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THE WHISTLE IS NOT A DECORATION: ADMONISHMENT IN INTERTRIBAL DISCOURSE

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Abstract:
Restraint and indirectness in the macro-speech act of admonishment, in the context of American Indian intertribal gatherings called powwows, are assessed as to their strategies of inclusiveness, dissociation, and reaffirmation of conservative social structures.

Keywords: American Indian English rhetoric, pragmatics, macro-speech act

1. Introduction

Notwithstanding American Indian traditional oratory having been lauded greatly by literary scholars, little work concerning contemporary rhetorical processes is evident in sociolinguistics (Ruoff 1990; Stromberg 2006). Yet, as universal phenomena, rhetorical structures appear wherever individuals feel the need to persuade others of taking or refraining from certain actions or beliefs. This paper assesses the rhetorical constraints in the macro-speech act of admonishment, in the context of American Indian intertribal and bicultural pressures. The notion of macro-speech act refers here to the extension of a single illocutionary force to an entire discourse. In an impressively exhaustive survey of the role of rhetoric in shaping traditional American Indian political organization, Meyer (2005) found admonishment ubiquitous throughout the ethnographic literature of the Americas. Usually describing it as a subset of haranguing, ethnographers have considered such rhetorical strategies as markers of political authority.

2. The Ethnolinguistic Context

American Indians who, for primarily economic reasons, are drawn to large urban areas such as Southern California, bring with them a range of functional competencies in English. Most are very capable bilinguals; however, their children, reared in the urban setting, tend toward nonstandard English monolingualism. Nevertheless, noticeable

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substrate influences continue to make themselves felt, not only in phonology and syntax but also in discourse. By necessity, nonstandard English serves as the lingua franca in reaffirming a general native identity at intertribal events such as powwows. These one or two-day celebrations provide the predominant frame for the (re)-construction of ever-evolving identity schemata of "Indianness." Although at times in competition with narrower family-based tribal identities of a particular ethnographic region, such as the US Southwest, the urban intertribal powwow contains a subtext of inclusiveness, regardless of tribal affiliation. Held in a public park or a school gymnasium, these gatherings are dominated by the iconic traditions of the Great Plains. Choruses of men huddled around large raw hide drums sing in piercing falsetto while dancers in spectacular regalia of cloth, fur, buckskin and feathers delight the spectator with a feast of rhythmic colors. Often referred to as war dances, ethnographers have traced them to the Grass, Scalp, Calumet, and Stomp dances of the Great Plains and the Great Lakes (Howard 1955, 16; Young 1981, 103). A contemporary distinction between Northern and Southern Plains traditions regarding songs, regalia and dance styles still mirrors that diversity of provenance.

3. The Rhetoric of Admonishment

Even with the intertribal reliance on nonstandard English, some of the powwow esoterica is not always transparent to all participants, especially to those whose parents hail from tribal reservations outside of the Great Plains. Therefore, one of the main functions of the Arena Director is to instruct, preferably with good humor, the participants regarding various protocols. In addition, knowledgeable individuals may request to step forward to offer directives or deliver admonishments regarding deviations from traditional practices. Thus, the particular discourse genre a speaker chooses is designated by his relational position in this particular social space, which gives him or her the right to be listened to (Bourdieu 1991). The following extemporaneous discourse was produced by such an individual, a middle-aged bilingual male with noticeable second language phonetic features, the description of which are beyond the scope of this paper, who had requested to be allowed to speak on what he considered a violation of dance protocol:

> *(1) I thank you and aho ... (2) the reason I wanna talk today is ... (3) it's an experience that's going on ... (4) and I think it's being abused ... (5) and it's quite frequently ... (6) the whistle ... (7) I thought about it all night ... (8) wondered if I should say something ... (9) or I should not say something ... (10) but it's something we should all know about ... (11) and the whistle ... (12) it's an honor to blow it ... (13) but only if you are a veteran ... (14) of any type of service (15) you're experiencing or participating in a Sun Dance ... (16) now if the whistle has been handed down to you ... (17) from a veteran or a person from the Sun Dance ... (18) you only can wear it ... (19) has a very special meaning to it ... (20) you only blow it four times ... (21) for the song that you want after the song is over with ... (22) a lot of you probably don't know is that ... (23) you give the drum ... (24) something ... (25) back home ... (26) it could be rifles ... (27) it could be anything ... (28) but out here... (29)*

