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- **The Efficacy of Myths and Superstitions in Ibibio Land: The Paradigm of Pottery**
- **Interrogating the Indifferences in the Application of Statistical Techniques in Theatre Scholarship**
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- **Principles and Styles of Good Oral Presentation**
- **Technological Influences of the *World-Wide-Web* on Theatre and Media Productions in Nigeria**

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Dynamics of Public Speaking

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And

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Introduction

The term presentation, in its broadest sense, can be seen as any written or oral encounter one has with every person or group of persons he or she ever meets. According to Clay (2004), an oral presentation is “a well structured/organized spoken material meant to inform, persuade or instruct a specific audience”. By oral presentation we mean a situation in which one person stands in front of an audience composed of several people. The speaker does the talking, and any oral participation by the audience, more often than not, is limited to making comments at the end of the presentation.

Making a good presentation is not essentially a natural ability – people can perfect the art with training and experience. Today, one of the major factors in learning and knowledge exchange, stable relationship, conflict resolution, and development is the possession of effective communication (presentation) skills. We have witnessed several written materials that lack the precision, economy, clarity and focus required of a good written presentation. In the same vein we have been victims of speakers (eg teachers, entertainers, instructors, leaders) who stir violence, or put their audience to sleep with their style of presentation. The presenter is familiar with the topic and the ideas were written down, but the message was not heard at all, or was delivered wrongly. Was it the manner of presentation? Was it because the audience

did not seem interested? Was it the kind of tools used? What was it?

The onus of this article is, therefore, to present, some of the styles and principles of oral presentations that yield results – from dynamic introductions to powerful closings.

Definition of terms

Principles

The term *principle* is defined by Lucas (2006) as “a fundamental truth; a comprehensive law or doctrine on which a process or a theory is based. It refers to the basic rules/ideas that explain how something works or is organized”. In this case, this definition is holistic and all encompassing the different facets of human activities. We have the principles of teaching, the principles of learning, the principles of leadership, the principles of administration, and of course, the principles of good presentation. There are all rules that must be followed to achieve desired goal(s)/objective(s).

What is Style

Style is an abstract term viewed from several perspectives and so has attracted a variety of definitions. M. H. Abrams (1981) defines it as “the manner of expression in speech or in writing – that is, it is how a speaker or writer says/writes whatever it is – that he says or writes”. Pleka (2004) describes style as “the arrangement of words in a manner which at once best expresses the individuality of the speaker or writer and the idea in his mind”. Edward Corbett's (1987) description sums it all up as an individual's way of expressing himself as distinct from another.

Style, therefore, is a combination of two elements: the idea to be expressed and the individuality of the speaker or writer. It is the result of the choices that a writer/speaker makes from the available vocabulary and syntactic resources of a language and other variables of communication. Despite the fact that speaking and writing require the use of words and sentences of a given language, the style of speaking differs from that of writing. Though written style has some oral qualities,

the major differences are not in kind but in degree, as the next part of the discussion shows.

Styles of Oral Presentation

By style of oral presentation we mean the summation or totality of all techniques and efforts (linguistic and extra-linguistic) that a speaker employs to make the presentation a success. Pamper (1999) defines it as the customary manner of presenting a paper orally. He goes on to advise that since it is very hard to change the way one express oneself, every presenter should use his peculiarities – (gestures, voice, expression, etc) to his advantage rather than try to copy another presenter's style.

The characteristic style of a work of any oral presenter may be analyzed in terms of its diction or choice of words, its sentence structure and syntax, the density and types of its figurative language, the patterns of its rhythm, component sounds and other formal devices (MH Abrams, 1981). According to Sterfield (1999) in *effective Writing*, the respective choices by respective presenters from the linguistic inventory often result in bad styles and good styles. While the good style achieves the communicative objective, purpose and intent of the speaker, the bad style does not. The audience sees it as boring, uninteresting and confusing. Good style of presentation takes time and effort to cultivate. Any speaker whose aim is to present effectively must strive to use as many as possible of the good qualities of presentation style enumerated here:

- Choose words and structures that convey a clear and unambiguous meaning
- Choose words and structures that are part of the language/field of discourse.
- Choose words and structures that convey your ideas precisely and meaningfully
- Use only the terms that your audience can picture.

