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Well-bred and well-spoken

On the role of class origins for young adults´ experiences of rhetorical training in schools

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Abstract

How do social class backgrounds shape young people's experience and mastery of the arts of rhetoric? Using a national speech competition in Norwegian upper secondary schools as a natural experiment for studying the relationship between class background and the use of language and the body in a social and linguistic genre par none for social elites, a follow-up survey (N=940) identified their experiences of participating in the course as varied much. Working-class children found the writing and delivery of a public speech much more complex and stressful and less often reported a family culture favourable to the cultivation of public speaking. They also tended to choose private, non-controversial themes rather than political themes. Girls enjoyed the writing process more than the oral delivery, while it was the reverse for boys.

Keywords

Bourdieu, Social class, Rhetoric, Family socialisation, Linguistic capital

A man by his speech is known to men,
The simpleton by his silence (Hávamál 57)

Introduction

While the role of family and class background in language socialisation and its benefits and disadvantages for young people in educational settings has been much studied, its more general role in preparing youth for persuasive speaking has been given little attention by sociologists and rhetorical scholars. Rhetorical training in schools, not least because it is usually forced upon everybody, offers something of a *natural experiment* not only for

studying how adolescents are unequally prepared for such formal use of language and the body in school situations.

Public speaking is not part of everyday life, but by its nature, exceptional. Even in the most ecstatic moments of sociality in families and civic life, making a formal speech is a mark of authority and seniority, performed before the intense attention and judgement of those present. Outside the family, especially when the speech is deliberative[1], it is a speech genre (Bakhtin 2014) usually reserved for the socially privileged. It is *the* genre for leaders and elites, the social extra-ordinaries, with ordinary people usually relegated to listeners. This rhetorical *actio* combines two fundamental social actions. It is an act of *social classification*, imposing a specific view of the world, the relevant categories and action (Bourdieu 1991), made possible by a preceding act of *social delegation*, where the 'veritable magical act of institution' (Bourdieu 1991, 195) invests an individual, based on their position and capital, with the authority to speak in the name of others. But what happens when everyone, including the ordinarily silent, *must* speak?

On the one hand, we have the proliferation of books and courses for aspiring speakers, which tells us not only, by their very existence, of the perceived complexity and unnaturalness of this act for many people ('Speak with no fear'), but also of a promise that this can be learned by everyone, by following simple guidelines and techniques. This latter view contrasts with sociological expectations (and likely the experiences of many teachers) that public speaking is for many difficult to learn and feel comfortable with, as it involves the use of language and the body that bring into play deeply rooted dispositions, which likely also varies much by social background and trajectory (Bourdieu 1991).

Studying rhetorical training in schools thus offers an interesting case for understanding how family resources and cultures impact young people's confidence and relation to the use of language relevant to many school situations. However, investigating their varying capacity for the use of appropriate language and the body in public displays of social authority also tells us something more: their varying preparedness for the linguistic cultures of other important social institutions and social elites.

Rhetorical training for young people was, until very recently, a rare phenomenon in Norwegian schools. Our case is a survey of 940 pupils from 22 upper secondary schools whose teachers had enrolled their class *en masse* in a short speech course to provide them with "… a self-confidence to voice their concerns and believe what they say is important. In this way, they will become active citizens in their society and capable of changing it".[2] Class winners progressed to school and national competitions. The pupils had to write and deliver an oral, persuasive speech on a self-chosen subject. In line with classical rhetoric, such a speech required the invention of a theme and arguments, the arrangement and ornamentation of the text, memorising it and delivering it in a public setting. From the pupils' accounts, we learn that they did, to a very different degree, find these operations easy, interesting and enjoyable, and their subjects varied a lot.

We look at three questions. First, how were pupils divided in their experience of the process of speech writing (and delivery) as difficult or easy? And how did this differ by the classical steps for making a persuasive speech (*inventio, dispositio, elocutio, memori* and *actio*), which likely challenged the pupils in different ways? Second, what rhetorical types

can be identified, and what characterises them as speakers? Third, how do family capital resources and oratory culture structure their experiences?

The analysis found that the higher the pupils' class of origin, the more natural and easy the act of speech writing and delivery was felt, demonstrating the unequal social conditions for being "brave" and "natural" and being prepared mentally, linguistically, and bodily, for public displays of authority and deliberation. This school exercise, where every pupil play-acted in a genre dominated by and the distinguishing mark par excellence of powerful agents, was for the pupils more natural the more this exercise was an extension of their past, that is to say, their socialisation in a favourable family climate, but also as part of a very unequally probable future, where some will be speakers, and other will be listeners.

