Analyzing C-Span in the Basic Communication Course

Jim Schnell
Ohio Dominican College

Follow this and additional works at: http://ecommons.udayton.edu/bcca

Part of the Higher Education Commons, Interpersonal and Small Group Communication Commons, Mass Communication Commons, Other Communication Commons, and the Speech and Rhetorical Studies Commons

Recommended Citation

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of Communication at eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Basic Communication Course Annual by an authorized editor of eCommons. For more information, please contact fricel@udayton.edu, mschlangen1@udayton.edu.
Analyzing C-SPAN in the Basic Communication Course

Jim Schnell

The basic communication course can be a forum for a variety of teaching strategies. Selection of said strategies is determined by variables such as topic, objectives, audience, and context. This article includes a methodology for studying presentations made by President George Bush during the Persian Gulf War as an example of how public speakers can be studied using the Purdue University Public Affairs Video Archives. Such methodology is beneficial in the classroom and with individual research efforts. The Purdue University Public Affairs (C-SPAN) Video Archives is the primary source used in this study because analysis focuses not only on literal statements but on nonverbal communication channels as well. The author sees the teaching and research functions of C-SPAN usage as mutually enriching.

To obtain videotapes, call the Public Affairs Video Archives at Purdue University (1-800-423-9630) and give them the name of the person being researched. They will provide an index and cost of all videotapes they have of that person. Each videotape has a brief description of the event. After reviewing the list, desired tapes can be ordered by calling the Public Affairs Video Archives. They will provide an order form and answer questions regarding the ordering process.

Written transcripts of speeches and presentations by President Bush provide literal meanings but provide no
insights regarding nonverbal communication cues. Usage of transcripts (as a singular source) has serious limitations because so much of our meanings are communicated through nonverbal channels. Thus, transcripts convey a limited portion of a speaker's overall meaning. Videotapes of the actual speeches provide verbal statements, nonverbal messages, and situational context. A transcript can describe the situational context but a videotape allows you to see and hear the situational context.

This research uses Persian Gulf War presentations delivered by President Bush between August 2, 1990 (the day Iraq invaded Kuwait) and January 16, 1991 (when the air war against Iraq began). Bush was selected for analysis because, as President, he was a major statesman. The Persian Gulf War time period was selected because it is a definite time period that includes numerous presentations by Bush on a particular subject. Every presentation by Bush, available from the C-SPAN tape index for the aforementioned period, was used in this study. Contexts of delivery include news conferences, speeches, news briefings, and White House events. Using all of the Bush presentation tapes available from the C-SPAN index provides an appropriate way to limit/define the tape sample studied.

The study of the Bush videotaped presentations allows analysis of the President's rhetoric in relation to events and intentions in the Persian Gulf. Analysis of literal verbal statements provides insights regarding labeling (usage of action verbs) and the use of symbols. This is exemplified by Bush describing the Iraq troop movement into Kuwait as an "invasion" and "unchecked aggression." Analysis of nonverbal communication provides insights regarding the role of vocalics & paralanguage cues (pitch, rate, tone, and volume), occulesics (eye behavior), and kinesics (gesturing). Analysis of the
verbal statements and nonverbal messages is enhanced through appreciation of situational contexts the statements and messages are communicated within. For instance, when Bush spoke solely to a television audience from the oval office it was a different context than when he addressed a joint session of Congress.

Study of these areas (verbal statements, nonverbal communication and situational contexts) can be done using the chart provided below.

### STUDENT SPEECH ANALYSIS FORM

Tape Date: ____________  Topics: ________________

Length: ________________

Type of Speech: ________________

Title of Speech: ________________

Location of Speech: ________________

Use the following scale in responding to each of the following statements:

- SD = strongly disagree
- D = disagree
- N = neutral
- A = agree
- SA = strongly agree

LOGOS (use of reasoning): Provide a brief summary of main points and describe how these main points are substantiated.
The speaker effectively clarified main points of the position taken and provides appropriate substantiation of these main points.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SD</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>SA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ETHOS (character of speaker): Provide a brief summary of main factors that comprise speaker's character (i.e. trustworthiness, expertness, goodwill & charisma) and how this character is conveyed.

The speaker effectively conveys positive character (i.e., trustworthiness, expertness, goodwill, and charisma).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SD</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>SA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PATHOS (stimulation of emotions): Provide a brief summary of speaker's stimulation of audience emotions (i.e. anger, friendship, fear, shame and/or pity) and how this stimulation is achieved.

