



Reconciling the Issues And Concerns of the Place of Rhetoric in Communication for Development Practice: an Essay

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ABSTRACT

This paper was inspired by the clear signals the researcher received in his first few weeks as a graduate student of Development Communication at the University of Philippines Los Banos (UPLB), which pointed in the direction that Rhetoric had no place or significant role to play in Communication for Development/Development Communication practice. It aims at theorizing that Rhetoric has a place, and is relevant to Development Communication. It attempts this through an exploration of existing literature for foundations of a number of assumptions that appeared to have informed decisions on the usability of Rhetoric in Communication for Development. paper concludes that beyond answers to the discursive positions of the essay, a thorough understanding of the foundational elements of Rhetoric may help strengthen the quality of development practitioners by preparing and equipping them with the right measure of sensitivity, and an appreciation that the field of development is primarily made of 'people' and 'communities', and most especially in finding truthful answers to whether Rhetoric in its classical and contemporary incarnations, can offer an alternative way of addressing some of today's issues of development/social change and/or ensure a better grasp of principles and concepts of social change.

INTRODUCTION

To appreciate the place of Rhetoric in Communication for Development, it may be necessary to trace the foundations of rhetoric, examine some of its elements, and identify the contemporary incarnations in it that will serve to guide a search for a theoretical anchor for this paper. It is also believed that identifying Rhetoric in Development Communication practice must of a necessity begin with a comparative analysis of definitions of Development Communication and Rhetoric.

Rhetoric and its Classical underpinnings

The Great Philosopher, Aristotle contributed immensely to the epistemological foundations of Rhetoric. In the early years, Rhetoric centered around how speakers used their emotion, logic, and trustworthiness or credibility to persuade the audience. Since it was a strictly speech tradition in Aristotle's time, communication was regarded as artful public address. Tisia, who was recorded as Aristotle's student, took the essential teachings of Rhetoric to Greece where it was believed that the art could be taught and that eloquence was an innate gift. From Tisia's involvement in rhetoric, a group of teachers called the Sophists emerged. The Sophists were said to have brought an understanding into the use of language and its power for persuasion. Foss, (2009).

Plato's contributions to the epistemological progression of Rhetoric can also not be overlooked. He was Aristotle's teacher and a distinguished Athenian philosopher. The survival of his 'Dialogue' gave Rhetoric a boost as a potential tool for social cohesion.

The Evolution

Rhetoric continued to be seen as a practical art with emphasis on letter writing and preaching (Perelman and Sloane:2008), (Foss:2009). However, the Renaissance period provided Italian linguists, grammarians, and literary scholars who belonged to the humanist school of thought a boost, and projected them as leaders of thought and style. They believed in the critical place of language in constructing the human world and that language is the lens through which the meanings of the world come into existence and that human beings used symbols to make sense of the phenomena around them. This led to the Rationalism that brought Renee Descartes into prominence as he played a significant role in the separation of reason from feeling and emotion.

The critical place of reason later dominated rhetorical treatises in the 20th century when focus shifted to rational argument as an appeal, aligning with the new ideals of objectivity, empiricism and scientific approaches to knowledge.

This new line of thought heralded the development of faculty psychology, which was a new science premised on the notion that human beings had five faculties governing them. These faculties according to them, were understanding, memory, imagination, passion and will. Rhetorical theorists such

as George Campbell responded to this by offering ways to address the other faculties rhetorically. This included enlightening understanding, pleasing imagination, moving passions and influencing will.

The modern period in Rhetoric therefore sought to understand the effect of rhetoric on all aspects of human mind in various contexts such as delivery, letter writing and literatures. And thus evolved contemporary rhetorical theory from several past traditions and influences. However, from the earliest traditions and influences a number of assumptions, elements, rules or ethics and features that informed practice of the classical tradition of Rhetoric had emerged.

Major assumptions of Rhetoric

According to Aristotle, a speaker who is interested in persuading their audience should consider the age, sex and education of the audience.

Other elements of the rhetorical tradition included Logos, Pathos and Ethos. To Aristotle these constituted the triangle of Rhetoric. Logos were Logical proofs such as arguments, rationalization, and discourse. They are divided into two; Syllogisms and Enthymenes. Both refer to set of propositions that are related to one another by which conclusions can be drawn. Pathos relate to emotions drawn out of listeners while Ethos refers to perceived character, intelligence and goodwill of the speaker as revealed through the speech. It is also the mutual influence that speakers and listeners have on each other. (Mckay and Mckay :2010)

Some of the guiding principles and highlights of the Rhetorical tradition remain the following;

- Public address delivered in a democratic forum is a more effective way to solve political problems than by decrees.
- It is essentially a one-way communication.
- Oratorical training is the cornerstone of a leader.
- It is more art than science because there is an emphasis on language use and beauty of language to move people to action.
- The field was dominated by males until the 19th century. Also, in rhetorical tradition the speaker must be able to;
 - reason logically,
 - understand human character and goodness in their various forms,
 - understand the emotions and be able to name and describe them.

