

TRANSFORMATIONS OF CLASSICAL RHETORIC IN MODERN PUBLIC DISCOURSE

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Abstract

Purpose – the purpose of this article was to present the main features of classical rhetoric and to reveal their transformations, focusing, in particular, on Aristotle's theory of categories of persuasion, an important technique of rhetoric applied in modern public discourse.

Design/methodology/approach – the paper is based on scientific literature analysis and comparative analysis of different types of public speeches from ancient times to the present day.

Findings – the final thesis of this article states that, although the requirements for public speech have been modified throughout history, the ability to reach rhetorical persuasion depends on the capacity to speak under the canons of classical rhetoric. Moreover, the most effective communication strategy is based on the synthesis of logos, ethos and pathos categories and their application in modern public discourse.

Practical implications – the paper reveals several practical implications important for leadership development. Ethical and effective eloquence is the key to leadership, encouraging young members of contemporary society to be equally responsible for preserving common values and overcoming global issues. The modern public discourse demonstrates an obvious tendency towards opposition in speaking and acting processes. This situation is conditioned by an obvious lack of synthesis of the logos, ethos and pathos categories in daily rhetoric activities. Although it is common to speak eloquently and convincingly, spoken words do not always match the actions taken, particularly in political discourse. Therefore, rhetoric values, such as *res non verba* taken from Antiquity, the cradle of European culture, ought to be included in the education and development system of future leaders.

Research limitations/implications – the speakers selected for the scope of this review differ in terms of their intentions, purposes, and types of speeches, i.e. some are informative, while others are emotional or appealing. The difference in structure and type of public speeches limits the scope of the analysis. Moreover, an additional factor of distinct variables has to be taken in consideration analyzing modern public discourse, namely historical period, culture, age, religion, gender and occupation, and, last but not least, the circumstances of a public speech which can all have a negative impact on the evaluation of paper making the analysis superficial and incomplete.

Originality/Value – within the great variety of rhetoric theories and conventions, some have been modified over time, although the fundamental ones remain unchanged to this day. This has not, however, reduced the significance of public speaking quite on the contrary public speaking has become a daily activity in everyone's life. Therefore, Aristotle's theory of rhetorical categories is an important approach to every public speaker and the most effective strategy leading to rhetorical persuasion. Moreover, the dissemination of rhetoric is promoted by a significant growth of communication throughout the world. Furthermore, stylistics, structural poetics, text linguistics, logic, advertising theory, pedagogy, psychology and other sciences are also based on the research of classical rhetorical traditions and transformations. By comparison, in the context of cultural integration, eloquence and the ability to communicate has become particularly important in social, political, educational or entrepreneurship activities.

Keywords: rhetorical transformations, modern public discourse, Aristotle's categories of persuasion, logos, ethos & pathos, virtues of eloquence.

Research type: general review.

JEL classification: Z13, Y80.

Introduction

The objective of this article is to present the main features of classical rhetoric and to reveal the transformations it has undergone by applying Aristotle's theory of categories of persuasion as the main method for analyzing and assessing public speeches. Moreover, the theory of virtues of eloquence is an important technique for every public speaker seeking to deliver a correct, clear, well-reasoned and expressive public speech. Although a wide variety of theories of rhetoric have been developed and modified over the centuries, the fundamental theories remain unchanged. Therefore, Aristotle's theory of rhetorical categories is an important approach to every public speaker and the most effective strategy leading to rhetorical persuasion. This has not, however, reduced the significance of public speaking. Quite on the contrary, public speaking has become a daily activity in everyone's life. Classical rhetorical canons defined by ethics are therefore an important factor grounding the approach of every public speaker. Moreover, the dissemination of rhetoric science is promoted by a significant growth in the importance and implications of communication throughout the world. Philosophy, philology, logic, psychology and ethics have got crossing boundaries with rhetoric. Stylistics, structural poetics, text linguistics, logic, advertising theory, pedagogy, psychology and other modern sciences are also based on the research of rhetorical traditions and transformations. By comparison, in the context of cultural integration, eloquence and the ability to communicate has become particularly important in social, political, educational or entrepreneurship activities. In conclusion, ethical and effective eloquence is the key to leadership, encouraging younger members of society to be responsible equally for preserving values and adopting solutions to global challenges.

