Summary of Course C6.7: Elements of Rhetoric

This course provides a broad introduction to rhetoric and the theory of language proficiency, emphasizing the clear organization of thoughts and the accurate composition of texts. The material highlights the historical background and contemporary relevance of eloquence, linking these to fundamental concepts such as the main elements of the speech act, text formation, and dramaturgical performance.

It also sets out various theoretical approaches, including the signifistic, communication-theoretical, pragmatic, and hermeneutic perspectives on language. Through numerous bibliographical references, practical examples, and literary analyses, the source demonstrates how classical techniques of persuasion remain relevant in modern communication.

1. Foundations and Definition of Rhetoric

The course offers a comprehensive study of language proficiency designed to improve the ability to understand, organize, and compose texts. In the nineteenth century, classical rhetoric was largely dismantled by the intellectual elite, a development that proved, historically speaking, to be a cultural mistake. Today, rhetoric is experiencing renewed interest in various areas of society, including public speaking, business management, and communication training.

From a semasiological perspective, rhetoric can be defined in three ways. First, rhetoric as praxis refers to actual speaking skills and the ability to convey messages persuasively.

Second, rhetoric is the teaching of language proficiency and persuasive techniques.

Third, it constitutes a protoscience and a metalanguage that theoretically describes language-related behavior

Whereas traditional authors often defined rhetoric as the art of persuasion based on inductive examples and prescriptive rules, contemporary scholarship situates rhetoric within broader fields such as communication science, semiotics, and the study of human understanding.

2. The Five Elements of the Rhetorical Act

Every rhetorical action is a speech act and a form of applied action theory, or praxeology. Since the time of the ancient sophist Hippias of Elis, five fundamental components have been distinguished within such a speech act, divided into a textological and a dramaturgical part.

The *textological part* encompasses the substantive and stylistic construction of the text.

The first element is invention or heuristics, that is, the collection and gathering of raw information and argumentative material.

The second element is arrangement or harmological rhetoric, in which the material gathered is organized logically according to a planned structure with a beginning, middle, and end.

The third element is expression or stylistic rhetoric, through which thoughts are given an aesthetic form using linguistic and rhetorical devices such as metaphors and inversions. The *dramaturgical part* focuses on oral delivery and performing before an audience.

The fourth element is memorization or mnemotechnical rhetoric, which concerns learning the text by heart and having it readily available.

The fifth element is delivery or hypocritic rhetoric, referring to the actual performance of the message through diction, gestures, bodily expression, and material aids.

3. Theoretical Perspectives and Interpretative Models

To understand the rhetorical process, the course employs various theoretical frameworks. The signifistic approach regards the speech act as an act of mutual understanding between people, situated in time and space.

The communicative and semiotic approaches analyze the process in terms of sender, receiver, and message. Peirce's semiotics distinguishes between syntax, semantics, and pragmatics, while Saussure's semiology works with the signifier, understood as the sound-image, and the signified, understood as the concept.

The pragmatic approach examines the purpose-oriented and result-oriented nature of language, placing the receiver and reception at the center. In hermeneutics, or the theory of interpretation, human beings are regarded as interpreting beings.

Peirce distinguishes four types of interpretation: the idiosyncratic type, which is based on prejudices; the orthodox type, which relies on authority; the preference-oriented type, which depends on personal taste; and the scientifically oriented type, which relies on verifiable external facts.

Furthermore, the human sciences distinguish between causal explanation and understanding through interpretation.

The psychological workings of language are clarified by Ellis and Sagarin's ABC theory, in which event A leads, through mental framework B, to interpretation and emotional response C. Finally, the theory of suggestion shows how thoughts and acts of will can be transmitted through psychological resonance and introjection, a process that plays a decisive role in both medicine and education.

4. Historical Development and the Rhetorical Tradition

Rhetoric has its roots in ancient mythical and magical ways of thinking, in which the spoken word was experienced as a creative force and vital energy. In ancient Greece, the god Hermes served as the divine mediator and eloquent counsellor, embodying both eloquence and the ability to outwit others. Three classical rhetorical genres emerged in the Greek polis: the political genre in the popular assembly, the judicial genre in the courts, and the epideictic genre for ceremonial and celebratory speeches.

Historical development involved several key phases. Sicilian agonistics under Corax and Tisias introduced the first practical manuals and emphasized probability.

Early sophistry, associated with Protagoras and Gorgias, developed eristic argumentation and ornate rhetorical elaboration.

In response, Plato re-established rhetoric as the care of the soul, or *psychagōgia*, aimed at seeking ideal truth through the dialectical method and rejecting empty or merely written rhetoric.

Aristotle closely linked rhetoric to logic and dialectics and analyzed persuasion through abbreviated arguments, or enthymemes.

During the later Hellenistic and Roman periods and the Middle Ages, rhetoric broadened under the influence of Cicero, Quintilian, and the Second Sophistic, becoming a form of general education, a set of school exercises, and ultimately an all-encompassing literary theory, or literatology.

5. Theory of Discourse, Text Types, and the Rhetorical Triangle

The theory of discourse focuses on the systematic development of an assignment or thesis. Topical reasoning and the study of commonplaces form an indispensable intellectual toolkit. General topoi concern existence and essence, while circumstantial topoi address questions such as who, what, where, when, why, and how. When preparing a discourse, one analyses the problem and the *status quaestionis* through an erotetic interplay of questions and answers.

The course distinguishes several specific text types.

Scientific rhetoric uses language to persuade fellow specialists and introduce paradigms.

Philosophical and theological rhetoric often employ indirect communication and existential presuppositions, as illustrated by Kierkegaard's work.

The theory of description focuses on faithfully representing landscapes, views, and inner states through ekphrasis, prosopopoeia, and ethopoeia. Narrative theory, or narratology, analyses actions according to the chronological and logical sequence of foreshadowing and subsequent developments, structured by an initial situation, complication, peripeteia, and resolution.

Finally, report writing and text condensation teach how to summarise texts concisely while retaining their essential content.

Every discourse and argument is fundamentally based on the classical rhetorical triangle. This triangle brings together the rational element of reasoning, *logos*; the emotional and value-driven influence of *pathos*; and the speaker's authority, character, and personal presence within *ethos*.