Use words/structures that are appropriate to the context . A word is

considered inappropriate to its context if such a word does not fit the theme, the occasion and the audience. Remember that technical language is exclusively for technical audience, and stately language is not to be used everywhere. For technical presentations avoid the use of idioms and figurative expressions rather use the simple, concise and precise words and sentences that would appropriately convey the technical information.

Use technical vocabulary (or jargon) appropriate to the audience.

Avoid the use of neologism and archaisms. Neologism are recently coined words forms which appear in current speech and in some writing, and that soon fade away, while archaisms are words once in common use but no longer regarded as standard. They add nothing positive to your presentation (oral/written).

Avoid the use of dangling modifiers. A dangling modifier is a phrase that appears at the beginning of a sentence but does not modify the sentence, for example (1) On getting to the venue, the presentation had already ended. (Who got to the venue? The presentation? Certainly not). (2) Returning home late at night, the gate was locked (who was returning home late? Certainly not the gate?).

From the above, it can be stated summarily that good style is attractive, interesting and purposeful. Any piece of writing that is characterized with the above choices should be greatly effective, and acceptable by the audience.

In the conference on presentation skills held in Chicago in 2006, Professor Lewis identified five styles of oral presentation which are summarized as follows:

Good Old Boy: This is usually an experienced person who is the peer of most of the audience. Generally, the speaker has a great deal of information, but it may be poorly organized or poorly delivered.

The Entertainer: This person relies on jokes and stories to get his points

across. Good visual aids could be an important feature of the presentation. Sometimes there is so much emphasis on satisfying the audience that little information is actually transferred.

The Academic: This person tends to be very precise and deliberate in presenting information. There is a considerable content and it is usually well organized. It can also be boring and irrelevant, not relate with the audience.

The Reader: This person decides to read his material word for word. The material is not especially prepared for an oral presentation and can be overly technical, boring and hard to understand. All topics are covered and what is said is precise and accurate.

The Snail: This person is nervous about the presentation and goes into his shell. Like a snail, this person also moves slowly and the presentation seems to last forever.

What is best? You have to have a style you are comfortable with. Ideally, you have to have the rapport of the good old boy, the organization and the content of the academic, the ability to get and maintain interest of the entertainer, and the precision of the reader. Any one who does this should avoid slow pace of the snail and effectively present information to the audience.

Principles of a good Oral Presentation

As discovered, no matter how good or important a message may be, if it is not delivered in an interesting and effective way, such a message will not be heard at all. Whether a message is delivered by reading from the manuscripts, by reciting from the memory or by speaking extemporaneously, all that matter is adherence to the right principles as strong presentation skills advances one's career and poor speaking skills grounds a rising star.

Making a presentation can be made easier and effective if

speakers follow the simple principles discovered in this study; principles which are also in tandem with the postulations of an expert on public-speaking, Stephen Lucas (2006)

i. Preparation

This principle agrees with the saying that “the key to success is preparation”. Practice, it is said, makes perfect and repetition makes dexterity. The decision not to speak is of greater benefit to a person's reputation than an unorganized lecture, characterized with glib and inaccurate statements, and data signifying unpreparedness or lack of knowledge. In fact the most important part of a presentation is preparation. If the presentation is not well structured with background information and relevant content, it does not appear credible to the listener. Therefore all attempts to educate, inform, persuade or construct are overshadowed by audience's prejudice. The first step in preparation is to research the subject. Read reports and look up information about the subject with the specific purpose of writing a presentation script. Read thoroughly on the subject matter as your presentation can make or mar you. So, know your stuff. Watch presentation by great presenters of recent history. Discover what makes them effective.

The next step is to write up your presentation and have it reviewed by colleagues and supervisor; iterate and modify. Having had a simple and concise copy of your presentation script, practice it aloud and say it differently each time. Professor Arnold of the University of Idaho suggested at the Ottawa Linux Symposium in 2006 that the use of a mirror or a camcorder for video-taping ones rehearsals is vital for self critique. If possible, get a real audience (your family members, your colleagues, etc) to test again. It may sound silly, but it works well to get the kinks out of the presentation.