The speaker effectively stimulates audience emotions (i.e. anger, friendship, fear, shame and pity).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SD</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>SA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This chart uses the Aristotelian perspectives of logos, ethos, and pathos as a framework for interpreting Bush’s reasoning, character, and emotional appeal. Bush’s reasoning, character, and emotional appeal are conveyed through his verbal statements, nonverbal communication, and situational contexts. Using this framework benefits students because, if they are not familiar with logos, ethos and pathos, this approach will orient them to the concepts and their application. If they are familiar with these concepts then this approach will allow them to sharpen that understanding.

The eleven tapes studied in the project can be analyzed using the form above. Review of each tape begins by noting the tape date, title, length, topic, type of presentation, and location of presentation. This information helps define the situational context of the presentation. It is easily obtained from the tape description provided on each cassette (except for the topic, which is best ascertained after viewing the tape).

**STUDENT REVIEW**

Ideally, each tape should be viewed three times by students. This allows specific focus on logos, ethos, and pathos. The first viewing is for analysis of logos (use of reasoning). The form instructs the student to provide a brief summary of main points and describe how these main points are substantiated. The student also responds to the statement “The speaker effectively clarifies main points of the position taken and provides appropriate substantiation for these main points.”

The second viewing is for analysis of ethos (character of the speaker). The chart instructs the student to provide a brief summary of main factors that comprise the speaker’s character (i.e. trustworthiness, expert-
ness, goodwill, charisma, etc.) and how this character is conveyed. The student also responds to the statement, "The speaker effectively conveys positive character."

The third viewing is for analysis of pathos (stimulation of emotions). The form instructs the student to provide a brief summary of the speaker's stimulation of audience emotions (i.e. anger, friendship, fear, shame, and/or pity) and how this stimulation is achieved. The student also responds to a statement, "The speaker effectively stimulates audience emotions."

Analysis of the presentations using this form provides a means by which reviewers can formulate concise interpretations. Without such a framework for interpretation, reviewers can too easily generalize their observations if they don't have specific phenomena they're watching for. Use of the Likert Scale provides a foundation for classroom discussion of the presentations (i.e., presentations can be numerically scored regarding speaker effectiveness in these three areas).

Students can write additional comments on the back of one of the pages of the form. Occasionally the reviewer may have an observation that does not directly relate to logos, ethos, or pathos that he or she feels is relevant to the evaluation process. For instance, if the speaker is wearing uncommon clothing for the speaking situation, the reviewer (student) may want to note that on the form.

**FINDINGS**

The eleven presentations used in this study are listed in the references section. Each tape has been analyzed by the author using the aforementioned form. This type of analysis, based on author interpretation, is intended to be a pilot study. A more thorough analysis
can obviously be achieved by using the survey with students and quantifying their observations (using the Likert Scale numerical ordering). Thus, consistencies in the data can be used to build findings and conclusions.

Findings, based on verbal statements, nonverbal communication, and situational contexts, illustrate the benefit of using videotapes of presentations rather than written transcripts, in that nonverbal communication and situational contexts cannot be evaluated using written transcripts. It is the author's contention that such nonverbal communication and situational contexts impact viewer impression formation.

An example of such a finding is located in the tape, "Situation in the Persian Gulf" (1990). Review of the tape indicates Bush consistently pronounces Saddam Hussain in a manner different than journalists, spokes­persons, and those interviewed. This unique pronunciation is of the name "Saddam." Bush's unique pronunciation of Saddam rhymes with "Adam". The more common pronunciation of Saddam can be described as "Sawdawm" (with emphasis on the first syllable). The pronunciation of Saddam used by Bush is incorrect and translates to "shoe-shine boy." The more common translation of Saddam is correct and translates to "highly revered one." This usage exemplifies a unique form of (what could be referred to as a) "psychological operation."

A primary finding from the videotape analysis deals with the importance of what type of presentation Bush is making. These types, or contexts, of delivery include news conferences, speeches, news briefings, and White House events. The more control Bush has over the environment, and the more prepared he is with his message, correlates with his ability to convey his desired meaning. For instance, he is most effective in an oval office speech, where he has a prepared text and no live audi-
ence to contend with, than he is in a news conference, where he is responding to questions spontaneously.