I think it's because ... (30) we don't hand it down to our children ... (31) and it's not passed on to our relatives ... (32) the ones that wanna get out there and dance ... (33) it's an honor to be out here dancing ... (34) and I appreciate all you being out here ... (35) but the whistle is not ... (36) is not a decoration I wanna emphasize that ... (37) it's not to be used as a decoration ... (38) it was given for a purpose ... (39) and hang on to our culture and tradition the right way ... (40) so many times that ... (41) you know we hear it and ... (42) back home is that when a whistle is blown and a veteran ... (43) or a Sun Dancer goes up to the guy blowing the whistle ... (44) and if he does not have a story to say where he received that whistle from ... (45) then that veteran would take it away from him .... (46) or the Sun Dancer ... (47) so there are rules and regulations ... (48) just like everything else ... (49) and the people that are not ... (50) they're dancing ... (51) to their own tribe but to another tribe ... (52) which is no problem ... (53) but learn ... (54) the rules and regulations of the tribe that you're dancing to and of ... (55) before you get out there ... (56) I thank you very much (... indicates pauses and hesitations of notable lengths)

The speaker was introduced by the Master of Ceremonies as a Lakota from the Pine Ridge Reservation and a Vietnam War veteran. These biographical particulars impart an acknowledged symbolic significance and axiomatically imbue his entire discourse with an agency of power and authority. Firstly, the Lakota, particularly the Oglala, or Pine Ridge, division, in part due to their prominence in nineteen-century resistance to US military invasions, command a great deal of respect at powwows and have therefore played an influential role in shaping the preferences of the "Northern" style of powwow singing and dancing. Secondly, just as warriors in traditional times, veterans of the armed services, especially those with combat experience from such conflicts as the Vietnam War, continue to hold a special place of honor. And just as in traditional times, the powwow as a social space reinforces a culture of oratory that acknowledges individuals with charisma and presence.

In full dance regalia, the speaker initiated his remarks with redundant opening discourse markers of courtesy in (1). The English phrase of gratefulness is followed immediately with a Kiowa word of the same meaning, which has been diffused throughout the US powwow scene as a convention for opening as well as closing various types of speech events. Furthermore, it seems to have evolved into a device for framing a particular English discourse topos as Indian in content. Thus, both markers can be considered synonyms of an expanded intercultural semantic field. By repeating these synonyms, the speaker not only establishes coherence but also oils the waters of social interaction with a signifier of native content (Brown 1999, 224). In addition, the anadiplotic pair elevates his register for positioning it into the legitimization of his privileged place in the existing social hierarchy (Bourdieu 1991).

Such enhanced registers have been reported generally for traditional American Indian discourses, especially regarding their sense of prudence and politeness (Kennedy 1998, 221). Though the unidiomatic nominal choice in (3) may certainly be interpreted as the lexical search breakdown of a bilingual, the additional constraint that should be considered is the speaker's cultural imperative to exercise restraint. The more indistinct

a term, the more it achieves indirectness. Later, in (15), the recurrence of the same stem with present participle morphology undergoes a self-correction, in order to narrow its meaning and achieve idiomaticity.

Another strategy of indirectness at the opening of the discourse surfaces with the cataphoric third person neuter pronoun in (3) - (5) for the referent in (6), which squarely names the central issue of the grievance: the abuse of the eagle bone whistle. The hedging continues in (5), not only by underscoring the prevalence of the deviant behavior but also by refraining from naming the individuals involved. A similar strategy was observed by Spielmann (1998, 154) among Objibwe elders delivering hortatory advice to young people of the tribe.

After disclosing the delicate issue, a digression emerges in (7) - (9) in the form of a background construction in order to delay, for the moment, the direct confrontation of the issue (Schutze 2012, 211). This move provides him with an island of reliability for not only the planning of his next utterances but also for the projection of an image of modesty. By claiming a prior indecision regarding his addressing the community, the speaker attempts to soften his authoritative stance in this relatively egalitarian setting. Although quickly refocusing in (10), he again tempers his self-appointed tutorial posture by selecting the more inclusive first-person plural pronoun instead of the more accusatory second-person option.

The older ethnographic literature certainly supports the speaker's contention, in (11) - (15), that the eagle bone whistle, fashioned from the tibula of a wing, belonged to warriors and participants of the Sun Dance, a summer solstice renewal ceremony (Walker 1917, 116). However, in the inclusive urban intertribal context, things are more fluid. Thus, the speaker represents a defensive and conservative point of view strongly resistant to change, which he perceives as threatening to his notion of tradition. Nevertheless, in (16) - (18), he again moderates his seemingly orthodox perspective by conceding a face-saving exception for those addressees already displaying a whistle, usually on a necklace, as part of their dance regalia.