1. Theoretical background

The noticeable increase in the scale of communication has promoted the spread of rhetoric. In our dynamic intercultural society, it has become vitally important to know how to communicate in political and social areas and to be able to employ effective techniques of persuasion. Moreover, the ability to apply knowledge of the time-tested canons of classical rhetoric definitely helps to preserve values, address global issues and successfully manage daily life activities. It is therefore essential to have a clear understanding of the transformations and modifications of rhetoric, its objects and classification, the role of public speakers, their values, intentions and goals and finally, the importance of Aristotle's categories of persuasion.

As is well known, the discipline of rhetoric has been considered over its long history of 2500 years to be the art and theory of eloquence. The formal study of rhetoric is believed to have originated approximately in the 6th-5th century B. C. in the ancient city-states of Greece and their colonies (Brummett, 2011). Although the origin of rhetoric dates back to the ancient oriental civilizations of China, India, Assyria and Egypt, the development of this discipline is attributed to Greek culture. Thus, in its contemporary understanding, rhetoric is a Greek phenomenon.

Rhetoric (gr. ῥέω – I speak, ῥήτωρ - speaker) was one of the seven liberal arts of ancient Greece along with grammar, arithmetic, geometry, music, astronomy and dialectics. Together, these constituted the oldest programme of subjects deemed essential for a free citizen. An interesting concept of the word is found in the ancient Egyptian civilization, where it was believed that the word for rhetoric was born in the process of breathing and means the human spirit itself (Bielinienė, 2000). Greek rhetoricians were subsequently the first to develop and lay down rhetorical rules and canons that were later transferred, adapted and modified by Roman orators. The importance of rhetoric in Antique culture is reflected by the vast number of rhetors who practiced it for centuries, including Gorgias, Lysias, Demosthenes, Sokrates, Plato, Aristotle, Theophrastus etc. in Greece, and M. T. Cicero and M. F. Quintilian in Rome, still widely quoted by contemporary leaders, linguists, legists and public speakers.

It is important to note that elements of eloquence and types of orators were already known in the 8th century B.C. In the Homeric epics Iliad and Odyssey, for instance, public speakers were classified into certain types of characters, and features of eloquence such as laconism, accuracy and clearness, were recorded as virtues of language. Moreover, the 5th century, when rhetoric became important in court, is considered to be the golden age in the development of rhetoric (Bielinienė, 2000). Rhetoric closely associated with politics, trade and law, was mostly about deliberative, juridical and demonstrative public speeches. The classification of public discourse has remained unchanged up to the present, although the informative speeches common to modern rhetoric were not found initially. Informative speeches, i.e. lectures, lessons, reports and interpretations, further subdivided into instructions, reportages and comments, were added to the previous classification of speeches (Koženiauskienė, 1999).

For centuries, thinkers and writers have developed different approaches towards understanding the concept, forms and functions of rhetoric. The most common understanding of rhetoric as an art and a theory-based practice has remained unchanged, whereas the concept of rhetoric as a subject of education has undergone several modifications. Rhetoric, a subject mandatory for every free citizen and essential in the primary schools of ancient Greece, is not even included nowadays in secondary school syllabuses, and is also given less attention in higher

education institutions. It is rarely chosen as an alternative subject and is only available for students of Law and Religion.

