

Memory

As a psychological concept, memory is both the long term and short term storage of one's knowledge and experiences that can be retrieved with or without cues. As a rhetorical term, memory plays a critical role in the effective delivery of a speech. When a speaker is able to memorize precisely what he/she has written down in his/her script, the speaker is able to fluently deliver the speech without much interruption that might affect the quality of the declamation. In fact, memory is one of the five canons of rhetorics, along with invention, arrangement, style, and delivery.

As a rhetorical term, memory has had a long history, but its significance dwarfs in comparison to other concepts of rhetorics. In Donald E. Hargis's *Memory in Rhetoric*, he outlines a general course of how memory develops as a rhetorical term: the concept was established in the fifth century B.C.E, by Hippias of Elis, who believed that orators' education should involve memory as a rigorous discipline (Hargis, 114-115). It is reasonable to assume that a narrator's effective delivery of speeches rely on a strong memorization of their recital materials. In contrast to Hippias, the two other great figures in the classical period, Plato and Aristotle, didn't regard memory as an important rhetorical device. According to Hargis, the term "memory" is used in a general sense by Plato and Aristotle as they referred to memory as a perfect mental representation and a source of knowledge when necessary respectively (115). They believed in the importance of memory, but not really as a rhetorical term. Rhetoricians argued over memory's significance since the very beginning, which over time, led to some scholars who emphasized memory while some did not.

With the dissociation of Rome and the disappearance of institutions of free speech, the significance of memory as a rhetorical term declined among the scholars between the classical period and the Renaissance period. In the most influential work of rhetorics in the Middle Ages, *Ad Herennium*, the term of memory was included, but it was not nearly as emphasized as the Classical scholars did. According to Hargis, "As far as one is able to discover, there was almost no mention, in this period, of memory in the sense which Cicero and Quintilian included in their discussions" (120). The lack of mentioning memory gives evidence that the scholars in the Middle Ages did not believe that memory is significant enough to be studied by rhetoricians, which serves as a direct contrast to Renaissance Scholars, who rediscovered and reevaluated the Classical texts and paid much closer attention to memory. The view of memory by Renaissance scholars resembled the one by the Classical rhetoricians, such as Quintilian and Cicero, that memory serves as a powerhouse of knowledge for better delivery of speeches (123). Later on in the modern era, whether choosing to emphasize memory solely depends on the choice of the authors (123-124), which indicates that memory doesn't really play a critical role in rhetorics, at least in some people's opinion. Unlike other canons that scholars across all ages devoted their time studying, the importance of memory seemed to only oscillate.

In the context of rhetorics, memory seems to play a supporting role to improve other canons and concepts, particularly invention and delivery. Since the definition of memory involves the "storage of knowledge", a link between memory and the first canon of rhetorics, invention, is

formed as memory helps create persuasive and memorable content that can be delivered to a group of audiences. Hargis concludes that “General memory bears a relationship to invention, by holding in mind the ‘available means of persuasion’ once they are found; while formal memory relates to the exact retention of words, phrases, arrangements, and the like” (Hargis, 115). Since invention is largely related to logos, or what the speaker intends to say, memory gives a solid foundation for invention as it holds the ‘available means of persuasion’, which is knowledge and experiences.

While what one says is important, how the speaker delivers it also matters. Memory determines the eloquence of one’s speech, as the speaker needs to have strong memorization of what he or she has to say, and he/she might need to improvise as needed. It seems like improvisation doesn’t have a close connection with memory, but the ability to improvise does often reflect one’s memory, either in terms of storing general knowledge or memorizing the content of the speech. In Quintilian’s *Institutio Oratoria*, memory has a special role in rhetorics as Quintilian refers to memory as “treasure-house of eloquence”, because “pleaders need not only to be able to retain a number of facts in their minds, but also to be quick to take them in; it is not enough to learn what you have written by dint of repeated reading” (Quintilian). Quintilian takes a step further when discussing memory: merely memorizing is not sufficient enough. In order to argue or speak effectively, one must actively use their mind and is able to take knowledge in and deliver the organized content.

Memory’s link with delivery, the last canon of rhetorics, suggests that memory does not just serve the orator, but also has an interactive role with the opponents of the debate or the audiences. Memory is not just about how the speaker memorizes the text, it is also about the impression that the speech has on its audiences. A successful example of a memorable text is Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. ’s speech *I Have a Dream*, particularly the passages that contain lines that begin with “I have a dream”. In fact, according to Carmine Gallo, a journalist for Forbes, the series of “I have a dream” lines are a combination of King’s memorization from a previous speech and an improvisation cued by an audience’s fervent call “tell them about the ‘dream’” (Gallo). The power of memory comes in play as aids to both invention and delivery: his memory of his previous speech gave Dr. King the basis of generating those great lines, while the cue to improvise allowed Dr. King to refer to his knowledge, past experiences and the understanding of speech delivering and to craft powerful words that leave the audiences with unforgettable memories.

When treating memory as an interactive rhetorical strategy, the goal is definitely to let the audiences remember what they’ve said, using techniques that draw audiences’ attention can help achieve the speaker’s goals. In *Silva Rhetoricae*, the contributor, Gildeon O. Burton, suggests that to help audiences retain things in their mind, “certain figures of speech are available to help the memory, including the use of vivid description (ecphrasis) and enumeration” (Burton). In contemporary settings, it is not uncommon to see presentations with visual cues such as graphs and pictures, as people often rely on them to understand and memorize. For the presenters, understanding not just their memories but also the audiences’ can help achieve the presenters’ goal better.

Works cited

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