Class origins, language, body and the school

One of the most well-documented and stable sociological facts is that children from families with higher social origins are more likely to succeed in all levels of the educational system (OECD 2022). This is also the case in Norway, which, due to universalistic welfare politics, has established an educational system dominated at all levels by public, no-paying institutions. In upper secondary education (which nine out of ten of 16-18-year-olds attend), those with parents with no higher education are likelier to choose vocational courses than those leading to university studies. These also have a lower probability of finishing their studies and lower grades - including language grades (Hansen and Mastekaasa 2006; Author et al. 2022).

The reason for such family differences in educational success is subject to well-known and long-standing sociological debates. Some explanations downplay the role of family background. Boudon (1974) attributes class differences to rational decisions where investment in schooling comes with much higher risks and lower benefits for the lower classes, while Goldthorpe (2007, 14) argues that schools "compliment, compensate for or indeed counter family influences". Other explanations - which are the kind we are most interested in here - argue that family backgrounds are essential because of the effects of *cultural* harmony between the requirements of schools (e.g. the use of language, ways of thinking and arguing) and family socialisation.

Bernstein's concept of language codes has here been influential. He suggested that a *restricted code* (in his earliest writings called "public language") was more common among the British working classes, and an *elaborated code* ("formal language") dominated the middle classes. The codes were expressed in very different ways. Speech in the former case was often grammatically poor, the language simple, short and repetitive, using a limited use of words with little use of symbolism, and arguments were often categorial and based on implicit meaning. The latter code had opposite traits, such as complex sentences, a richer vocabulary, accurate grammar and syntax, more complex arguments and qualifications and a higher use of symbolism (Bernstein 1971). But rather than a description of two sociolects – a common, reductive misunderstanding of Bernstein's work (Atkinson 1985) – a code is a deep generative structure akin to Lévi-Strauss concept of *grammar*, a principle of structuration where the specific use of language is only a surface phenomenon of different ways of thinking and acting in the world:

> '… an elaborated code facilitates the verbal elaboration of subjective intent whilst a restricted code limits the verbal explication of such intent. (…) A restricted code is generated by a form of social relationship based upon a range of closely shared identifications self-consciously held by the members. An elaborated code is generated by a form of social relationship which does not necessarily presuppose such shared, self-consciously held identifications with the consequence that much less is taken for granted' (Bernstein 1971, 90)

Bernstein's theory is, at its root, Durkheimian. For him, differences originate in the 'qualities of different social structures', which tend to lean towards 'positional' or 'person-centred' types (Bernstein 1958, 27). Middle-class children are rooted in the first type of social world, characterised more by organic than mechanical solidarity[3], and socialised in family settings which emphasise individuation and elaboration, where "complex logical relations are articulated, and personal intentions and sensibilities are explored." (Ibid.). In contrast, children from working-class families, typically "positional", come to the school situation with a relation to language less matched to, and therefore undervalued by, the school culture, which tends to be dominated by elaborate codes.[4]

A similar argument about a cultural mismatch between working-class languages and school was developed in the sixties by Bourdieu and Passeron (1990), who saw schools as fundamentally characterised by middle- and upper-class cultural ways of acting, thinking and speaking (to the degree that school for working-class children demanded a process not just of inculturation, but also acculturation). The school forms a market where socialised dispositions and competencies of children from different classes have very different chances of being valued (functioning as *cultural capital*). In this way, they, like Paul Willis in *Learning to Labour* (1978), appraised this mismatch as a broader clash of cultures than Bernstein while still seeing language as central. Like Bernstein, they saw bourgeois language as the most valued, which, analogous to his elaborated code, were inclined towards "abstraction, formalism, intellectualism and euphemistic moderation", with "a tendency to move from particular case to particular case, from illustration to parable, or to shun the bombast of fine words and the turgidity of grand emotions, through banter, rudeness and ribaldry" (p. 117). And they similarly saw the use of language as fundamentally marked by one's social origin:

> "Rhetorical devices, expressive effects, nuances of pronunciation, melody of intonation, registers of diction or forms of phraseology (…) all these stylistic features always betray, in the very utterance, a relation to language which is common to a whole category of speakers because it is the product of the social conditions of the acquisition of language." (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990, 117)

For Bourdieu, as he would expand on in later works, our relation to language is not, as Bernstein argued, an outcome of family structure but the *life conditions* given by the fundamental resources in the family (its capital and, therefore, its class position), which

give rise to different dispositions in people's habitus, which tend to lead to different lifestyles (Bourdieu 1984). Language socialisation here forms the core of one's *linguistic habitus*, 'the generative, unifying principle at the basis of all linguistic practice' (Bourdieu 1977, 660), which, depending on its appropriateness for a linguistic market (the school or elsewhere), can function as *linguistic capital*.

