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FOLKLORE,
CULTURAL
PERFORMANCES,
AND POPULAR
ENTERTAINMENTS

A Communications-centered Handbook

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ORATORY

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The art of using speech effectively in addressing an audience within political, legal, ceremonial, or religious settings. In the Western tradition of Greek and Roman rhetoric, oratory is strongly associated with public speaking in political and legal settings, and it is defined as the art of getting the audience to take a particular perspective and eventually to accept the speaker's position or resolution on a particular issue. In the anthropological and linguistic literature, oratory also refers to the skillful PERFORMANCE of particular speech genres within ceremonial or magico-religious settings, such as curing sessions, initiation rites, weddings, and funerals. In these contexts the orator's task may include one or more from a variety of functions that range from interpretation of the occasion to creation of a context in which psychological, social, or even physical change can be said to occur. *See also* ETHNOGRAPHY OF SPEAKING.

Characteristics and Contexts

The language of oratory is usually distinct from other ways of speaking in the same speech community. Oratorical speech tends

to make more concentrated use of PROVERB, metaphor, parallelism, and repetition than is typically found in most everyday talk. It is, however, difficult if not impossible to predict in any speech community which specific linguistic features will characterize oratorical speech vis-à-vis other verbal genres (*see* GENRE). Although it is usually possible to distinguish between the language of oratory and that of conversation, other distinctions are problematic without an understanding of the relationship between oratory and other areas of verbal art, such as poetry, verbal dueling, singing, and theater, within the same community (*see* INSULT; SONG). In fact, in some cases this very distinction may be questionable, given the interdependence of some of these genres in many communities around the world. Furthermore, despite the expectations of participants in a given social event regarding what constitutes oratorical language, individual performers often achieve fame by successfully mixing features from more than one genre (for example, archaic formulas and jokes). Such controlled violations of the audience's expectations can help establish a particular atmosphere that the performer can then exploit for needed theatrical effects. *See also* DRAMA PERFORMANCE.

The nature of the social activity in which oratory is used also affects both the actual form and content of oratorical speeches and their interpretation by the participants in the event. It is quite common, in fact, for a reflexive relationship to develop between oratory and the social event in which it is performed: the event is defined by the language used, whereas the language is said to be interpreted in light of the larger ongoing activity.

The Work of Orators

Like any other form of communication in any community, oratory is always tied to a tradition that both gives it meaning and offers a background against which new values and new

forms of expression can be tried. The most well-known and respected orators tend to be those individuals who establish a relationship with their audiences by addressing current concerns while at the same time displaying an impressive knowledge of the tradition (for example, historical facts, myths, proverbs, metaphorical expressions).

For any orator the ability to communicate with an audience is not measured by linguistic skills alone. Knowledge of the appropriate linguistic repertoire and its organization in coherent units of talk must be accompanied by knowledge of effective paralinguistic features (for example, voice quality, volume, tempo, pauses, and prolonged silence). Furthermore, culturally and situationally appropriate nonlinguistic behaviors, such as body posture, gesture, eye gaze, and facial expression, must accompany a speaker's verbal performance. The importance of such nonverbal expertise in a public speaker has long been recognized in the Western tradition of rhetoric, as documented by the special term, *actio*, given by the Romans to the nonlinguistic behavior that was supposed to accompany any public address. The introduction of modern mass media such as film or television can highlight certain aspects of nonlinguistic behavior (for example, facial expression) that could not be detected easily in a public performance in front of a large crowd.

Nature of Oratorical Speech

A tradition of oratory has been found in many different types of socioeconomic systems. Oratory has been documented among both so-called hierarchical and egalitarian societies. Societies vary, however, in terms of how they see the relationship between oratory and power.

Oratory and power

In many communities, such as the ancient Greeks, the Maori of New Zealand, and the Kuna of San Blas (Panama), oratorical

ability is considered the entry point into politics, and the skills necessary for publicly addressing an audience are defined as directly linked to the exercise of power. In societies such as Bali and Samoa, however, powerful figures delegate others to speak for them in public, thus retaining the privilege of saving face or in some cases contradicting their spokespersons. Where this complementary model is adopted, such as in Tikopian political meetings (*fono*), the relationship between the chief and his spokesman is a complex one, in which the spokesman may take public blame and lose face on behalf of the chief but will then expect political and economic support from the chief on other occasions.

The definition of oratory as the art of making any political or judicial decision acceptable to a given audience has been criticized by those social and cultural anthropologists who question the very ability of talk to affect social processes. In particular, the typically formalized and formulaic nature of oratorical speech has been cited as a means of so restricting an individual's choices that it is very difficult to do anything other than reaffirm or celebrate the existing social order. This perspective goes hand in hand with a deterministic view of the relationship between sociocultural context and talk, with the former always affecting the latter but not the reverse.

Oratory as action

Detailed studies of language use in a variety of cultural settings have instead stressed the dialogical, if not dialectical, relationship between speech and its social context. These studies have confirmed that in particular social settings people have to work out conflicts and to achieve an understanding of their own polity through speech. This view originated from an appreciation of words as deeds and not just labels for an already taken-for-granted reality. Many anthropologists, linguists, and folklorists are convinced that the action-producing force of oratorical speeches is also quite common to other uses of language. In

particular, participants in conversation routinely employ a range of techniques to ensure preferred interpretations of what they are saying and to establish common ground and alignments with their addressees. It is thus quite common for speakers in all kinds of situations to try to get their audiences to see the world through their eyes, to get others to follow or at least to approve of their conduct. There may be little uniqueness, then, in the orator's use of language to win a case or to be elected, to celebrate the past and to make it relevant to the present, to play with words and to teach, to create the very context in which a distant or unlikely reality becomes the here and now (see SPEECH PLAY). All of these functions and contexts are in fact part of the inherent multifunctionality of speaking. Why in only some cases these activities would be glossed as oratory by either the participants or the observers is what future research must explain in reconsidering oratory as a universal category.

■ See also ORAL CULTURE.

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SONG

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The term *song* is both elusive and enigmatic when considered cross-culturally. Birds, porpoises, and other animals have "songs"; does this mean that they are "singing"? And what of such creatures as the sirens of Greek mythology who were said to be able to lure sailors to their destruction through song? Is song, then, unlike spoken language, not a basically human activity, characteristic, and preoccupation?

Do songs have to have music? There are numerous examples of books that have not one note of music in them yet are called *cancioneros*, *chansonniers*, or *canzonieri*. For the most part, however, it can be assumed that songs do have music and are usually intended to be sung. Singing can take place with or without instrumental accompaniment, alone or in groups, and with many different kinds of audience. See MUSIC PERFORMANCE; PERFORMANCE.

Language and Song

It is axiomatic that both the speech and the song of a society will be largely in the same language. That language, in turn, can logically be expected to have an effect on both types of vocal production.