by the speech – problems that only a voting for the bill can solve.

Conclusion

The analysis of the two political speeches has demonstrated that different approaches to genre analysis and to the study of the public, the New Rhetoric approach and The Rhetorical Criticism approach, may be relevant in them selves, but that is it possible to let them work together in a progressive process.

A genre analysis may give an impression of how to characterise the texts as deliberative texts, carrying elements from the epideictic genre as well. We also found that the analysis may be developed into an interpretative level where the discourse situations and the expectations of the public entail the point of view that genres not only reflect social and culturally based acts, but may create them.

Furthermore, the analyses have shown that the genre perspective is closely related to the study of the types of public. Such analyses may reveal more types of public, some of them directly and indirectly addressed in the speeches, others created by the discourse or regarded as the rhetor's imagined implicit listener, a second persona. We may interpret this persona as covering the ideology and the view of the world inherent in the discourse. The result of the interpretation also implies the rhetor's evaluation of self and others in relation to problems in the global and national societies.

Bibliography

Bitzer, L.F. (1997), Den retoriske situation, in: *Rhetorica Scandinavica no 3* (1997), translated from The Rhetorical Situation (1968), Philosophy and Rhetoric

Black, E. (1965), *Rhetorical Criticism. A Study in Method*, Wisconsin, University of Wisconsin Press

Black, E. (1999), Den andre persona, in: *Rhetorica Scandinavica no 9* (1999), translated by Lars Nyre from The Second Persona (1970), USA, The Quarterly Journal of Speech, Annandale

Gabrielsen, J. (1999), Retorisk argumentationsteori i et topisk perspektiv, in: *Rhetorica Scandinavica no 9* (1999)

Kjeldsen, J.E. (2006), Retorisk genreanalyse, in: Klujeff, M.L. & Hanne Roer (eds) (2006), *Retorikkens aktualitet*, København, Hans Reitzels Forlag

Klujeff, M.L. (2006), Retorisk publikum, in: Klujeff, M.L. & Hanne Roer (eds) (2006), *Retorikkens aktualitet*, København, Hans Reitzels Forlag

Klujeff, M.L. & Hanne Roer (eds) (2006), *Retorikkens aktualitet*, København, Hans Reitzels Forlag

Miller, C. (1984), Genre som social handling, in : *Rhetorica Scandinavica no 18* (2001), translated by Kjell Lars Berge from Genre as social action (1984), Quarterly Journal of Speech

Perelman, C. & Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca (1958), *Traité de l'argumentation. La nouvelle rhétorique*, Bruxelles, Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles

Perelman, C. (2005), *Retorikkens rige*, København, Hans Reitzels Forlag, translated by Porsborg S. & Hanne Roer from L'impire rhétorique. Rhétorique et argumentation (1977), Paris, Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin

Strunck, J. (2003), Diskursive strategier i genren pressemeddelelse på hjemmesider, in : Firth, A. (ed) (2003), *Language Travels. A Festschrift for Torben Vestergaard*, Aalborg, Department of Languages and Intercultural Studies, Aalborg University

Strunck, J. (2004), Le genre des communiqués sur Internet, in : Strunck, Lassen & Vestergaard (eds) (2004), *Genres et rhétorique des discours médiatiques*, Aalborg, Aalborg University Press

Strunck, J. (2006), *The political speech as 'conference-opener' – How rhetorical strategies advocate ideas and selves* (forthcoming).