Bourdieu's discussions of linguistic capital say little about public speaking *per se*, but many parts of his oeuvre are pertinent to the subject. Not least his ideas of the socialised body: Taking the floor, demanding attention, composing oneself, and controlling one's voice and gestures, as is evident from any guidebook for public speaking, requires a particular ("proper") use of the body, a socially unequally distributed *hexis* as Bourdieu put it, where one's position in the social world is "realised, em-bodied, turned into a permanent disposition, a durable way of standing, speaking, walking, and thereby of feeling and thinking" (Bourdieu 1990, 70). Just like language, the use of the body and its 'techniques' (Mauss 1934) is 'marked by a social stamp' (Bourdieu 2004, 585). We should also add his work on social variations in the sense of self-worth, competence and one's natural place in the world, not least in relation to political matters (Bourdieu 1984). It also seems likely that one's rhetorical skills (or lack thereof) are strengthened by classes' typical educational and work trajectories; the general space of lifestyles, for many such reasons, likely corresponds to a space of *rhetorical lifestyles*. For a speech genre dominated by social elites, we would expect that coming up with ideas, writing, and speaking will not only vary with class origin but also generally feel less comfortable and more complex the lower the pupils' social origin.

Bernstein and Bourdieu's ideas on language have been influential but also criticised. In Bernstein's case, his binary language codes and linking these to family structure have been criticised for lacking nuance and ignoring broader societal dynamics of reproduction (Ivinson 2018). In Bourdieu's case, if seen to improve on this latter aspect, questions have been raised about the importance of class for forming cultural dispositions and lifestyles today (Lamont 1992; Grignon and Passeron 1989; Lahire 2004). We will not go further into this general critique nor the research dealing with sociolects and concrete speech differences among classes (but for an example, see Gee (2015). Instead, we will emphasise later work focusing on the role of class and family socialisation in adolescents' language mastery in school.

A common emphasis in later work is the complex and active dynamics of family socialisation. Children are seen as not passive but active and resisting agents in the socialisation process (Octobre and Jauneau 2009; Corsaro 2018). Also, the awareness of class signals in both language and lifestyles appears to be learned early in childhood (Vandebroeck 2021; Lignier 2021). Finally, the active role of parents is emphasised, where Lareau (2011), from her ethnographic research on working- and middle-class families in the USA, provides a useful distinction between two different parental styles. The middle classes practice *concerted cultivation*, an active, goal-oriented style with a strong focus on the proper use of language, with emphasis on reasoning and arguments, and teaching children to be competent speakers in interactions with adults both in private and in dominant social institutions. In contrast, parents in the working classes adhere to an ideal

of *cultivation of natural growth*, with less structure and more use of directives ("because I said so"). For such reasons, middle-class children become more familiar not just with the speech and culture of the school, which helps them secure a wide range of advantages here (see also Calarco 2018), but also with other important institutions.

We must also consider that language socialisation often differs by gender (Kyratzis and Cook-Gumperz 2008). Arnot (2002) and Lee (2013) have also found that the school pedagogy and curriculum tend to embed and construct gender asymmetries, where school codes are marred by pervasive binaries (like facts versus values), and females and non-whites are presented as secondary actors. Important for our study, Lee finds boys to be more often talkers and girls to be writers and listeners. If not the main focus of our study, we should expect gender differences to be important, both by itself and in combination with class background.

When it comes to Norway, which is a very different society than those studied in the literature above, the evidence of class-based differences in parental socialisation and the value of specific cultural and linguistic manners for success in school is relatively meagre but suggests broadly similar patterns as those found above (Gullestad 1984; Elstad and Stefansen 2014; Dæhlen 2015; Strømme 2021). The more precise relationship between class and rhetorical mastery is the subject for the rest of this article.

The case and the data

The data in this study stems from a survey of 16-19-year-old pupils in upper secondary schools in Norway whose teachers in 2021 volunteered their classes for a course on public speaking, <*NAME OF CONTEST*> using a curriculum and structure made by rhetoric scholars at the University of <CITY>.[5] The course consisted of 6-15 hours in class writing and giving an oral speech on their chosen subject. It was unusually competitive by Norwegian school standards; not only were their speeches graded by the teacher, but each class was also to choose a winner who competed against other class winners to be the school champion, who continued to the national finals.

