
A Modeling Analysis of Martin Luther King's Speech

Eulogy for the Young Victims of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church Bombing, delivered at Sixth Avenue Baptist Church. 18 September 1963. Birmingham, Ala

Presentation Genius: Modeling of Martin Luther King's Speech

Want to be a great speaker? It's no longer just about confidence – it's about learning how to create words that are powerful enough to generate emotional power. In this article, I will be analyzing Martin Luther King's speech and to show you how some elements in presentations can lead to you being more charismatic and effective.

I've decided to analyze it from a slightly different perspective to show you how I evaluate the process and structure. While not every element is included inside, you will have a better understanding of the presentation patterns and how you can directly apply it to whatever kind of presentation you choose to have.

Unfortunately, I don't have the actual audio clip of King's speech. If there were an audio version, I probably would be able to help you to detect changes in inflectional pattern, volume changes and the like in order to give you an idea about the way that King delivers his speech. So we will have to contend with the final script itself. There are many lessons that can be learnt in this script, and I'm almost certain that it is not necessarily complete.

Just observe how the analysis is done so that you might be able to do the same in the future.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stuart Tan', with a stylized, cursive script.

Stuart Tan

Executive Director

Adam Khoo Learning Technologies Group Pte Ltd

<i>Speech</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
1 This afternoon we gather in the quiet of this sanctuary to pay our last tribute of respect to these beautiful children of God.	<i>Notice the use of predicate patterns. There are 10 kinesthetic predicates compared with 1 auditory predicate. One application of this is the pacing of the emotional experience. Note that he frames this up early in his speech in a religious context.</i>

<i>Speech</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
<p>2 They entered the stage of history just a few years ago, and in the brief years that they were privileged to act on this mortal stage, they played their parts exceedingly well. Now the curtain falls; they move through the exit; the drama of their earthly life comes to a close.</p>	<p><i>Metaphor</i> is used here to help embed the required submodalities in the audience, painting a picture of a play.</p> <p>King uses the <i>presuppositions</i> of 'privilege' to convey the idea that the life was not taken away in the first place.</p>
<p>3 They are now committed back to that eternity from which they came.</p>	<p>Notice the use of tenses in the last line where he describes their death as a return back to where they came from.</p>

	<i>Speech</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
4	<p>These children—<u>unoffending, innocent, and beautiful</u>—were the victims of one of the most vicious and tragic crimes ever perpetrated against humanity.</p>	<p><i>Notice the presuppositions that occur through the use of adjectives (descriptives). King realizes that it should not just be about the families' loss, but humanity's loss. Here, the use of chunking can be seen – King chunks up in order to gain agreement.</i></p>
5	<p><u>And yet they died nobly. They are the martyred heroines of a holy crusade for freedom and human dignity.</u></p>	<p><i>Observe the metaphor, and how he shifts the perspective to a higher cause, a more 'God-driven' cause.</i></p>

<i>Speech</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
<p>6 And so this afternoon in a real sense they have something to say to each of us in their death. They have something to say to every minister of the gospel who has remained silent behind the safe security of stained-glass windows. They have something to say to every politician who has fed his constituents with the stale bread of hatred and the spoiled meat of racism. They have something to say to a federal government that has compromised with the undemocratic practices of southern Dixiecrats and the blatant hypocrisy of right-wing northern Republicans. They have something to say to every Negro who has passively accepted the evil system of segregation and who has stood on the sidelines in a mighty struggle for justice.</p>	<p><i>He uses high-chunk words to allow the audience to accept the death the way he plans to frame it. At this juncture, notice that he uses the pronoun 'they'.</i></p>

<i>Speech</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
<p>7 They say to each of us, black and white alike, that we <u>must</u> substitute courage for caution. They say to us that we must be concerned not merely about who murdered them, but about the system, the way of life, the philosophy which produced the murderers. Their death says to us that we <u>must</u> work passionately and unrelentingly for the <u>realization</u> of the <u>American dream</u>.</p>	<p><i>Note the auditory predicate patterns that are used primarily for the purpose of providing a voice.</i></p> <p><i>Notice also the difference here in the pronouns used. The shift from ‘they’ to ‘we’ and ‘us’ is obviously a change from looking outside and blaming, to looking inside and taking responsibility. At the same time, notice that this shift from the past into the future using the modal operator ‘must’.</i></p> <p><i>Cause and effect.</i></p> <p><i>16 – note the use of nominalizations. The effect is one of placing the pictures in ‘still mode’</i></p>

<i>Speech</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
8 And so my friends , they did not die in vain. God still has a way of wringing good out of evil. And <u>history has proven</u> over and over again that <u>unmerited suffering is redemptive</u> .	<i>Note the SRV. This points his comment away from him and toward something that is greater than him. He draws on the legitimate power that 'history' has as an educator or researcher.</i> <i>"Suffering is redemptive" is a complex equivalent</i>
9 The <u>innocent blood of these little girls may well serve as a redemptive force</u> that will bring new light to this dark city.	<i>Selectional Restriction Violation is used here.</i>
10 The holy Scripture says, "A little child shall lead them."	<i>This is an excellent example of framing. Note the next statement is made meaningful as a result of this statement.</i>

Speech

Remarks

11 **The death** of these little children **may lead** our whole Southland from the low road of man's inhumanity to man to the high road of peace and brotherhood. These **tragic deaths may lead** our nation to substitute an aristocracy of character for an aristocracy of color. The **spilled blood** of these innocent girls **may cause** the whole citizenry of Birmingham to transform the negative extremes of a **dark** past into the positive extremes of a **bright** future. Indeed this tragic event **may cause** the white South to come to terms with its conscience.

