

SOME DO NOT'S FOR ORATORICAL CLARITY

by
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PART SIX: Foreignism, Colloquialism, and Cliche`

LEARN WHAT NOT TO DO!

As stated in Part One of this series treating oratorical clarity (See *Rostrum*, March 2002, p. 43), perhaps the most practical way to improve oratorical effectiveness is to emphasize what not to do. In other words, the orator should focus on those features which compete with clarity. Like the first five, this article does not treat every obstacle to clear thought, for such endeavor would be futile for any person. Instead, this article covers three of the most notorious obstacles and sufficiently warns the orator to examine carefully language usage. The author

sic transit gloria mundi
mitte
mirabile dictu
requiescat in pace
quid pro quo
terra firma
non sequitur
ure
cedant arma calcem

So passes away earthly glory
Let him go
marvelous to relate
Rest in peace
one thing in return for another
solid ground
It doesn't follow
Burn the killer
Let military authority yield to
civil power

The above examples can be very impressive, especially when stated as a thesis, but only when the audience understands their meanings because of formal training in Latin, or because the orator accompanies them with translation. Such was not the case with some of the tournament participants. The latter assumed the audience understood the foreignisms and, therefore, failed to explain what the foreignisms meant. Communication broke down.

Students of oratory need not ignore all foreignisms, but they should use caution when employing them. Unless foreignisms are absolutely necessary for conveying intended thoughts clearly, orators should avoid them.

...Orators should carefully examine ready-made expressions that easily come to mind, and should employ them only if they are essential for the clear and impressive development of thought...

DON'T USE COLLOQUIALISM!

Colloquialism is a word or expression that is customarily restricted to conversation or familiar letters. While colloquialisms are proper and effective on occasion, they are definitely unacceptable in formal speech and writing. A major reason for their unacceptability is their tendency to be unclear as evidenced by the following examples:

assumes from his teaching and coaching experience that, if the orator knows **what should not be done**, he or she will employ **what should be done**. This article stresses foreignism, colloquialism, and cliche`.

DON'T USE FOREIGNISMS!

People skilled in foreign languages often employ in the vernacular, consciously or unconsciously, foreign words and expressions. For example, the following Latin was employed by high school, college and university, and adult education students participating in speech tournaments in the United States and Japan. Many of the foreignisms were used as theses, or parts of theses.

FOREIGNISMS

ad finem
nota bene
ecce homo
a capite ad calcem
vox populi
sine qua non
tempus fugit
caveat emptor
hic habet
iugala

TRANSLATIONS

to the end
Note well.
Behold the man.
from head to heel
voice of the people
an absolute prerequisite
Time flies.
Let the buyer beware
Now he's had it
Kill !

COLLOQUIALISMS

a lot of
a great deal
bank on
cannot seem
enthused
every so often

fellow
fix
funny

help
inside of
invite
job
locate
lot, lots of

mighty

FORMAL USAGE

Much noise is in the room.
Mary needs new shoes *badly*.
I *rely on* you and your friends.
We are *unable* to meet his demands.
Everyone is *enthusiastic* over the result
I return to formal education at *regular* intervals.
Every *man* at the concert wore a suit.
Marilyn *repaired* the broken vase.
This island always gives me a *queer* feeling.
How many *employees* do you have?
We saw three children *inside* the car.
Did Ralph receive an *invitation*?
Harvey did get the position.
We *settled* in Kamakura, Japan.
We have *much* wealth in town. *Many* people are millionaires.

He was very *pleased* to see them.

miss out on nowhere near	I <i>missed</i> the golf tournament today. He complained that there was <i>not nearly</i> enough for food for every one.
on the side	Robert studies art <i>in addition</i> to his course in Chinese metaphysics.
one or the other out loud poorly put in	<i>One</i> of the players was accused of cheating. The drill instructor called the recruits <i>aloud</i> . Charlotte was feeling <i>in poor health</i> . To do well in school, a students should <i>spend</i> at least three hours of homework every day.
right along right off	Opponents were <i>continuously</i> critical of Joe. We could interpret Ian's mood <i>immediately</i> by her facial expressions and gestures.
show up	We were sad that Rachel failed <i>to put in an appearance</i> .
sign up	As soon as the Professor completed his lecture, fifty students <i>enrolled</i> in her class.
size up stand for	We were unable to <i>evaluate</i> Jim's skills. The professor said, "I no longer intend to <i>endure</i> your sarcasm."
start in	When you <i>begin</i> your medical studies, you will cherish few moments of leisure.
wire	When Tom received his fellowship, he sent his parents a <i>telegram</i> .