The teachers of 35 participating schools were invited to enrol their classes in an online survey about their course experiences. We received answers from 43 classes at 22 schools, a total of 940 pupils.[6] Most of these schools rank higher than average in national examinations on Norwegian language grades (Norway 2021), and non-vocational programs and large-city schools are over-represented. The data thus concern a somewhat socially privileged section of pupils in upper secondary Norwegian schools.

Figure 1. Promotional material from the <NAME OF CONTEST> website, showing school finalists being trained for and participating in the national final.

The majority of the survey questions asked the pupils' judgements of different parts of the speech writing and delivery as more or less complicated, their general evaluation of the course (e.g. as fun or unpleasant), their confidence in their speeches and their delivery, their chosen subject, and their preferences from a list of hypothetical speaking subjects (e.g. ranking politics as a more desirable topic than one's mental health, and finding these subjects interesting or complex). Note here that the course implementation was subject to both individual (e.g. due to illness or nervousness) and class-wide adjustments: Not all teachers required a written manuscript[7], and the oral delivery situation differed. Most gave their speech in a physical, small-group situation (49%), but many also presented the speech as a video (32%) or gave the speech in front of the whole class (24%).[8] Most read their speech verbatim (51%), others depended on a list of keywords (39%). A small minority memorised the speech (7%) or improvised (3%).

In addition to characteristics of the pupils themselves (school year, gender and language grades), the survey also asked them for information about their parents, including indicators of social class (level and type of education, income), their relation to public speaking (if they enjoyed it, regularly spoke to large groups in their work, and if larger family gatherings usually involved few or many speeches), and questions on language-related socialisation in the family (e.g. if parents enjoyed discussing societal issues with the pupils, and heeded their arguments). Given the difficulty of such judgements, we must realistically expect them to be often imprecise. For such reasons, while our analysis can tell us something about the general role of social inheritance in *structuring* children's relation to the rhetorical arts, it can not precisely measure the *strength* of this relationship, only the lowest possible bound. When statistically significant, on the other hand, these likely indicate robust patterns in the real world.

In the first part of the analysis, we will give an overview of the varying felt ease and naturalness of the rhetorical steps, first by simple descriptive statistics and then by constructing a space of experienced rhetorical mastery using principal component analysis. This space is later the basis for a cluster typology of rhetorical speakers, and these two constructions are then explored for evidence of the importance of family background.

Experienced mastery of the five arts of rhetoric

Mastery of the five arts and their relation

The pupils' reactions to taking part in the speech course varied greatly. A slight majority reported that they found the course interesting, fun or educational, while the rest found it boring or unpleasant.[9] Approximately one in five felt they had become better speakers, but just as many thought they had become worse. One in ten said they were now less nervous about public speaking, but one in six had become more anxious. Elaborating in open questions, pupils expressed very different views of their experiences, ranging from 'scary', "difficult", and "stressful" to "exciting", "enjoyable", and "easy".

In preparing and delivering their speeches, the pupils had to mobilise all of the five lesser arts Cicero (85 BC) saw combined in the art of rhetoric: Invention, arrangement, style, memory and delivery. To measure their experience of these parts as easy or difficult, we asked them a series of Likert questions (Table 1). The grouped questions form acceptable shared measures of the difficulty experienced in each of the five arts (using Cronbach's α), except for memory.[10]

Table 1. "... which of the following things did you think were difficult or easy to do when writing or delivering your speech?" (1=difficult, 5=easy). Means and Chronbach's Alpha.

Arts	Questions	Girls	Boys	Alpha
INVENTION	… what to talk about	2.5	2.5	0.69
	… the goal of the speech	2.9	2.8	
ARRANGEMENT	… find good arguments	2.9	3.1	0.73
	… make a good introduction	3.0	3.1	
	… make a good ending	2.8	3.1	
	… find the proper sequence	2.9	3.1	
STYLE	… find the right words	2.8	3.0	0.82
	… express myself clearly	3.0	3.2	
	… make the language interesting / lively	2.7	2.9	
MEMORY	… use the manuscript	3.6	3.7	0.54
	… remember what to say	3.0	3.1	
DELIVERY	… keep eye contact with the audience	3.1	3.2	0.82
	… speak loudly and clearly	3.7	3.9	
	… speak calmly	3.2	3.5	
	… how to use my arms and body	2.9	3.4	
	… make the audience engaged	2.9	3.1	

The pupils' experiences of the difficulty of each art are strongly correlated (Table 2), especially in the case of arrangement and style (both acts of writing). Their total answers constitute a reliable scale of their overall experienced difficulty of the course (α=.88). Except for invention, coming up with a theme and arguments, boys were more likely to report the steps of making a speech easier. They especially tended to find the delivery easier, which we will return to later.