Sometimes, a perfectly prepared presentation may be hampered by the incompatibility of electronic systems. So it is advisable to make a few phone calls to find out the compatibility of the system with your laptop. Arrive early, and remember to anticipate crisis. If the unforeseen

happens – a power cut – make sure you have a hard copy of your presentation so that you can use a flip chart or an OHP (Overhead projector) if all else fails. Be very well prepared.

ii. Structural Organization

By this principle, a good presentation must consist of four (4) parts, namely, the opening, the body, the summary and the conclusion. The opening sets the stage for what is to follow. Here, the presenter introduces the topic, providing a very brief outline of the points to be covered. This helps keep the audience oriented properly within the framework of the script. The opening must be interesting and attractive.

The body is the part of the script in which the bulk of the subject matter is presented. It must be separated into smaller, easily assimilated modules. Each should convey one main idea. These sub-sections should each have their own simple opening, body and summary.

The summary should be brief and simple, reinforcing the central theme and purpose of the presentation by briefly emphasizing the key points and main idea of the script.

The closing highlights the presenter's position based on the points raised in his presentation and those raised during the question session (if any). It is at this point that handouts and samples may be distributed.

iii. Outlining the presentation

The principle of outlining requires the speaker to present to the audience, at the introductory stage of the presentation, a plan, a list or a structure of what is to be presented. It gives the audience insights as to what is forthcoming, and how it will be structured. In short, an outline is a list of the main ideas or facts in a presentation, usually presented during the introduction/opening. It must cover the introduction, the main ideas in the body, the summary, the conclusion and the recommendations.

In other words, something like "First I am going to explain that project 'A' is important, because it allows you to do 'xyz'. Then I will

show you how you can do 'xyz' and how well project 'A' does those things. Then I will explain how we could do 'u', 'v', and 'w' as well and how useful that will be. Finally, I will tell you briefly what I have told you and then make my conclusions and suggestions." This is one way to present an outline. Outlining is indispensable in any good presentation, as it helps the speaker match each slide with an item on the outline, making his presentation coherent.

iv. Attractive Opening

The presenter is required to open the presentation with flair, style and impact. The best way is to jump right into the topic and say something that grabs the audience's attention, something compelling, humorous, shocking or imaginative. The following devices may suffice for granting the audience interest and attention.

- *Quotation*

A quotation from a well-known person can be a very effective opening. A quote from obscure source is not as successful; part of the impact comes from the name recognition itself. For a speech that discusses effective time management: "Mark Twain once said, 'Never put off till tomorrow what you can do the day after tomorrow.' Well, that may be what Twain believed, but I am here to show you how you can get the most out of today!" Or for a presentation on workplace civility: "You can get much farther with a kind word and a gun than you can with a kind word alone." That's what Al Capone said, but it's funny that nowadays we can't even get a kind word."

- *Rhetorical Question*

Asking a question immediately engages the minds of the audience members as they attempt to answer it in their heads. "How many of you have ever considered plastic surgery?" "What is the most

embarrassing thing your kids have ever said out loud?” “Where were you on September 11?” Keep in mind that you're not looking for people to actually answer you; you simply want to get their brains working. Accompany your question with one hand raised in the air and the audience will be cued that you're interested in a showing of hands, not verbal response. Your questions must have relevance with the topic.

- ***Declarative Statement***

Opening with a bold, powerful statement is another good way to grab the audience's attention. A startling statistic or bold claim can jolt them and set the stage for an educational or informational talk. “In the time it takes for me to speak to you tonight twenty men will be diagnosed with colon cancer.” “90% of this audience have HIV/AIDS.” A shocking statement like this is often followed by a pause and then a disclaimer, such as “according to so-and-so in his book, ...” or “so I thought when I was growing up in the South.”

- ***Scenario***

This type of opening usually begins with “Imagine ...” and the goal is to create a scene for audience members to visualize in their minds. “Imagine yourself in Tahiti, sitting on a beautiful, secluded beach, a gentle breeze blowing...”. Remember that audiences rarely remember the words you say; they remember the pictures you paint for them.

- ***Anecdote***

You have probably already heard somewhere that you should never open a speech with a joke. That's true, but it is okay to open with a short, amusing story, as long as it is both short and amusing. Find the funny, personal stories in your life and use them as your opening, making sure they relate to the theme of your speech. This device is a favourite of the minister at my church. He often starts his Sunday sermon with a

humorous story from his childhood or of raising his 4-year old twins. Most of us instantly relate to the anecdote, and our minds are then open to the broader message he as to share.