2. Transformations of Classical Rhetoric

Modern rhetoric, referred to as 'new rhetoric', is perceived as a theory of mass communication, where communication is understood as an exchange of thoughts, words and expressions and tends to be interactive, innovative, and mutable (Baršauskienė et al, 2005). Its main form, the public speech, is not limited to one-way communication with the intention of convincing the interlocutor. On the contrary, in modern public discourse two-way communication and interaction aimed at mutual persuasion is important. In Antiquity, public speaking was associated with the artistic expression of words, i.e. rhetorical figures. In order to achieve rhetorical persuasion, the theory of virtues of style had to be applied. In fact, contemporary rhetoric is closer to oral manipulation and verbal and nonverbal suggestibility (Dobržinskienė, 2015). Therefore, it is not sufficient nowadays to simply present information, it is also important to be effective in drawing attention, choosing interesting forms in attracting the audience and matching both verbal and nonverbal aspects of communication.

In ancient times, the stage was usually reserved for male speakers only. A speaker who was able to interpret and convince the crowd was called a rhetorician by Greeks and an orator by Romans. Only a person responsible for reading court rulings, a lawyer or a prosecutor, a man of city-state, a man speaking publicly in a social meeting or a teacher of rhetoric (Koženiauskienė, 2005) could be called a rhetorician. A rhetorician was *vir bonus, dicendi peritus* or, in modern terms, a knowledgeable well-educated person, skilled in speaking (Jaffe, 2013), the leader of the contemporary society. Moreover, the greatest speeches ever given are attributed to men and not to women. Although public speaking has never been dependent on any social division such as gender, race, religion, social status, age or ethnicity, historically the great speeches delivered by women have never gained the same level of recognition as have speeches by their male counterparts. In his book *Speeches that have changed the world*, Simon Sebag Montefiore lists the forty-eight most inspiring public speeches of all time, only three of them were given by women, namely the speech by Queen Elizabeth I *I have a king's heart and the spirit of a woman*, delivered before the Spanish invasion, and public speeches performed by Susan B. Antony and Emmeline Pankhurst, fighters for women's rights.

The number of women orators has been increasing during the last two centuries. Today, not only women, but also teenagers are becoming effective public speakers. Severn-Cullis Suzuki, Greta Thunberg, Malala Yousafzai, Emma Gonzalez are female activists well known for their

public speeches on global political, educational or environmental issues and can be considered as excellent public speakers and authorities of contemporary world. Severn-Cullis Suzuki became famous for her impressive public speech known as *The Girl Who Silenced the World for five Minutes*, given on global environmental issues in 1992 in Brazil. Greta Thunberg is a current environmental activist well known not only for her effective public discourse, but also for her encouraging protesting actions outside the Swedish parliament. These teenagers, who have drawn the attention of the global international community, could be considered as examples of constructive and effective eloquence. The modern public discourse of young speakers as a result demonstrates an obvious tendency towards synergy in speaking and acting processes. Meanwhile, political leaders have got the lack of it.

2. 1. Aristotle's categories of persuasion

Although rhetorical persuasion is considered to be the goal of every orator and the result of any effective public speech, the specific strategies of persuasion to be used in a public speech in order to convince the audience are a matter for the individual choice of the speaker. Theorists and practitioners of classical rhetoric have concluded that the success of a public speaker is predetermined by three factors: general erudition and competences, the ability to follow rhetorical rules and use language assets and finally, the orator's personality and charisma (Koženiauskienė, 2005). Thus, erudition, ethics, etiquette, energy, aesthetics, emotions and eloquence constitute the fundamental qualities for public speaker and define him/her as a personality. Meanwhile, spiritual poverty and deficiency of values eliminate any kind of persuasion (Koženiauskienė, 2005).

Skilled orators of the ancient world followed Aristotle's categories of persuasion in writing public speeches. The synergy of a free combination of categories determined the success of eloquence. The first category of rhetorical persuasion in Liddell and Scott's lexicon is therefore defined as the Greek word (gr. λόγος) meaning not only a word, but also the definition beyond that, and can be described as "the word" or something by which "the inward thought is expressed" and, "the inward thought itself". Logos reflects a public speech based on facts and other clear evidence, and a logical expression of thought and language. Moreover, this category includes the intellectual aspect of persuasion, rational ways of proof, facts, examples, statistics, numbers, and other arguments based on truth and justice. Logos may be defined as the result of the topic, professional competences, subjectivity, critical thinking, and logical reasoning (Koženiauskienė, 2005).

