

## PUBLIC SPEAKING CULTURE

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### Abstract

*The present article analyzes from the viewpoint of content and form W. Faulkner's discourse held at the moment he was being awarded the Nobel Prize in literature.*

**Keywords:** *public speaking culture, content, form, discourse, literature, prize*

### Rezumat

*În articol, se analizează discursul scriitorului american W. Faulkner la momentul înmânării acestuia a Premiului Nobel în domeniul literaturii. Analiza făcută e de ordin formal și conținutal.*

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *cultura vorbirii în public, conținut, formă, discurs, premiu*

"Use what language you will, you can never say anything but what you are"  
(Emerson).

"The proof of a poet is that his country absorbs him as affectionately as he has absorbed it" (W. Whitman, *Preface to "Leaves of Grass"*. *American Literary Criticism*, p. 139).

Culture dictates its written and unwritten laws and rules to public speaking. It is culture that forms the basis of practices and conventions in public speaking. University and school education which prepares for public life should place public speaking in the foreground in their curriculum.

The number of books devoted to public speaking in American culture is quite striking. They try to embrace the main problems speakers face in preparing speeches: search for materials, speech preparation, and delivery. Some books provide sample students speeches as well as world-famous speeches (Buyse, 1987, p. 223; Byrns, 1985, p. 350; Devito, 1966, p. 250; Lucas, 1988, p. 444).

According to Byrns (Byrns, 1985, p. 350), public speaking may be defined as a type of communication in which a single speaker transfers a message to an audience in a public setting. The main components of a public speaking situation include a speaker, an audience (familiar on unfamiliar), a message (usually prepared in advance), a public setting (definite time and definite

place). All those components as well as pragmatic purposes are able to produce a number of factors determining a style and a genre of a public speech.

The world of American public speaking is very wide: from the speeches to inform to the speeches to persuade, there are speeches of introduction, presentation speeches, acceptance speeches, after-dinner speeches, commemorative speeches, inauguration speeches. Different social occasions call for special rhetorical means and structures, so it is but natural that public speeches should form different genres (Byrns, 1985, p. 350).

The speech genres are products of culture which elaborate special forms and delimit form and content of interaction. They become accepted, approved and model human behaviour and turn it into a custom. The speech genres take their origin from pragmatic functions or speech acts which are developed into speeches (Todorov, 1995, p. 136).

The article focuses on the study of acceptance speeches with the purpose of determining the specific features of Nobel Prize acceptance speeches in Literature as their subdivision. The choice for analysis of this kind of speeches may be accounted for by the fact that this kind of acceptance speeches provides excellent chance for comparison as the main coordinates of the speech situation are quite similar.

The study of Nobel Prize acceptance speeches in Literature presents great interest from the point of view of form and content. They are written by men of letters and therefore they carry the best of the language and the best of culture, the best of acceptance speeches.

According to Stephen Lucas the purpose of the acceptance speech is to "give thanks to the people who give the award and the people who helped to gain it. The three major traits of a good acceptance speech are brevity, humility and graciousness" (Lucas, 1988, p. 444).

The Nobel Prize acceptance speech by William Faulkner (Cowley, 1981, pp. 273-287) has been chosen for stylistic analysis as it states the aims and tasks and criteria of good writing and gives the young writers cultural orientation as to what is valued in literary writing.

In fact, in his speech W. Faulkner does not say thank you directly, moreover he denies that the award was given to him as a man ("but to my work"). So he wants to talk only about his work and his duties as a writer to those who undertake such work.

People who helped him to get the award are not mentioned but his address to young men and women "who may one day stand where he is standing" may serve as an indirect gratitude for people. The optimistic tone of address, his desire to help to uplift people may be considered as possible indirect saying thank you.

The speech pronounced in 1950 found its way into many anthologies of American literature due to the fact that it presents a classic Nobel Prize acceptance speech in Literature. The speech carries the views of W. Faulkner

on life, literature, young writers and due to its content it is a sort of a literary manifesto. Nobel Prize winners in Literature will read it and make direct and indirect references to it in their speeches. The key cultural concepts outlined by W. Faulkner will travel from speech to speech acquiring social and cultural significance.

The speech states directly and openly the views of W. Faulkner on literature, without the necessity of any inference or decoding on the part of the listener. The speech does not leave room for guesswork or misunderstanding as it states what W. Faulkner thinks about his work, unlike his complicated writing, involving time shifts, memory flashbacks, and changes of points of view.

The address made to young writers strikes by its being direct and outspoken and brief. It is one of rare discourses that clearly states the aims and tasks of a writer. It has been a sort of discovery that there is no accepted definition of Literature and what different cultures include into the concept of Literature may differ from culture to culture. American literature, for example, includes Indian folklore and political speeches of American presidents (Mc Dougal, 1984, p. 975).