Table 2. Correlations (Spearman) of the experienced difficulty of the five arts of rhetoric.

	Invention	**Arrangement**	**Style**	**Memory**
Arrangement	.41			
Style	.36	.61		
Memory	.15	.26	.35	
Delivery	.23	.35	.47	.44

The space of experienced rhetorical mastery

To better understand how pupils differed by what they found difficult or more straightforward in their rhetorical training, a *space of experienced rhetorical mastery* was constructed by subjecting the sixteen questions above to principal component analysis. The substantial variation in the pupils' answers is divided along three axes, where we will focus on the first two (Figure 2). Note that the figure is composed of both active variables (used in the construction of the space) and passive variables (which are not) to provide a rich description of this space. The contributions of the active variables are given in Table 3. More statistical details can be found in the online supplement (Author 2024).

Table 3. The space of experienced rhetoric mastery. Normed PCA, absolute contributions axis 1-3.

	Label of the variable	Axis 1	Axis 2	Axis 3
INVENTION	… what to talk about	3.4	**7.2**	**26.2**
	… the goal of the speech	4.6	**8.4**	**23.3**
ARRANGEMENT	… find good arguments	5.5	**8.6**	0.2
	… make a good introduction	**6.3**	5.3	0.4-
	… make a good ending	6.1	4.2	1.7-
	… find the proper sequence	5.3	3.6	**16.8**-
STYLE	… find the right words	**8.1**	3.2	**14.7**-
	… express myself clearly	**10.3**	0.9	1.5-
	… make the language interesting / lively	**9.6**	1.8	0.7-
MEMORY	… use the manuscript	2.7	5.7-	4.3-
	… remember what to say	5.2	5.1-	0.9-
DELIVERY	… keep eye contact with the audience	6.1	**10.8**-	1.5
	… speak loudly and clearly	**7.3**	**12.0**-	1.2
	… speak calmly	5.8	**14.1**-	0.4
	… how to use my arms and body	**6.3**	**8.3**-	1.1
	… make the audience engaged	7.3	0.9-	5.2

Categories in bold are above average.
Minus signs show placement on the negative side of the axis.

The axis of general mastery (vertical axis in Figure 2, explaining 34% of the total variance) divides those who find the rhetorical steps generally easier versus more difficult, with the latter placed towards the lower end. The most divisive variables are arrangement (writing a beginning), style (finding the right words, writing clearly and lively) and delivery (speaking clearly, using the body and engaging the audience). *The axis of spoken versus written mastery* (horizontal axis, 12%) separates pupils who generally find delivery easier than writing versus those who feel the opposite; the latter is placed towards the left. The third axis (not shown, 7%) divides pupils who found it easier to come up with ideas for the

speech (inventio) than ornamenting the text (elocutio) and vice versa. Figure 3 provides some representative comments on the course from the pupils given in an open question, given their position on the first two axes.