Modern ideas and thoughts

During the Second World War, with the advent of various media institutes which were established to study all levels of communication in addition to propaganda, a new crop of theorists and philosophers emerged with special interests in rhetorical issues and the use of language in making peace. In addition to this, they were also looking into ways of adapting arguments to various audiences and creating possibilities for reason and understanding systems of discourse that had the potential to structure societies.

Burke, a 20th century thinker, introduced the notion that all language use is rhetorical because it is aimed at moving people. To him, texts, that is, written materials, needed to be analyzed rhetorically. As a result of this idea, rhetoricians went beyond studying public speeches and began to critique texts. They brought a feminist approach to the tradition. To them, the goal is not to develop rhetors as speakers who persuade their audiences. To them the goal should be presentation as invitation. Speaker should present in a way that will enable transformation if the listener chooses to engage in such change. From this moment in the history of rhetoric, focus began to go beyond the classical speech centered approach, to embrace criterion of effectiveness for the evaluation of speeches, and later to multiple methods and subject matters. Rhetoric now was generally seen as the study of any kind of symbols. Craig and Muller, (2007)

Today, rhetorical theory is no longer a matter of public domains of classical Greece, but includes intrapersonal as well as interpersonal public discourse, of mediated messages and social movements focusing on what constitutes rhetoric in personal or public issues. It also includes social media, the internet and websites and the study of non- verbal cues and visual cues. Everything that constitutes the human experience can now be seen through rhetorical lenses and to validate this, many universities especially in the US now have Rhetoric courses that look beyond the traditional confines of speech. Such colleges include Iowa State University; New Mexico State University add a host of others. They also have MA. and PhD. courses in Rhetoric, Writing and Professional Communication, preparing students to practice or teach business and technical writing, write proposals, grants, produce manuals and in- house publications, as well as edit various kinds of materials.

Identifying the Place of Rhetoric in Development Communication

Quebral's (1971) definition of Communication for Development provides a classic lens through which our search for an answer may be found. To her, it is;

...the art and science of human communication applied to the speedy transformation of a country and the mass of its people from poverty to a dynamic state of economic growth that makes possible greater social equality and the larger fulfillment of the human potential...

Rhetoric on the other hand, according to Craig and Muller (2007) may be defined as “the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion” It is first an art and also a means of public discourse that deploys arguments, suggestions and especially persuasion, through the instrumentality of a trained speaker, skilled in the use of logic, emotion and credibility or ethics.

Questions/Queries

All of these necessitate the need for answers to queries for this paper. The questions are;

How tenable are the reasons put forward to defend the irrelevance of rhetoric to communication for development?

Does the claim of irrelevance of Rhetoric to communication for development practice cut across all known Schools of Communication for Development?

Are such claims of irrelevance of Rhetoric to Communication for Development hinged on balanced perspectives from the classical underpinnings and contemporary incarnations of rhetoric?

Are there acts of communication in Communication for Development practice that share similarities with rhetoric?

Can Rhetoric possibly answer for any of the lapses or gaps already found in Communication for Development practice?

How tenable are the reasons put forward to defend the irrelevance of Rhetoric to Communication for Development?

A number of contentions emerged against this Rhetorical tradition especially in the early days of its evolution. Perhaps those issues served to corrupt its memory and discourage its usability. A number of negatives have risen in the course of its evolution. Rhetoric was tagged as a tradition of empty words, an approach with little or no substance, and a mere decoration, or an ornament. Plato also had a dislike for the Sophists because they claimed there was no absolute truth. The survival of Plato’s writings against the Sophists has been attributed to the negative connotations of the tradition that persist today, and has affected a support for its usability or practicability in meeting perceived contemporary needs.

Perhaps the most prominent of the criticisms of the theory emerged with the failures and disillusionment that marked development practice at the turn of the last century, and the blame game against the modernization theory and its strong links to the top- down, vertical, and one- way approach which was regarded as its bane. This must have encouraged the search for alternatives which embraced the two- way, bottom- up, participatory approaches and relegated any connection to the rhetorical approach. From the illusions that have

trailed the consequent adoption of the participatory model, questions are being asked about the basis for an outright rejection of a tradition without strong proofs and without exploring whether it has a format and structure that can align with the character and process of change. Major arguments against the usability of Rhetoric in Development Communication practice include the assertion that;

- Communication for Development is much more than public address or democracy.