Tips on Opening

The best humour comes out of real life experiences, situations you have been involved in yourself or witnessed. Any funny lines you say should have been actually said by someone. Do not fall into the trap of trying to tell jokes. Tell humorous, personal stories instead. As you begin writing your presentation, do not start with the opening. Write your objective, key points, outline and body of the speech first and then write the opening. You can't write an opening before you've clarified the content of the presentation. Don't put the cart before the horse.

Know your audience

This principle sees the knowledge of the audience by the presenter as a very critical factor in the success of any presentation. It must be audience centered and not self centered. You must give the answers to the following questions about the audience if you must succeed in your presentation:

Will the audience come voluntarily or be required to attend? A knowledge of this will determine the pace of your presentation. For example, the members of the Horticultural Society are likely to enjoy it if you linger on specifics of tomato plant fertilization while a middle school field trip would appreciate it if you just got on with the show.

What are the expectations and interests? Your purpose in presenting is to inform, persuade or entertain while getting recognition or applause from the audience. To do this means satisfying them in something in which they are interested. How can you achieve this if you know not their area of interest, their prejudices, their expectations, moods: fun-loving or stodgy? This knowledge set the presenter on the right track, and helps him tailor the presentation to audience needs and expectations.

What is the size of the audience? This knowledge is vital, as speaking with a small group poses challenges and opportunities other than speaking to a large group. The size also determines the tone of the presentation, whether the presenter will sit or stand, whether to be formal or informal. You need to find out also, specific demographic information about the audience such as age, job, professionalism, familiarity with the subject etc.

No two audiences are exactly the same. The presenter who must deal with two audiences on the same topic must as a rule of thumb adjust his contents, materials, time, diction, personal approach and images to suit the audience, otherwise the presentation will pass over their heads and the resultant effect could be negative.

Finally, no matter the common characteristics of your audience, people learn differently. Some understand concepts better if they are able to read, while others learn better through hearing. A good presentation accounts for both types of persons by using visual aids.

In summary, a successful speaker achieve the goals of his expression, audience satisfaction and desired rewards by knowing the audience.

Personal Approach

This principle stipulates that the personal features of the presenter have a major impact on how the presentation is received. The principle consists of four aspects: gesture, dressing, voice and eye contact.

Gesture:

Presenters are here required to use gestures appropriately. Gestures are reflections of every speaker's individual personality used to highlight points to make additional emphasis. Gesturing, therefore, is natural and should not be inhibited, or else the speaker will become tense. However, the gesture must be purposeful, and reflective of the presenter's words.

In other words, your gesture must be in partnership with the words in communicating the same thought/feeling so that the audience will note only the effect, and not the gesture itself.

Billy Austin (2004) in *Body Language in Communication* holds that the general rule in the use of gesture as an aspect of the principle of personal approach, is that “standing, walking or moving about with appropriate gestures or facial expression is preferred to sitting down or standing still with head down and reading from prepared script”.

Avoid the following:

- Fiddling with a watch, pen or some other object
- Crossing your arms
- Hunching your body
- Touching your face or rubbing your nose
- Looking away
- Putting your hands in pocket (it shows disrespect for the audience).
- Each of the above conveys a lack of confidence or discomfort with the topic, audience or your own professional self. Gesture effectively.

Voice:

Voice is critical. The speaker should use sufficient volume to be heard. Modulation is also important. It is the process of varying the pitch or level of the voice. Speaking in a monotone might put the audience to sleep. Monotonous high level voice should also be avoided. It could be tiring to listen to.

Eye Contact:

Eye contact is a powerful tool of communication. It enables the

speaker/presenter to connect with the audience, project sincerity and openness and keep the listener's attention alive. However, maintaining eye contact can be difficult for some people (either in receiving or giving it), and there are some cultural issues to consider when using it.

Whatever may be the case, eye contact is vital in a presentation as it expresses intimacy, and as a direct glance becomes longer, the feelings become more intense. So for a good presentation, a duration of one second is advisable. A longer glance might make someone uncomfortable and may be construed as flirting.

Tame the troublemakers

A critical part of maintaining the audience bond is being able to handle the group gracefully even when things aren't going your way. When it comes to handling trouble makers, be a troubleshooter. Like John Wayne in Bolton (2006), always be prepared for the ambush. The following are four common types of troublemakers and tips on dealing with them gracefully.