Note again that the use of the selectional restriction violation where 'innocent blood' is a 'servant'. Take note of the transition into more visual predicates.

Note the use of the new modal operator 'may'. 'May' can be construed as a phonological ambiguity that conveys permission rather than motivation.

<i>Speech</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
<p>12 And so I stand here to say this afternoon to all assembled here, that in spite of the darkness of this hour, we <u>must not</u> despair. We <u>must not</u> become bitter, <u>nor must</u> we harbor the desire to retaliate with violence. No, we <u>must not</u> lose faith in our white brothers. Somehow we <u>must</u> believe that the <u>most misguided</u> among them can learn to respect the dignity and the worth of all human personality.</p>	<p><i>Here, you find that King begins a sequence of repetition using an interesting “not” and “is” sequence. “Must not” and “we must”</i></p> <p><i>Phrases like ‘in spite of’ create a sensation that there is more beyond that which is being thought of.</i></p>
<p>13 May I now say a word to you, the members of the bereaved families?</p>	<p><i>Shift from the Periphery to the Focus, while utilizing a Conversational Postulate.</i></p>
<p>14 It is almost impossible to say anything that can console you at this difficult hour and remove the deep clouds of disappointment which are floating in your mental skies.</p>	<p><i>Pacing Current experience in this line, using metaphors.</i></p>

<i>Speech</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
15 But I hope you can find a little consolation from the universality of this experience. Death comes to every individual.	<i>“But” is used effectively here to transit away from the “impossibility” of the previous statement. Note the use of universal quantifiers to make normal a situation such as death.</i>
16 There is an amazing democracy about death.	<i>Lost performative. Notice the way King defines democracy. He uses a huge number of Sleight of Mouth patterns to shift a person’s perceptions about death.</i>
17 It is not aristocracy for some of the people, but a democracy for all of the people. Kings die and beggars die; rich men and poor men die; old people die and young people die.	<i>Extended metaphor of democracy versus aristocracy paints a picture of ‘fairness’.</i>
18 Death comes to the innocent and it comes to the guilty. Death is the irreducible common denominator of all men.	<i>King uses complex equivalences and LRIs to put his message strongly across.</i>

<i>Speech</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
19 I hope you can find some consolation from Christianity's affirmation that death is not the end.	<i>Another example of framing.</i>
20 Death is not a period that ends the great sentence of life, but a comma that punctuates it to more lofty significance. Death is not a blind alley that leads the human race into a state of nothingness, but an open door which leads man into life eternal.	<i>The writing/typing metaphor 'comma' and 'punctuation'. The inferred meaning in the symbols are interesting, yet they convey the 'smallness' of our life itself.</i>
21 Let this daring faith, this great invincible surmise, be your sustaining power during these trying days.	<i>An interesting variation of the complex equivalent and embedded command.</i>

Speech

Remarks

22 Now I say to you in conclusion, life is **hard**, at times as **hard** as crucible steel. It has its **bleak** and difficult moments. Like the ever-**flowing** waters of the river, life has its moments of drought and its moments of flood. Like the ever-changing **cycle** of the seasons, life has the soothing **warmth** of its summers and the **piercing** chill of its winters. And if one will hold on, he will discover that God **walks** with him, and that God is able to **lift** you from the **fatigue** of despair to the **buoyancy** of hope, and transform dark and desolate valleys into sunlit paths of inner peace.

Notice the similar structure in the definition of life compared with the definition of death. King structures his speech from talking about death first before life. It will be very much different if it were done the other way around. He utilizes chained descriptions (from fatigue to buoyancy; from dark to light) to move your focus.

23 And so today, you do not **walk** alone. You **gave** to this world wonderful children.

24 They didn't live long lives, but they lived meaningful lives. Their lives were distressingly small in quantity, but glowingly large in quality.

King uses 'but' effectively here to show the contrast. Glowingly large is an example of how visual submodalities can be affected through proper combination of words.