-Rhetoric is one - way communication and does not fit into today's method and practice of Communication for Development that advocates dialogue, participation, awareness and praxis.

- Communication for Development is much more than deploying the beauty of language to move people to action.

- Communication for Development is much more methodical or systematic in its approach, to accommodate a mere art of arousing emotion in people.

While it is clear that Communication for Development is guided by values of being purposive, pragmatic and value laden, it must not be forgotten that what drives Rhetoric are its strong values of logic and, credibility, as well as its systematic approach to presentation which are elements that cannot be overlooked at critical levels of the method and practice of Development Communication.

The possibilities and realities of the relevance of Rhetoric to Development Communication are perhaps echoed in Sinha's, (1978:22) description of the journey towards the accomplishment of the goals of development communication through the people where he states that practice;

... implied a desirable change in their thinking and doing. Thus, the importance of communication as a tool to motivate and persuade the people for eliciting positive response to various development ideas grew manifold...

To confirm Sinha's statement and underscore the pro-persuasion and pro-top-down biases, Melkote and Steeves (2001:55) confirm that;

... before transistorization made possible the ubiquity of radio sets, the task of convincing people through persuasive communication to change their life ways, fell to the extension services. Extension had long been and continues to be regarded as a logical and systematic method for disseminating productive and useful knowledge...

Some critical factors make counter-arguments against the place of Rhetoric and Communication for Development myopic.

First, is the one expatiated by Sargent (1978:11), where he underscores the indispensability of the credibility of the 'real person' in driving the development message. According to him, it is not enough to package a bulletin information that will help the farmer increase his yield because the farmer;

...wants to hear it from a real person, somebody he knows he can trust. The need for the communication to establish common ground with the receiver has of course long been recognized...

Sargent goes on to use an analogy from William Shakespeare's classic, *Julius Caesar*, by trying to bring alive the oratorical ploy of Mark Anthony in swaying the Romans to his side. He declares that;

...When Mark Anthony told the mob that he was 'no orator' but 'a plain blunt man that loved my friend' he was establishing common ground with the people of Rome....

When a development message is assigned by practitioners to a religious priest or credible, known public figure for delivery, the intention is to build on their credibility for an impactful message. There is no participation, no dialogue, but a tacit understanding that the speaker's credibility will deliver the message.

Does the claim of irrelevance of rhetoric to Communication for Development practice, cut across all known Schools of Communication for Development?

This question arises from a tendency to overlook the pedigrees, peculiar traditions, foundations and overriding cultures of other schools of thought. While the Los Baños school by virtue of its foundation in Agricultural communication is more predisposed to building capacity through Agriculture, Environment, Biotechnology, Human Nutrition, and a host of others, with the evidence based, scientific approach, the foundation of the African, Indian and Latin American schools was laid to view and solve critical concerns of change through the instrumentality of a public debate culture, a virile theatre tradition especially on stage and radio, that emphasizes the rhetoric role of persuasion. There is also in Africa an emerging trend of Biblical and Quranic liberation theology with charismatic Pastors as champions, as well as a burgeoning rhetoric of motivation, not just for the rural poor, but the urban "poor". All of these have begun to change not just the climate of thought of development communication practice, but are fast changing the landscape of rhetorical expression. While the Los Banos School by virtue of its tradition focuses on the scientific approach, other schools have found approaches that may be amenable to their peculiar issues and concerns. To find conclusive answers to critical questions, all schools of thought must be at the transactional roundtable.

As Quebral (2002;15) observes,

...Development Communication would not stay development communication for long if it were cut off from ideas coming from various sources and disciplines...it is expected to branch out, from time to time even lead the way as we grow in wisdom...

Are such claims of irrelevance of rhetoric to Communication for Development practice, hinged on balanced perspectives from the classical underpinnings and contemporary incarnations of rhetoric or tilted in favor of one?

From the list of claims against Rhetoric in Development Communication practice, it is clear that many of the opponents of the place of Rhetoric in Development Communication today seem oblivious of the dynamism of both the tradition and its discipline. Burke's newer declaration that all language use is rhetorical, and that texts need to be analyzed rhetorically has taken the veil off traditional speech - centred rhetoric. In contemporary times, the rhetorical tradition has taken on a more encompassing garment of accepting all language use. It has gone beyond speeches to texts, allowing the speaker to present in a way that will enable transformation, and also giving the listener the prerogative of choosing to either listen or not, or to either reject or accept the invitation to engage in change. It has become a response to an exigence or problem or what we call an intervention, with an offer to bring the interest of the audience to bear. Rhetors not just only create an environment that will aid understanding and respect for people's perspectives, they can also now engender equality and break the power imbalance. The tradition now emphasizes the need to carefully construct content and delivery in a way to best affect the audience, while maintaining the integrity of the communicator.