Yet, in (19) - (27), the speaker specifies not only the restrictions but also the obligations that possession of a whistle entails. Instead of employing it casually as a special effect while dancing, he insists that the whistle carrier should only blow it four times, the sacred number of the cardinal directions, in front of the drum group he wishes to honor and thank for a particular song. However, doing so, he continues, requires a significant financial commitment that should not be entered into lightly. In (22), the speaker lessens the severity of his accusation of ignorance with an adverbial of doubt. Nevertheless, in (26) he spells out in specific terms the expected generosity at give-aways with an example of a high value material item with plural inflection to underscore the potential expenses involved. Harkening back to former survival strategies in the harsh environment of the Great Plains, such obligations are remnants of traditional vehicles for the redistribution of wealth in egalitarian hunting and gathering societies.

That Pine Ridge is the true homeland for the speaker is evident in the deictic markers in (28), which clearly transmit the view of urban Southern California as an alien environment out of traditional context. Since few opportunities for the socialization of

children into tribal values offer themselves, the speaker harangues the parents at the gathering indirectly by hedging in (29) and by selecting again the inclusive first-person plural pronoun in (30). More importantly, however, in (31) and (32) he extends his allegation of deficient socialization to those non-Lakota or non-Great Plains participants who are so eager to assert their Indian identity by dancing in the Northern Plains tradition. Mitigating his reprimand by again stressing inclusiveness, he refers to other tribesmen in (31) with the first-person plural possessive determiner and the English equivalent of Lakota *Mitakuye Oyasin* (my relations), a phrase often utilized for opening prayers and other formal discourses at powwows.

Notwithstanding the powwow's status as largely a secular gathering, the speaker reminds the participants in (33) of the quasi-religious nature of dancing, traditionally considered a form of praying. Redundantly, and thereby emphatically, he denounces the objectification of the eagle's spirit in (35) - (37), but he cushions that potentially condescending rebuke by preposing a modest encouragement in (34). In (38) and (39), he returns to the implementation of strict protocols, which he clearly views as key to preserving tribal values. While he attempts to offer his addressees an appeal to collective self-interest through the inclusive first-person plural determiner, he simultaneously advances his privileged position in the social hierarchy. In taking on the mantle of conservative authority, he is, nevertheless, compelled to attenuate his posture by launching into another digressive background construction in (40) - (46), containing a thinly veiled threat. Though the likelihood of such an extreme censure in the urban powwow context would be quite rare, the speaker has nevertheless put the "violators" of protocol on notice in an indirect face-saving fashion.

Toward the completion of his discourse in (47) - (55), the speaker becomes increasingly emphatic and even begins to distance himself somewhat from his addressees. By borrowing terms from the discourse of American bureaucracy in (47) and (54), he engages in overstatement and redundancy to express his confidence and resolve to prevail. However, his most obvious dissociation occurs in (50) and (51) with a pronominal switch from first person plural to third person plural (Nook et al 2017: 338). Equally detached is the generic semantic load of the antecedent to those anaphors in (49). And while he attempts to assuage his diatribe in (52), the speaker is now too caught up in his initial motive and finishes his discourse with the confrontational construction of a naked imperative in (53) - (55). In seeming exasperation, he closes his monologue with only the English marker of gratitude, skipping entirely over the customary Kiowa counterpart in (56). That omission reveals a final processing breakdown caused by the speaker's realization of the inappropriateness of his confrontational imperative choice.

4. Conclusion

This paper has offered an interpretive analysis of the rhetorical constraints in a public discourse produced at an American Indian urban powwow in response to perceived violations of esoteric dance protocols. Although such intertribal gatherings contain a subtext of inclusiveness, individuals with a lineage to the Great Plains and veterans of

the armed services are accorded a privileged position in the social hierarchy. The speaker, a Lakota Vietnam War veteran, stepped forward to deliver a public admonishment concerning what he deemed to be the abuse of the eagle bone whistle. The inclusive and relatively egalitarian nature of the urban intertribal setting prompted him to exercise restraint through indirectness by relying heavily on hedging, first-person plural pronouns, redundancy, and digressions in the form of background constructions, in order to mitigate the confrontational nature of the macro-speech act. However, the data also reveal the speaker's partial dissociation from his audience, achieved primarily through a pronominal switch from first person plural to third person plural, followed by the implementation of an imperative construction. In challenging what he considered a deviant practice, the speaker desired to defend himself and his tribe by recovering and reaffirming conservative values. And though he seemed to extend his hand to the participants of the powwow, the speaker remained a staunch critic of the urban setting and nostalgically elevated the homeland as a better place with a happier past.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interests.

About the Author

Guillermo Bartelt is a sociolinguist with a focus on the English varieties of American Indians at the spoken as well as written levels.

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