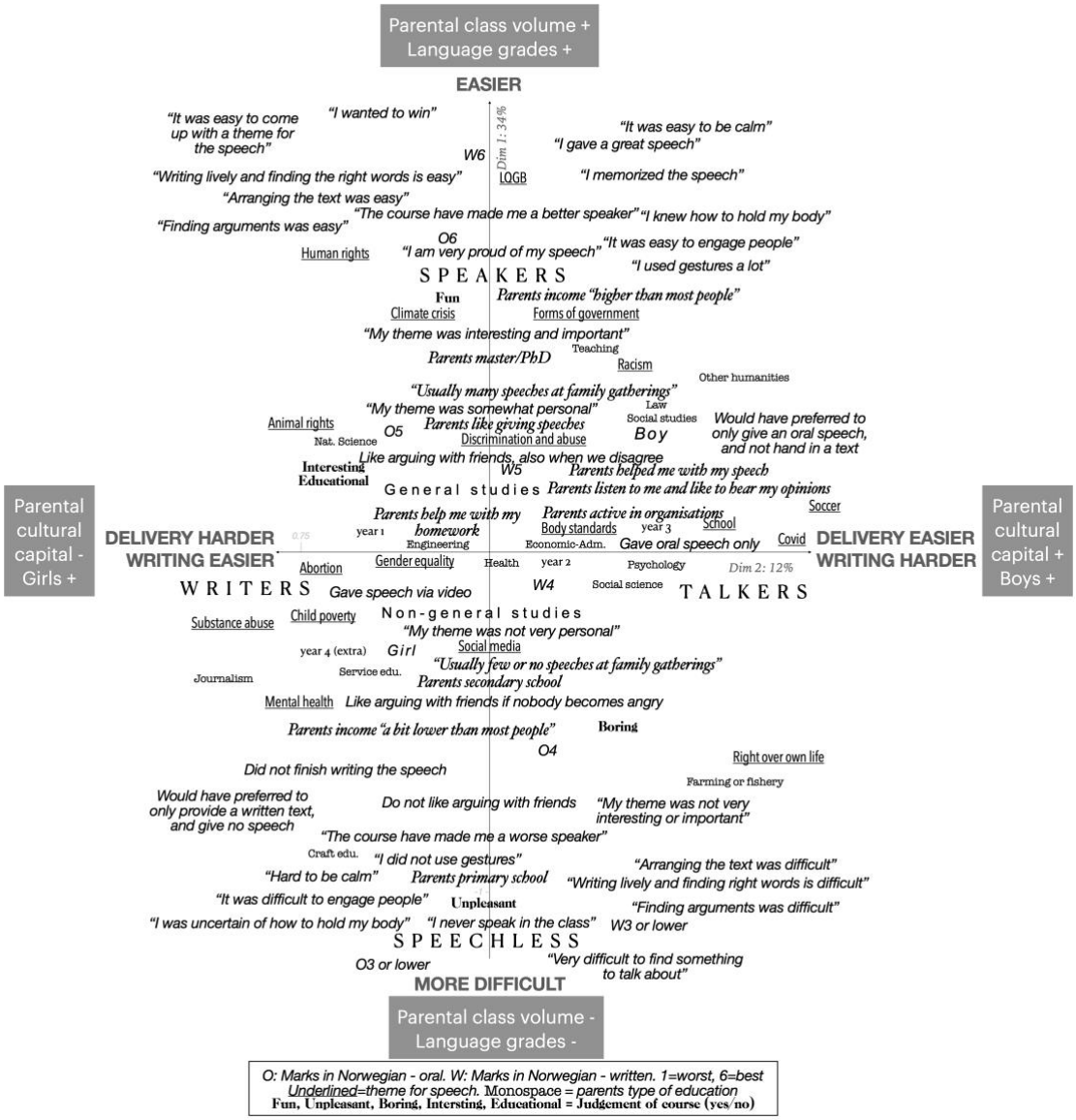

Figure 2. The space of experienced rhetorical mastery, axis 1-2. Categories.