The tape, “Bush and Thatcher on Invasion of Kuwait” (1990), is a news conference where Bush presents a prepared statement. Review of the videotape indicates Bush’s most notable factor, regarding character, is his expert image. His consistency with his position conveys an image of being knowledgeable and informed. The tape, “U.S.-Persian Gulf Resolutions” (1991), in contrast, is a news conference where Bush presents a prepared statement and responds to questions. In such a situation he has less control of his and others’ behaviors, as manifested in the questions asked and the aggressiveness with which they are asked. Review of the videotape indicates Bush appeared to be mildly disheveled (i.e. his hair was greasy and uncombed). This implies his hands-on approach with the Persian Gulf situation (making his normal well-kept appearance less of a priority).

Bush is most polished and “presidential” in a speech from the White House Oval Office (“Troop Deployment,” 1990). Review of the tape finds Bush speaks from the Oval Office (which enhances his credibility) and his family photos provide a backdrop (which enhances his humanitarian appeal). He is almost “fatherly” (when he provides a benevolently animated explanation for U.S. actions). The effect of environment is a factor in “Events in the Persian Gulf” (1990). This video is a Bush news conference from his vacation home in Kennebunkport, Maine. He speaks from his vacation home, outside, and wearing a blue blazer over a sport shirt. He seems well rested, comfortable, well informed (regarding his initial statement) and steadfast. The environment, and his familiarity with it, enhances his credibility.

The tape, “Presidential Address on Persian Gulf” (1990), is Bush’s speech to a joint session of Congress.
This presentation was designed to show a united American front, thus Bush could count on audience support from members of the House and Senate. Bush delivered a well polished speech. It was clear, concise, and delivered with a good sense of timing. A good example of statesman oratory (effective pauses and moderately animated). His logic was substantiated, his emotional appeals were built upon widely held beliefs of his audience, and his credibility was pronounced given he was the President addressing a joint session of Congress. This speech is a high point regarding Bush’s ability to stimulate emotion. His speech was interrupted roughly 24 times with applause.

The benefit of videotape analysis, over transcript analysis, is also apparent on the tape, “Geneva Meeting on Persian Gulf Crisis” (1991). Review of the tape indicates Bush inspires confidence and his leadership role is intact (he is flanked by U.S. and United Nations flags). One gets the feeling there is little posturing. Bush seems genuinely frustrated; especially as conveyed in his tone of voice. Thus, the aforementioned apparent preference for videotape analysis over transcript analysis is illustrated via the backdrop within which he speaks and his resolute tone of voice.

There are inherent weaknesses with the proposed model of analysis. Findings will be based on subjective interpretations of the videotaped presentations. When such interpretations differ in the classroom, this can be a foundation for classroom discussion regarding why interpretations differ. The subjective nature of this kind of inquiry is readily acknowledged. However, use of a subjective instrument does not negate or affirm the usefulness of the instrument. It merely substantiates that findings must be considered in light of the method used to arrive at the findings. The exemplification of this issue in the classroom benefits student understanding.
CONCLUSION

This study of President Bush's speeches on the Persian Gulf exemplifies how other public speakers can be analyzed. Student understanding can be benefited in a variety of courses in communication, including mass media, persuasion, intercultural communication, rhetoric, interpersonal communication, and public speaking. For instance, Bush's presentations are conveyed by the media, are often persuasive or informative, involve expression of meanings to culturally diverse audiences, and employ rhetorical strategies.

The goal of this article has been to describe methodology for studying presentations made by President George Bush during the Persian Gulf War. The study of Bush exemplifies how other public speakers might be analyzed using the Purdue University Public Affairs Video Archives. The strengths of the methodology described are use of videotape provides considerably more context than written transcripts and videotape can be used effectively in the classroom. As a pilot study this article illustrates the strengths and weaknesses of using packaged videotaped speeches as a teaching tool in the basic communication course.

The evolving information age offers teachers a variety of new tools for conveying class material. Examination of such tools is based on the belief we should clearly seek to acknowledge strengths and weaknesses of each innovation and work to capitalize on the strengths. The use of these kinds of videotapes helps students learn about the three kinds of proof and supporting materials that can be used in basic course assignments.
VIDEOS ORGANIZED CHRONOLOGICALLY


"Reaction to Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait," C-SPAN Public Affairs Video Archives. August 2, 1990 (ID 13395).