Since clear expression is a major goal, students of oratory should try to be consistent with good usage, the language used by well-educated people. To determine good usage one should consult an unabridged and up-to-date dictionary. Manuals on preparing for college entrance examinations also are helpful.

DON'T USE CLICHE`!

A *fresh* expression is the direct and spontaneous utterance of a person who thinks independently and employs language relatively free of *cliche`s*, expressions that once glittered but now are faded. Instead of being invigorating and vitalizing, *cliche`s* are stale, drab, and impoverished. Much of what negatively emanates from public platforms is a tissue of trite expression, the most pernicious being worn-out similes, hackneyed phrases, and too-familiar quotations. *Cliche`s* endanger communication because they are boring to members of the audience wanting freshness of expression. When boredom occurs, intellectual atrophy tends to follow and communication breaks down.

The following examples represent some of the *cliche`s* that appeared at high school, college, and adult education debate and forensic tournaments in the United States and Japan.

WORN-OUT SIMILES

sturdy as an oak	hard as granite	as sure as taxes
flat as a pancake	impenetrable as granite	bold as brass
clear as crystal	straight as an arrow	fit as a fiddle
sly as a fox	eloquent as apostles	tense as a banjo string
slow as the sands of an hour-glass	empty as a beggar's wallet	thick as autumnal leaves
dead as a doornail	hissing like a snake	pretty as spring
shallow as a pie-pan	calm as an iceberg	innocent as a child
faded like a dream of youth	many wrinkles as an old parchment	desolate as a cemetery
as active as a left-over fly in January	quiet as a monastery	ancient as the stars
changeless as Heaven	cunning as Satan	hard as a pine-knot

HACKNEYED PHRASES

burning the midnight oil	a heart of gold	a flash in the pan
apple of his eye	chip off the old block	the more the merrier
with a lawyer's logic	set the clock back	his two cents worth
came in with a bang	hit the nail on the head	last but not least
iron determination	crumbling morals	rustic simplicity
the sister of folly	salt of conversation	always in the right
God's gift to little men	method to his madness	the food of love
sting of a jealous mistress	all but the kitchen sink	bright as the sun
long-time listener,	inescapable conclusion	verbal tapestry
but first-time caller		
crack of dawn	too funny for words	in a few well-chosen words

TOO-FAMILIAR QUOTATIONS:

All that glitters is not gold.
People who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones.
When the cat is away, the mice will play.
Government is like a dress that shows everything but good taste.
Death brings all people to equality.
If you listen to only one bell, you hear only one sound.
Never put your feet where you can't see the ground.
Let's kick it around some more.
Don't build your pyramids upon needle points.
A man must take the fat with the lean.
Better men than I have said so.
I would rather be right than be President.

No orator can avoid all common expressions, nor should he or she attempt to do so. When a *cliche`* is tailor-made [another *cliche`*] for a specific context, the *cliche`* may appear bright and perceptive. However, orators should carefully examine ready-made expressions that easily come to mind, and should employ them *only* if they are essential for the clear and impressive development of thought. Orators who are boring deserve the words of Shakespeare's Hotspur in The First Part of King Henry IV (III. i):

O, he is as tedious
As a tired horse, a railing wife;
Worse than a smoky house: I had rather live
With cheese and garlic in a windmill, far
Than feed on cates and have him talk to me
In any summer-house in Christendom.

CONCLUSION

Orators should recognize that foreignisms, colloquialisms, and *cliche`s* can hamper clear expression. Orators should adhere to the self respect described by Edgar A. Guest in Myself:

I have to live with myself, and so
I want to be fit for myself to know;
I want to be able as days go by,
Always to look myself straight in the eye.
I don't want to stand with the setting sun
And hate myself for the things I've done.

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