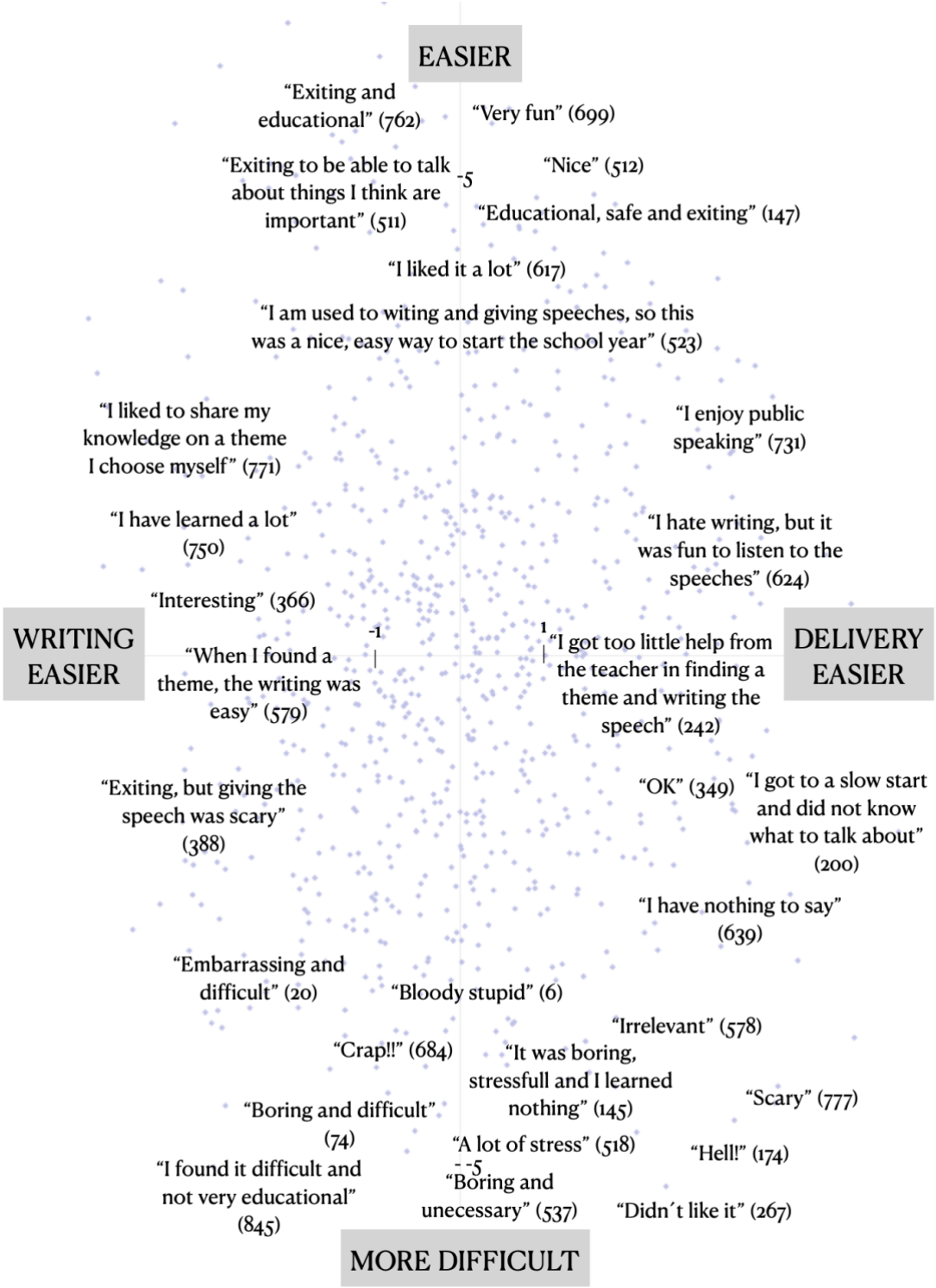

Figure 3. The space of experienced rhetorical mastery, axis 1-2. Cloud of individuals and selected comments on the course.

Speakers, Writers, Talkers and Speechless

Based on their experienced rhetorical mastery in this space, we can identify four main rhetorical types (Table 4).[11] *Speakers* (17%) find every part of the course more

straightforward than the others and express higher confidence and satisfaction in their abilities as writers and public speakers (e.g. saying more often the theme of their speech was important, that pupils and teachers probably found their speech interesting, that it was well written and well delivered), and much more often find the course interesting and fun (they also more often wanted to win the competition).[12] The *Speechless* (25%) are very much their opposite, defined by having the strongest feelings of lacking the necessary abilities and motivation for the course and more often finding the experience unpleasant. The remaining two groups occupy a middle position regarding how difficult they found the process but differed by which aspects they felt most comfortable with. *Writers* (35%) found the writing of the speech generally easier than average but the delivery more difficult, while the opposite is true for the *Talkers* (23%). Talkers tended to show disinterest and boredom with the course, while writers appeared more interested. As these descriptions suggest, the four groups are opposites along the two axes in Figure 2.

Table 4. Characteristics of four clusters of experienced rhetorical mastery. Global and cluster averages. Only categories with significant test-values are displayed.

		Speakers	Talkers	Writers	Speechless
Experienced mastery (1-5)	*Global*	Cluster	Cluster	Cluster	Cluster
Inventio	*2.7*	**3.5**	2.2	**3.0**	2.2
Dispositio	*3.0*	**3.8**	2.6	**3.3**	2.4
Elocutio	*3.0*	**4.2**	2.6	**3.2**	2.1
Memoria	*3.1*	**3.9**	**3.4**		2.3
Actio	*3.3*	**4.3**	**3.8**	3.2	2.3
Course (% agree)					
Fun	*21*	**38**	15		14
Interesting	*51*	**66**	41	**56**	41
Educational	*40*	**56**			32
Boring	*30*	18	**38**		
Unpleasant	*20*	7		15	34
Own speech (% very much agree)					
Well delivered	*20*	**48**		14	8
Made me proud	*29*	**54**	22		21
A good speech	*27*	**50**			17
Interesting for the teacher	*30*	**52**			21
Interesting for the other pupils	*23*	**40**			14
Interesting for myself	*43*	**61**			
An important theme	*60*	**72**			
Girls (%)	*60*	52			**66**

The easier the pupils found the course, the more likely[13] they were to say that their parents had a degree in humanities or social science or an income high above average, which are typical signs of upper-middle-class origins. Such differences also tended to persist when controlling for their language grades. E.g. children with both their parents in the lowest income category were, regardless of their grades, significantly more likely than others to find the experience an unpleasant one and to say that their speech was poorly written, badly delivered, of little interest to themselves or others, and on a not important subject.[14] Showing signs of a concerted cultivating parenting style (Lareau 2011), pupils from socially privileged families also more often reported their parents as involved in their speechwriting and an oral culture at home likely favourable for learning persuasive use of language. Their parents were more often said to enjoy public speaking[15], discussing societal issues with them, listening to their thoughts about the world and heeding their arguments. Those who found the course challenging were more typically of lower social origins and reported such traits of the parents less often.