The juridical type of speeches most closely refers to the category of logos, due to the importance of presenting facts based on the evidence, the testimony of witnesses, documents and the conclusions of experts. *On the Murder of Eratosthenes*, a speech by Lysias, a famous logographer of Athens, can be given as a perfect example. This speech was given by Euphiletos, defending

himself against the charge of having murdered Eratosthenes after he supposedly caught him committing adultery with his wife (Koženiauskienė, 2001). The structure of the text is similar to that of the public speeches given in courts by lawyers, prosecutors or judges, who often apply the rules of classical rhetoric. This type of speech stands out from other speeches in its typical structure, application of stylistic devices, clarity, accuracy, correctness, logics and well-organized argumentation. In terms of rhetorical persuasion, modern juridical speeches differ from those written by ancient orators, as logographers sometimes included in their speeches arguments in defense of both sides and used all possible means of persuasion, as Gorgias did in his speech *An encomium of Helen*. Meanwhile, the use of unacceptable methods of argumentation (*argumenta ad hominem*, *argumenta ad vanitatem*, *argumenta baculina*) is not admissible in modern public discourse, which in most cases follows an almost identical plan due to the high cost of time.

According to the Liddell and Scott Lexicon, ethos (gr. ἦθος) refers to manners and moral issues. Questions of ethics come into play whenever a public speaker faces an audience. In the ideal world, as the Greek philosopher Plato noted, all public speakers would be truthful and devoted to the good of society (Gunderson, 2009). The term denotes ethics, etiquette, empathy and other important features of a public speaker. As Aristotle stated, ethos is the most convincing category due to its influence on the moral authority of the speaker in the context of rhetorical appeal - *argumentum ad auctoritatem*. Ethos can be developed by choosing the appropriate level of vocabulary and the right topic. It also refers to the choice of a dress code. In this respect, different audiences require a different appearance. Other very important factors are self-possession and self-confidence, as well as good preparation and a solid understanding of the topic. In other words, it is like an early commitment to the audience. The ethos category can also be observed in modern informative public speeches, where the main role is played by the authority of the orator as a leader, a professor, a teacher or an educator. It can be concluded that the most effective strategy of persuasion is founded not only on a well-structured speech, but also on the authority of the speaker.

The third category of persuasion, according to the Liddell and Scott Lexicon, pathos (gr. πάθος), is a Greek word with two meanings: “suffering” and “experience.” The words empathy and pathetic are derived from the same term. Pathos is thus an emotional appeal, a method applied to persuade the audience through an appeal to the emotions, attempting to invoke sympathy, draw on pity, encourage action or make the audience feel what the speaker wants them to feel. Although theories usually attribute persuasive techniques to structural parts of a public speech (Brummett, 2011), they can also be predetermined by the type and genre of the public speech as well as by the intention and purpose of the orator. Excellent examples of pathos are persuasive speeches performed by public speakers on issues of environmental protection, climate change and sustainable development.

