Summary of Course 5.2: Rhetoric

General

This course text on rhetoric examines the historical development, structure and contemporary application of language proficiency as an essential instrument for effective communication. It covers the classical rhetorical stages, ranging from invention and arrangement to stylistic expression and the memorization of messages in both ancient and modern culture. In addition, it highlights the role of text types and literary studies, emphasizing the importance of being able to produce an academic dissertation responsibly. It then addresses semiotics and communication theory, in which language is analyzed as a complex system of signs and the transfer of meaning. Finally, the rhetorical act is linked to philosophical and sociological frameworks, such as the influence of power, ideology and interpersonal interaction on human speech.

Summary

1: Context, Definition and Social Utility

The course responds to the social misconception that rhetoric is merely "empty verbiage". At the end of the 19th century, classical rhetoric was deconstructed, contributing to a "new illiteracy" in which many adults and young people are insufficiently capable of putting their thoughts down on paper clearly and coherently. In this course, rhetoric is re-established as a thoroughly sound and relevant discipline for linguistic and expressive proficiency.

Classically, rhetoric is defined as 'l'art de persuader' (the art of persuasion). In a broad sense, rhetoric is the study of effective language use, whereby a message is successfully conveyed to an audience through means of communication (language and symbols) and means of interpretation. Not only political and legal speeches, but also teaching and the scientific communication of data constitute applied models of a universal rhetorical act.

2: The Components of the Rhetorical Act and Its Historical Genesis

Classical rhetoric distinguishes five components of the speech act:

- Textological rhetoric:

- Inventio (invention / heuresis): developing and gathering content, arguments and evidence.
- Dispositio (arrangement / diataxis): organizing the material found according to a logical structure.
- Elocutio (stylistic expression / lexis): putting the organized thoughts into appropriate words and style.

- Dramaturgical rhetoric:

1. Memoria (memorization / mneme): imprinting the message in memory, including the ability to improvise.

2. Pronuntiatio / Actio (delivery / hupokrisis): physically and theatrically delivering the text with appropriate diction, gestures and posture.

Historically, Greek rhetoric emerged through three successive stages:

1. Homeric tradition: the popular or military assembly (agora) convened under a sacred legal order (themis), in which the speaker was protected by the scepter of Zeus.

2. The democratic polis: with the rise of the city-state and the legal system (dikè), all free citizens gained freedom of speech (isonomia). Early natural philosophers such as Thales of Miletus already applied eloquence in economic and political contexts.

3. Sicilian agonistics: around -460, following a democratic upheaval in Syracuse, legal or forensic rhetoric emerged. Pioneers Corax and Tisias developed the first defense structures (pro-oimion, agones, epilogos). This formed the basis for the Protosophistic movement (Protagoras, Gorgias) and the medieval trivium (grammar, dialectic and rhetoric).

3: Rhetoric: Communication Studies, Semiotics and Hermeneutics

During the Augustan period and the Second Sophistic, rhetoric expanded from the art of public speaking into general literary studies (literatology). In modern times, rhetoric has merged with communication studies.

Rhetoric draws on insights from various auxiliary disciplines:

- Semiotics (the study of signs): divides communication into syntax (word order and structure), semantics (meaning and content) and pragmatics (purpose and intended effect of the speech act).

- Significs: developed by Lady Welby and Gerrit Mannoury as the study of means of communication and speech acts, in which language is analyzed within its psychological and sociological environment.

- Hermeneutics and the theory of interpretation: the theory of textual interpretation (Schleiermacher, Dilthey) and Peirce's theory of abduction. A well-known model is the ABC theory of personality (Ellis & Sagarin): an event (A) does not directly lead to a neurotic reaction (C), but is mediated by the subjective interpretation (B) that the person gives to the event.

- Pathetics and persuasion: the psychological influence on the recipient's emotional state (pathos), the credibility conveyed by the sender (ethos) and factual argumentation (logos). This principle is widely applied in sales (marketing) and techniques of persuasion.

4: The Theory of Dissertations: Structure and Logic of the Thesis

The main objective of the course is the theory of dissertations. A dissertation or thesis is defined as the reasoned or systematic development of a theme.

A successful final thesis rests on the hermeneutics of the assignment (task interpretation):

- Given versus Required: the author must clearly distinguish between the available factual information (the known / the topic) and the question to be solved (the unknown / the problem).

- Lemmatic-analytical method: originating with Plato; when data are still unknown, a working hypothesis or lemma is introduced as if what is being sought were already known, allowing the logical consequences to be analyzed step by step.

- Logic and methodology: an argument requires rigorous syllogistic reasoning (deduction or reduction). Falsification must be applied to refute counterarguments and verification to substantiate one's own thesis.

5: Forms of Text Development: Topics, Description,

Narratology and Report Writing

To provide a dissertation with substantive content, the author uses three main methods of text formation:

Topics (the theory of commonplaces): The arsenal of universal thought patterns or perspectives (topoi / loci) used to discover ideas.

The two most fundamental ontological commonplaces are existence (Does the fact exist?) and essence (What is its mode of being / essential form?). In addition, circumstances (why, where, when, how) and axiological commonplaces (value judgements and evaluations) play a decisive role.

A classical application is the chreia: an eight-part ancient writing structure used to develop a proposition or saying through paraphrase, justification, refutation, comparison, examples and testimonies.

The Theory of Description (Ekphrasis):

The neutral or orderly presentation of the existence, essence and circumstances of a given subject.

Subtypes include characterization or portraiture (consisting of prosopopoeia / (description of outward appearance) and ethopoeia / (description of inner character)), topography (landscape description), chronography (description of the passage of time), the tableau and the parallel (comparative description of two figures or movements).

Narratology (the Theory of Narrative) and Report Writing:

Narratology: narration is the diachronic representation of a succession of actions (praxis) over time. Every story follows a fixed pattern: initial situation (introduction/context), complication (development/plot/turning point) and resolution (outcome).

Report Writing (Reporting): can take the form of a factual report (description/account of a situation) or a text report (textual summary). A scientific report combines historiè (the collected factual material obtained through eyewitness accounts or testimony) with logos (the logical organization from a specific explanatory perspective).