Are there acts of communication in Communication for Development practice that share similarities with rhetoric?

Perhaps the answer might begin by establishing certain complementarities between rhetoric and Development Communication. This can be done especially from key words in their definitions. First, is the reality that they both involve a degree of artfulness or creativity in their practice. There is also the 'human communication' perspective of development communication which aligns with the 'audience' feature of Rhetoric. The 'audience' outlook also tallies with the 'people' lens of Development Communication.

A complementarity of motivation evolves effortlessly if one marries the 'means of persuasion' in rhetoric with the 'larger fulfillment of the human potential' part of development communication. Concerning Student's Democratic Society, (SDS) a social movement, Robert (2004) says;

'...SDS's efforts at recruiting *via* public and mass communication channels took four forms: presentation of public speakers, sponsorship of conferences and

similar public gatherings, publication and distribution of an extensive list of pamphlets, and film showings by SDS chapters. Individual SDS chapters occasionally sponsored speakers who spoke to the general public in an attempt to spread SDS's beliefs and attract members... These speakers spoke about civil rights... foreign affairs (including the cold war, revolutions, American foreign aid, and conditions in particular countries or regions), poverty (including the plight of the national or local poor and projects which addressed the problem of poverty) ...

Perhaps to authenticate Robert's claims, Satell (2015) explains the strength of social movements by stating that they start by attacking perceptions through getting people to see how fundamental issues are to their well being. He declares that contrary to widely held beliefs, people were not 'rational calculators' but would rather see things in the 'context of connections' that already existed in their minds. He asserts that people build connections through personal contact and that successful movements had focused on 'growing organically through attraction' and most importantly by connecting to the mainstream.

The thesis of the article of Jacobson and Banerjee (2004) titled 'Social movements and human rights rhetoric in tobacco control' is that the tobacco control movement in the US as a matter of urgency, needs to secure its recent successes and avoid any public retrenchment. They believe that the new tobacco control strategy should encompass a focus on voluntary non-smoking strategies, use human rights rhetoric to its advantage, as well as the strengthening of public health voice for it to be more effective in political battles. They opine that in developing a new strategy, tobacco control advocates need to build a social movement based on a more forceful public health voice, along with the strategic use of human rights rhetoric, to focus on the power of voluntary non-smoking efforts.

Navera(2011) examines the State of the Nation addresses (SONA) delivered by Philippine

President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo (2001-2010) from 2002-2004, during which time she openly advocated the need to engage in the US government-led "global war on terror." It focuses on how these presidential speeches re-contextualized the war on terror discourse and how this re-contextualization consequently worked to help her alleviate the challenges of presidency because through the national addresses, the Arroyo administration was able to work towards sustaining its hold of power.

Robert (2004) supplies strong evidence that movements primarily rely on face to face communication when mobilizing. The paper also advances evidence that looking exclusively at mass and public communication when generalizing about movements, results in different and faulty picture of movements communication than if the entire range of movements communication is examined. The study further supports these contentions by comparing an outline of recruitment in public and mass communication channels alone when placed

side by side a description of recruitment looking at all communication channels in one social movement organization.

However, whether at the classical or contemporary level, there is always what Lloyd Bitzer refers to as the Rhetorical situation. The situation is explained as a response to an exigence or some kind of urgency, problem, or something not as it should be, with the audience as individuals capable of affecting the exigence with positive and negative factors that hinder or enhance the possibility that the audience will be able to affect the exigence. Rhetoric is said to come into being when a rhetor observes or creates an exigence and offers opportunity to bring the interests of the audience to bear on it through discourse. (Foss:2009)

In critical theory, rhetorical scholars have demonstrated interest in the way domination emerges in speeches of people, and have developed methods of analysis informed by critical theory. With the start of the critical rhetoric project in the early 80's especially with the work of Mckerrow and McGee, it was established that even though there was no move to separate reason or rational discourse from rhetoric, the critical perspective recognizes that not all communication is reasoned especially when the power of the establishment is entrenched and can determine who can say what, to whom, and in what way. They however gave room for this to be challenged. Mckinnon, (2009).