<i>Speech</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
<p>25 And no greater tribute can be paid to you as parents, and no greater epitaph can come to them as children, than where they died and what they were doing when they died.</p>	
<p>26 They did not die in the dives and dens of Birmingham, nor did they die discussing and listening to filthy jokes. They died between the sacred walls of the church of God, and they were discussing the eternal meaning of love.</p>	<p><i>Linguistically, King uses Implicature to make the audience draw an inference from the meaning of being in a church (i.e. dying in a church praying is better than dying in the ghettos lying)</i></p>
<p>27 This stands out as a beautiful, beautiful thing for all generations.</p>	<p><i>Note the LRI by implication, refer to the childrens' meaningful deaths as well as the sacredness of being in Church.</i></p>

<i>Speech</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
<p>28 Shakespeare had Horatio to say some beautiful words as he stood over the dead body of Hamlet. And today, as I stand over the remains of these beautiful, darling girls, I paraphrase the words of Shakespeare: Good night, sweet princesses. Good night, those who symbolize a new day. And may the flight of angels take thee to thy eternal rest.</p> <p>God bless you.</p>	<p><i>King frames up what he says as 'beautiful' by again using another speaker, and the poetic nature of this experience reframes the negative perception of death.</i></p>

Martin Luther King

7 Hot Keys In King's Presentation Strategies

1. Shifting of Predicate Patterns

In delivering your presentation, shifting predicates can allow you to tap into more attention from the audience. Calibrate the mood of the audience. Are they bored? Are their rhythms and energies low? If so, wouldn't it be counter productive to use a visual approach to it instead? Conversely, if you were to use a kinesthetic system, it can be used to pace the sensation in the room. As you shift the audience into a high-energy state, use more visual impressions such as metaphors and visual predicate patterns.

2. Repetition with multiple reframes

When you need to transform perspectives, you need to learn about the Sleight of Mouth technique, developed by Robert Dilts. King uses repetition and does multiple reframing through the repetitive language structures, but dealing with different perspectives and beliefs. As a result, there is emphasis, impact and the process of installation is well underway. You can do the same by asking: what else do I want to define for my audience?

Let's say you wanted people to stop eating fast food. You can tell them 'Don't eat fast food', but there is no repetition. Instead, you can use a definition. 'Fast food is fast death; fast food is money wasting; fast food is commercial imperialism at its worst'.

3. "Must-must not" Contrasts

Contrastive effect can be created through a variety of different patterns.

- We must not falter, we must persevere.
- We cannot hide, we must fight.
- This cannot be tolerated – it must be destroyed.
- Each person's will must not be bent – we must stay strong.

-
- I cannot accept this excuse – you shouldn't be allowed to stay.

4. Pronoun sequence – “We, They, Us, You, I”

The pronoun sequence is important. When you use ‘we’, the term is more general in nature. It also tends to be more distant and formal. ‘They’ can be experienced as slightly more direct in nature. It draws attention to an external figure. ‘Us’ has a different meaning from ‘we’, in the sense that it is more personal and has a closer feeling. ‘You’ is much more directed. It draws attention to the speaker. ‘I’ first draws attention to the speaker, but also often results in the listener reflecting on one’s personal experience.

5. Reframing using Metaphor

Great presenters can use metaphor as a means of reframing. King uses metaphors a lot, and frequently, to address the audience’s needs. However, metaphors have to have cultural significance. To most people in the Asian context for instance, it is quite impossible to use the metaphors that he uses in the speech above. However, King uses metaphors that are most relevant to his audience.

Often, when you put your mind to thinking about a presentation, you will have to think about the context of the presentation anyway. So, if you can put yourself in the shoes of the other person, you might gain a lot more from the presentation by finding out: what does my audience know? What does my audience feel?

Natural metaphors are useful, such as rain, water, fire, farming and so on. There are other metaphors that are very close to our hearts nowadays, such as the computer metaphor.

6. Pacing the Pain, Leading the Solution

King uses this strategy, but the surprising thing is that he literally emphasizes the pain. He doesn’t casually say things like ‘I know your pain’. He uses words like ‘vicious’, ‘perpetrated’ and other strong emotional words. Likewise, in any

presentation, one will have to understand the audience to pace the pain effectively. Don't just pace the audience – ensure that the pacing is done at the right level of intensity.

7. Chaining

Chaining is a situation where one state is linked to another. As King wants his audience to feel less intense about the situation, he chains the negative pattern into the positive pattern. “Dark” to “Light” is one example of a chain. By virtue of understanding the Swish pattern strategy, you know that the language used here can literally make the audience change their perceptions of the negativity into something much more positive. You can use chaining in presentations to emphasize contrast, but also to emphasize the *direction* of the contrast.

Become a Charismatic and Confident Presenter In Just Two Days!

To learn about Presentation Dynamics and how you can become a more powerful and charismatic presenter, visit us at <http://www.akltg.com/corporate/present.html>.

Join us for this 2-day (9am to 6pm) session where you have a whole range of learning exercises to tweak your vocal abilities as well as your delivery skills.

Remember to visit the link as there is a time-limited offer to get two FREE Speech Clinics, personalized attention and FREE Bonuses! Visit <http://www.akltg.com/corporate/present.html> to get them all now!

[intentionally blank]