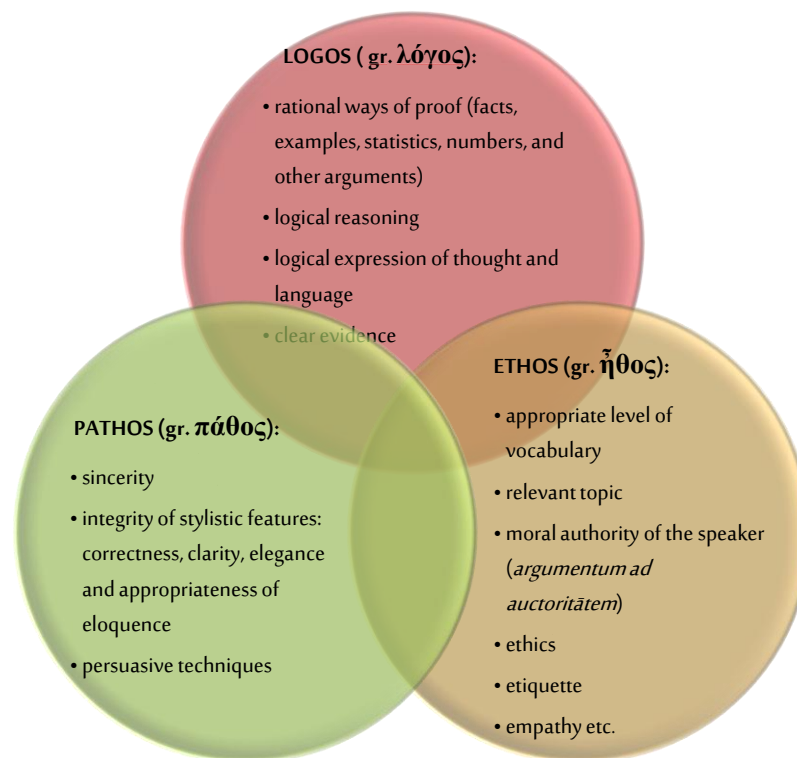


Figure 1. Rhetorical techniques of persuasion

In conclusion, the success and efficiency of rhetoric and communication entirely depend on the synthesis and appliance of rhetorical techniques of persuasion, i.e. logos, ethos and pathos.

2. 2. Pathos as an important aspect of virtues of eloquence

An important place in public discourse is taken by pathos – the selection of a proper language style. The fundamental principles of good public speaking (gr. ἀρεταὶ λέξεως; lat. *virtūs eloquentiae*), the essence of pathos, are applied in every public speech, regardless of its type or genre. Thus, two conditions are necessary for the realization of pathos in a public speech: sincerity and the integrity of stylistic features, i.e. clarity, correctness, elegance and appropriateness.

The development of virtues of eloquence is closely related to Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. Although they are not referred to as values, the three features of style, clarity and correctness (τὸ ἐλληνίζειν) as well as appropriateness (τὸ πρέπον), are mentioned in the book (Valiene, 2007). The modified theory of eloquence of style was introduced by Aristotle's disciple Theophrastus, who distinguished four norms of style attributing them to his treatise *Περὶ λέξεως*, where ἐλληνισμός meant the correct appliance of Greek grammatical and lexical norms, σαφήνεια referred to the use of clear words, πρέπον to the use of appropriate style, and κατασκευή to the appliance of beauty. Greek rhetoricians

later formulated different stylistic requirements for public speeches. The original theories of stylistic values (*ἀρεταί*) are found in works of other philosophers.

Cicero continued the Greek tradition by using the same theory of eloquence of style suggested by Theophrastus. In his books *Brutus sive de claris oratoribus* and *Orator sive de optimo genere oratorum*, he distinguished the same four basic features of eloquence of style: correctness (*latinitas*), clarity (*perspicuitas*), expressiveness (*ornatus*) and appropriateness (*decorum*). Expressiveness and appropriateness of language were considered to be the most important features of eloquence.

Quintilian, a representative of Roman rhetoric, also frequently referred to theories suggested by his predecessors Aristotle, Theophrastus and Cicero. Numerous quotations from Cicero in his texts prove that the influence of Cicero was undeniable. The four features of style, *virtūtes dicendi*, recognized by Quintilian's predecessors, were also analyzed in his book *Institutio Oratoria*.

The theory of virtues of eloquence has been modified over time, but its fundamental features remain the same. Therefore, the specific functions it was developed to perform should also be pointed out. The feature of clarity in modern rhetoric is defined as the ability to put even the most complicated subject in a simple, popular clear way, avoiding ambiguous, unusual and complex terms. Furthermore, the expressiveness is interpreted as the ability to use rhetorical devices avoiding redundancy of lexical elements. Third, the norm of appropriateness is considered to be the integrity of verbal form and content depending on the context of the public speech. Moreover, this list of the fundamental elements of eloquence was later extended to include consistency, accuracy and conciseness of language and other specific features (Koženiauskienė, 1999).