The Nobel Prize acceptance speech by W. Faulkner may give the answer to the question: what is the difference between literary discourse and other types of discourse? According to the speech of W. Faulkner, literary discourse should be devoted to cultural values which serve as themes and ideas of writing and its purpose may influence cultural values and change schemata or renew schemata, expressed in terms of Guy Cook (Cook, 2000, p. 215). The author's message in literary discourse might concern certain cultural values precious to people, raising human interest and uplifting people by optimism. Due to the clear-cut cultural values that a young writer should follow, the speech by Faulkner appears to be both an intellectual and emotional appeal to young writers world-wide.

Among the key cultural concepts mentioned by W. Faulkner in his speech there are about fourteen items that the writer's work centers around: problems of the spirit, glory of the past, work, love, honor, pity, pride, compassion, sacrifice, man's immortality, hope, courage, endurance. Though Faulkner speaks as a representative of American culture, the set of values compiled in the speech may be considered to be of more universal character.

From a semantic point of view it is possible to draw connection between: *love* → *pity* → *sacrifice*; *honor* → *pride* → *glory of the past*; *pity* → *compassion*; *hope* → *endurance*; *courage* → *endurance*. There are, in fact, two groups: first, values most associated with sacrifice (*love, pity, compassion*), second, values most associated with endurance (*hope, pride, work, honor, courage, glory, learning*).

William Faulkner arranges the outlined values in three polysyndeton chains, the longest of them is a seven-concept chain and he orders concepts in a sort of climax so that the last concept in every chain is really the strongest: *sacrifice, endurance, sacrifice*:

“Love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice,  
Compassion and sacrifice and endurance/  
Courage and honor and hope and pride and compassion and pity and sacrifice”.

The first chain is introduced by “the old universal truths” and the longest chain given in the concluding passage is completed by one more very important value: “the glory of the past” which in a way summarizes all of them.

It is of interest to note that the second position in the above-mentioned chains is occupied by honor, the fourth one - by pride, the fifth one - by compassion. This special stylistic device - climatic chain arrangement of cultural values and their repetition gives Faulkner a possibility to repeat his key ideas for several times and bring home to the listener their significance.

It is worth mentioning that direct lexical repetition presented in the speech under analysis involves pairs of words: *the human spirit, the agony and sweat, the glory of the past, the end of man, teach himself, the inexhaustible voice, man is immortal, endure and prevail*. The concluding words of the speech “endure and prevail” sound as a motto not only for literary men but for every human being.

Within such a comparatively short speech (22 sentences) W. Faulkner reiterates the ideas not only with the help of direct repetition but also with the help of synonymic paraphrase:

*problems of the spirit – problems of the human heart in conflict with itself;  
the old verities and truths of the heart – the old universal truths;  
learn again – relearn – teach oneself;  
I decline to accept – I refuse to accept;  
a soul – a spirit;  
the poet’s – the writer’s;  
props – pillars – pinnacle;  
he must learn – he must teach himself;  
by lifting his heart – by reminding him of...;  
agony and sweat – anguish and travail.*

Another frequent kind of repetition favored by W. Faulkner is anadiplosis:

*my work – a life’s work;  
stand here where I am standing;  
worth writing about worth the agony and the sweat.*

Repeating the key ideas “man is immortal” and “he will endure and prevail” W. Faulkner strikes an optimistic note which is one of the main tasks of literature, in his opinion. There are numerous cases of repetition of grammatical structure (“not because ... but because”). They help to draw opposition on which the second passage of the speech is built and make the presentation of the ideas even more vivid.

In the speech of W. Faulkner one might distinguish several voices talking: one of the writers, a professional talking voice, stating his purpose in writing

- "to create out of the materials of the human spirit something which did not exist before"; one of the writers talking to the young men and women about what makes good writing - "the problems of the human heart in conflict with itself". This is his professional voice talking about the writer's duty - "help him endure and prevail".

There is also a voice carrying a dialogue and debating with others. ("I decline to accept the end of man", "I refuse to accept this"). And there are several argumentative moves starting with "but" and "because" and the words of opposition (*love - lust, defeats - victories*). The speech resembles a dialogue but not a monologue as if W. Faulkner were having an argument with young writers.

There is also a poetic voice, full of ambiguity, "... that when the last ding - dong of doom clanged and faded from the last worthless rock hanging tideless in the last red and dying evening", rich in metaphors, metonymy, alliteration, onomatopoeic repetitions. One can also hear the voice of a young writer: "When will I be blown up?" In this way the speech acquires polyphony of voices which make it very impressive.

The above analyzed Nobel Prize acceptance speech by W. Faulkner represents not only a genre of public speaking but also a literary work and a product of human culture.

The ideas expressed in the speech have been reiterated in the acceptance speeches which followed and will follow in the future. The impact of the speech upon the young minds who W. Faulkner addressed has been great and further intertextual analysis may reveal the scope and the resonance of the impact.

Another research direction may be pursued if we try to answer the question how literary works produced by W. Faulkner reflect his literary views on the tasks and duties of a writer proclaimed in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech.

Thus, analysis of public speeches may be able to throw some light on the techniques accepted in public speaking and at the same time on cultural values expressed in them explicitly and implicitly.

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