Motor-mouths

(Two people chatting constantly). Walk toward the conversationalists, touch one of the culprits on the shoulder and ask if he or she has a question. Another way to handle this situation is with... silence and direct eye contact.

Bumps-on-a-log

(People who are unresponsive during audience participation). When asking a question, don't put anyone on the spot by calling his or her name. Instead, wait patiently for a volunteer. If the audience is reluctant to participate, have them write their response first, then respond orally. This will give them a chance

to think, and they will become willing participants. Ask them a question in their area of expertise. Sometimes you need to clarify or rephrase the question. If you are doing activities in small groups, it will help if you shuffle the people occasionally.

Snipes

(People who are out to “snipe” you with negative comments or questions). Don't become defensive or argue with a snipe. Let the person air his or her concern. Ask the rest of the audience how they feel about the issue. Usually the audience will pounce on the snipe for you! Or, you can use a two-step escape. First, paraphrase the question or concern (“I hear what you're saying...”). Second, explain your point of view (“It's been my experience...”).

Scene-Stealers

(People who dominate the session with comments or questions). When the scene stealer strikes, say, “Let's get some input from some of the other people.” Physically move away from the person and withdraw eye contact. Look away. This is a powerful signal. The scene-stealer should feel as though his or her flame has just been doused. If the problem persists, talk to the person during break. Or you can tell the person that you will be available after the session for further discussion. You could also use the time-out signal to stop the action.

Audience Feedback

This principle stipulates that the presenter should, during the presentation, try to find out if the audience is still following, or losing focus. This should be done by asking once in a while if everything is still clear. It makes special sense if you have just introduced a complicated

slide.

An easy way to check if everyone is still paying attention is to make a funny remark every once in a while, and see if people catch it. If not, try to be clear or make your remarks funnier.

Questions and Answers

Presenters are generally required to leave time for questions – ideally, five minutes for a presentation of 30 minutes duration. An applauded presenter may have a strong desire to talk for the full amount of time allotted – this temptation must be resisted especially as a presentation is not complete without a Question and Answer session. It is from here that valuable audience feedback is derived, showing how much has been learnt.

The following tips should be adhered to for a successful question session:

The presenter must, during presentation, anticipate questions and prepare resources, and also think ahead to all possible questions during delivery.

Treat all questions with respect. Remember to paraphrase a question before answering as it gives you allowance to get at the proper answer. The presenter must endeavour to control the crowd, permitting questions at his convenience.

- The presenter should always answer questions briefly and to the point.
- As a presenter, ask friendly questions – don't use questions to embarrass or badger; never call anyone who is not ready to talk.
- Avoid asking questions that imply lack of knowledge or intelligence.
- When challenged, be candid, firm and assertive without being aggressive, and avoid over responding.

- Be honest: if you cannot answer a question, say so. No one is an island of knowledge, not even the world's best.
- Avoid circumstances that require an apology.
- Use the last question to summarize.

Summary and Conclusion

This principle agrees with an old axiom that says "... Tell them what you are going to tell them, tell them and tell them what you told them". It requires the central theme or purpose of the presentation that was highlighted in the introduction to be reinforced. Key points, as contained in the outline and enunciated in the body of the presentation be restated, and conclusions made based on the available points.

Also in summarizing and concluding, we must make sure that we do not add anything new – it should merely cap existing information, or re-list it. Remember also to take a bow while thanking the audience for listening (Livingstone, 2005).

Conclusion

We have seen style as the totality of all the choices a writer/speaker makes from the available linguistic inventory as well as from the extra linguistic variable of communication. We have also discovered that to have a good style of oral presentation, the presenter should choose words and structures that are part of the language; that convey ideas clearly and meaningfully; that are appropriate to the context; and that avoid neologisms and archaisms, dangling modifiers, and the use of idioms and figurative for technical writing.

For a good style of oral presentation the presenter should combine the rapport of the old boy, the organization and content of the academic, the interest of the entertainer, and the precision of the reader. And to have a good oral presentation some basic principles must be adhered to. These include: the principle of preparation, the principle of

outlining, an attractive opening, audience centeredness, personal approach, audience feedback, the creation question and answer sessions and summarizing and concluding. For as long as a presenter stays focused on the styles and principles of oral presentation, highlighted, in preparation, in delivery and during the question and answer sessions he would attain a high level of success.

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