Finally, the theory of stylistic values takes an exceptional place in classical and modern rhetoric, and helps to ensure the realization of *pathos* in any public speech.

3. Virtues of eloquence in modern public discourse

The rhetoric of Cicero and other Roman orators is characterized by its expressive language due the tradition of using the grand style, which was sublime, solid, rich and sophisticated. Almost all well-known speeches of Cicero were written in the grand style in order to impress the audience with colorful, sophisticated metaphors, rhythm, rare words, rhetorical questions, hyperboles, antitheses and graduation. As the most famous Roman orator, Cicero used the grand style all his life and considered Demosthenes as the greatest authority on eloquence. (Kučinskienė, 2009).

Modern public discourse, on the contrary, is considered to be more subtle and moderate in terms of the realization and use of expressions. It also has a more restrained manner of speaking. Rhetorical means of persuasion are therefore now used rarely and more economically. As lawyer J.

Kairevičius once noted, a lawyer who has got or has developed the skill of eloquence is able to present arguments in a more convincing way and is more likely to win the case than one who speaks in an overloaded manner with vague argumentation (Koženiauskienė, 2005). Obviously, clarity, logic and correctness of language as well as well-prepared argumentation, are valuable features of modern public discourse.

The theory of five rules laid down in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* focused on requirements for style, word selection and the arrangement of ideas. Furthermore, in Antique rhetoric, correctness of language was considered the primary and compulsory feature of a public speech. Quintilian also stated in his *Institutio Oratoria*, that a speech should firstly be correct, clear and elegant (*cum oratio tre abeat virtutes ut emendata, ut dilucida, ut ornata sit <...>, <oratio> emendata, dilucida, ornata apta esse debeat*) (Valienė, 2007). Meanwhile, in modern rhetoric, correctness is perceived as the ability to speak correctly (*ars recte dicendi*) and well (*ars bene dicendi*) (Koženiauskienė, 1999). Correctness, in its narrow sense, is associated with the knowledge of language norms, grammar rules, stylistics and the language culture. The paradigm of speech, in broader sense, also includes ethics, etiquette, psychology, etc. Apart from being grammatically and stylistically correct, words have to be uttered gracefully, intelligently and elegantly, taking into consideration the context of speaking – the audience, the place and the time. Finally, the two concepts *ars bene* and *ars recte dicendi* are considered to be the fundamentals of a correct speech of modern discourse (Koženiauskienė, 1999). Thus, the synergy of the stylistic norms applicable in public speaking preconditions effective and efficient communication.

A comparative analysis of modern public discourse concluded that speakers representing certain dialects, such as the Northern Highlands dialect of Lithuania, often reveal obvious deficiencies in language correctness. Insufficiency of eloquence is also frequently evident in their public speeches.

Speakers originating from regions sometimes have difficulty using the standard language and fail to follow rules of classical rhetoric. Correctness and other stylistic features are often neglected in their spoken and written public speeches.

The analysis of the modern public discourse reveals that incorrectness of language is often caused by erroneous accentuation predetermined by a dialect. This may be illustrated by the accentuation in the West Highland dialect of Lithuania, where words are shortened by losing the endings and the stress is usually placed on the second or third syllable from the end. Neither can the accentuation common in the North Highland dialect be applied in public discourse, since the norms of the standard language are mandatory for public speaking. It is also worth mentioning that formal rules are an important feature of public speaking, whereas they may be neglected in ordinary

conversation. Public speaking is thus more strictly structured and requires a different method of delivery (Lucas, 2008).