Invitational rhetoric as developed by Foss and Griffin also came to change the rhetoric landscape because of its radical departure from the original tenets and principles of the traditional conception of rhetoric. It came to challenge the definition of rhetoric as persuasion which was seen as a conscious attempt to change others. The invitational rhetoric perspective establishes that rhetors should be able to recognize situations in which they seek not to persuade the people, but just to create an environment that will aid or facilitate understanding, and respect for the people's perspectives that will foster equality in the relationship.

(Sonja :2009)

Closely aligned to the above is the school of thought labeled ideological Rhetoric which is the discourse which includes visual as well as external artifacts, with the motif of establishing or challenging existing power relations between and among the people.

Rhetorical Sensitivity was also a term coined by Hart and Burke in 1972 to underscore the communicator's attitudes about how to encode or state spoken messages. It represents an ideal way to present messages for best audience understanding, and effect calling for awareness of the complexity of the self and need to carefully construct content and delivery in a way to best affect the audience while maintaining their integrity.

UNICEF's Water, Sanitation and Hygiene, WASH campaign also provides a classic example of exigency especially for rapid but effective intervention sometimes through direct response in emergencies to the most vulnerable population which includes women and girls and children generally. In the midst of crises, such as conflicts, disasters and diseases, WASH, like many other such initiatives have continued to provide alternative methods that thrive on connections and little rationality to succeed.

On their own part, Dura et al (2013) underscore the long standing efforts of rhetoric and professional writing scholars toward participatory and intercultural approaches to social and organizational change, especially in making interactions more ethical, sustainable, inclusive and culturally relevant. They also note the reality of inherent methodological and practical limitations in implementing these approaches.

Can Rhetoric possibly answer for any of the lapses already found in Communication for Development practice?

Perhaps the biggest lapses in Development Communication practice emerged from the obvious weaknesses and disillusionment with the participatory paradigm. It was evident at a point in the history of development practice that the pictures earlier connected to bottom-up approaches to build the image of involvement of the people were nothing more than institutional devices to create the impression of ownership and denigrate the top down approach. Among such lapses were that;

-research and evaluation were non participatory,

-the perspective on participation was blurred since there was no evidence of sufficient certainty to rely on in determining whether participation was passive, functional, interactive, by consultation, or for material gains or incentives, or simply by self-mobilization. (Norad :2013)

What is perhaps most crucial in reconciling the issues and concerns of the relevance of Rhetoric to Communication for Development are the following;

There is a need for a closer look at, and a better understanding of the rhetorical appeals of logos, ethos and pathos. This is because a thorough understanding of these elements may help strengthen the quality of development practitioners. It prepares and equips them with the right measure of sensitivity and an appreciation that the field of development is primarily made of 'people' and 'communities', and that the impact they make as agents of change is determined by the people skill they possess over their technical skills. And perhaps there may be a need to find answers to whether Rhetoric can offer an alternative way of addressing some issues of

development/social change or ensure a better grasp of principles and concepts of social change

CONCLUSION

This paper establishes that an appreciation of the place of Rhetoric in Communication for Development is ensured with a thorough understanding of the foundations of rhetoric, and the identification of its contemporary incarnations. It opines that since age, sex and education consideration of the audience, in addition to quality of argumentation, credibility of speaker, and the ethical approach of speaker, were among the practice of rhetoric in classical times, this is a complement to the definition of Communication for Development as 'art and science of human communication'. The major weaknesses of Rhetoric which was the claim of its lack of involvement or participation of the audience has however been nullified by the discovery that even research and evaluation were non participatory. The perspective on participation was blurred because no evidence of sufficient certainty has been found, to determine whether participation was passive, functional, interactive, by consultation. (Norad,2013). The exigency of contemporary times and the new incarnations of Rhetoric which commands the acceptance of Rhetoric as all language use, has therefore lifted the veil beyond speeches to texts, allowing the speaker to present in a way that will enable transformation, and also giving the listener the prerogative of choosing to either listen or not, or to either reject or accept the invitation to engage in change. If the modern tradition emphasizes the need to carefully construct content and delivery in a way to best affect the audience, while maintaining the integrity of the communicator, it is hard to separate this new vision of Rhetoric from the classical pattern. There are acts of communication in Communication for Development practice that share similarities with Rhetoric, just as it is established that Rhetoric can answer for any of the lapses already found in Communication for Development practice. This is why the major challenge for today is to take a closer look at the classical rhetorical appeals of logos, ethos and pathos, and ensure that development practitioners imbibe them and use them with the right measure of sensitivity, and an appreciation of the 'people' and 'communities' that constitute their field of practice. This is because imbibing and making use of these elements is the major and final arbiter that beyond their technical expertise, development practitioners possess the 'people skills' which remain the ultimate proof that they can address the issues of development/social change in a contemporary world.

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