Appropriateness, on the other hand, is common to modern public discourse. Modern rhetoric usually employs the basic virtue of eloquence, which, as Quintilian stated, is defined as a speaker's capacity to take into consideration the actual circumstances, the environment, the time and the audience. Thus, eloquence is considerably dependent on the choice of the problem to be dealt with and the topic being considered. The topics chosen by nowadays speakers usually include global issues related with climate change, recycling, and responsible consumption, economical use of natural resources, influences of consumer culture, environmental pollution, healthy lifestyles, etc. In addition to that, the actual formulation of the topic already reveals the speaker's maturity and awareness of the subject.

To sum up, it can be stated that, despite modifications and transformations of classical rhetoric, some traditions still remain relevant in life today when a speaker faces the task to persuade the audience by means of well-reasoned verbal arguments (Brummett, 2011). Although it may seem that the modern tech-savvy generation tends to reject strict rules and tries to set new standards attributable to the wide use of mobile phones, computers and tablets, the traditional training based on the theory and practice of rhetoric is still effective and can lead to excellent results. Despite the most common deficiencies in modern public discourse, which include poor ability to overcome fear of speaking on the stage, failure to use correct language and the lack of skills and competences necessary to produce public speeches, the results unquestionably reveal the presence of talented speakers, able to apply, preserve and pass on to future generations the most effective and time-tested techniques of classical rhetoric.

4. Conclusions

The most common understanding of rhetoric as an art and a theory-based practice has remained unchallenged, whereas the concept of public speaker has been extended to include anyone whose daily activities entail public speaking. Literature review and comparative analysis of modern public discourse has led to the conclusion that the major modifications of classical rhetoric have taken place in the preparation, composition and classification of public speeches. For instance, the threefold classification of oratory suggested in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* has been extended to include additional genres of informative speeches. Moreover, the focus on a one-way communication pattern aimed at convincing the interlocutor has shifted towards two-way communication and interaction between speakers. Obviously, contemporary rhetoric entails more oral manipulation as well as verbal and nonverbal suggestibility.

It should be also pointed out that social divisions are no longer ascribed to public speaking. The former approach to public speaking as a prerogative of men has entirely changed in contemporary society. Moreover, public speaking has been taken up not only by women, but also by teenagers, well-known for their public discourse on global political, social and environmental issues. Thus, rhetoric is playing an important role in terms of leadership, inspiration and consolidation. In conclusion, ethical and effective eloquence is a key element preconditioning the success of young leaders of contemporary society in their commitment to take responsibility for preserving common values and overcoming global challenges.

In modern public discourse, contrary to Plato's idea, there is an obvious tendency to contrast speaking with acting. The situation is partly preconditioned by frequent failures to apply rhetorical persuasion, which is specific in political discourse. It can be also concluded that, despite the contemporary modifications in eloquence, rhetorical persuasion is still impossible without the alignment of rhetorical categories. Therefore, the success and efficiency of communication strategies entirely depend on the synthesis and application of Aristotle's categories of persuasion, i.e. logos, ethos and pathos.

The theory of virtues of eloquence is an important approach to every speaker seeking to deliver a correct, clear, well-reasoned and expressive public speech. Speakers originating from regions sometimes have difficulties using the standard language and fail to follow rules of classical rhetoric: correctness of language is often neglected in their public discourse. Although public speeches in Antiquity were associated with the artistic expression of words, i.e. rhetorical figures and the elegance of style, modern public discourse, on the contrary, is considered to be more subtle and moderate in terms of the realization and use of expressions. It also has got a more restrained manner of speaking.

A clear, correct, aesthetic public speech reflects the human spirit and national culture. Moreover, the delivery of an informative, well-reasoned and articulate public speech is equally as important as the ability to stay honest and ethically correct in one's performance (Lucas, 2008). Texts that are a few thousand years old may inspire a modern speaker to produce a clear, correct, expressive and logical public speech, and ground the understanding that effective communication is impossible without the basic principles of classical rhetoric. In addition to that, leaders of contemporary society should not only be eager to collaborate constructively, but also fully acknowledge the importance of rhetorical canons, rules and values. Otherwise, a modern public discourse can become ineffective or effective simply *ad hoc*.

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