Table 5. Chances for having selected characteristics of pupils and fathers by placement in the four clusters. Odds ratios (relative to odds for those among the "Speechless").

	% in cat.	Speakers	Talkers	Writers
Girl	58%	-2,17**	-1,59+	-1,35
2nd or 3rd year	60%	-1,15	1,15	-1,47+
Grades (1-6, 6=best)				
Oral, 6	12%	6.96***	1.55	1.92
Oral, 5 or 6	56%	6.86***	2.33***	2.94***
Written, 6	9%	9.13***	3.11+	4.10**
Written, 5 or 6	42%	2.20***	1.23	1.56+
Oratory culture in the family (father)				
Like public speaking	49%	1,68**	1,57++	1,59*
Has a job which require public speaking	39%	1,11	1,52+	1,05
Active in organisation	36%	1.74**	1.50 +	1.43
Do not speak Norwegian	14%	-1,45	-1,41	-1,61
"Many speeches" in large family parties	18%	1,34	1,13	-1,05
Parental style (father)				
Discuss societal issues with child	54%	1,99**	1,99**	1,24

	% in cat.	Speakers	Talkers	Writers
Listen to childs opinions about the world	59%	1,76*	1,94**	1,40
Listen to child's arguments	59%	2,33***	1,64	1,76*
Can discuss personal, difficult issues	40%	1,39	1,30	1,20
Can help me with homework	43%	1,45	1,73*	1,22
Helped with speech	27%	1,97*	1,61+	1,63+
Social inheritance (father)				
Master degree or PhD	36%	1,04	-1,3	1,74
Income high above average	13%	2,55*	1,4	1,87
Master Humanities or social science	6%	4,81*	3,82*	1,34
Master Economics, law or adm. edu.	11%	1,74	1,22	1,84
Master Natural science or technical edu.	14%	-1,61	-1,89+	-1,82+
Master Health or Social Studies edu.	5%	-1,64	-1,56	1,01

Sign: + p<0.10, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001
Control for the school year and gender.

Talkers are more likely than Writers to have parents educated in humanities (children of teachers are especially likely to place in this group) or the social sciences, the markings of inherited cultural capital, while Writers' parents tend to have educations associated with high economic capital, e.g. medicine, law or economics. Whereas Speakers and Speechless generally map to higher and lower class origins, that is, the overall volume of parental capital, Talkers and Writers differ more in terms of parental capital composition. That we, simply by looking at what parts of the rhetorical training pupils experience as easier or more difficult, have roughly sketched the social space of classes (Bourdieu 1984; Rosenlund 2019) clearly argues for strong links between rhetorical mastery, public speaking and social inheritance.

Public and private

Given that the pupils' reactions to rhetorical training vary by social class, it is unsurprising that this social topos (place) is also linked to rhetorical topos, e.g. which subjects they prefer and feel comfortable talking about. A critical division here appears between the public and the private, and the universal and the personal - between subjects directed to debated issues in politics and the public sphere versus issues that concretely affect pupils' daily lives. When asked to choose from a list of subjects for giving a hypothetical speech, the higher the parent's educational level and income, the more likely pupils were to rank

political themes higher (and as less complex), and school, mental health and family issues lower (and more embarrassing).[16] For many working-class pupils, there appears to be a rejection of partaking in the world of politics, a trait which is often observed among working-class groups (Gaxie 1978; Author 2023).

But some of the same is also true for girls. Girls were more likely than boys to be Speechless than Speakers, and more often Writers than Talkers (Table 5), the latter in line with common findings on gender differences in school (e.g. Lee 2014). Even if girls' language grades, both written and oral, on average, were significantly higher than the boys' (4.6 and 4.7 in written and oral, versus 4.1 and 4.5), boys found the course generally easier (except for coming up with ideas for a theme) and seemed to enjoy the oral speaking more, while at the same time more often expressing boredom and indifference. On the other hand, girls expressed more often pride in their written speeches but less in their oral delivery. Girls were also more likely to avoid 'politics proper' when choosing subjects (e.g. forms of governance or the electoral outcome), saying more often than boys that it was too complex and favoured subjects like mental health, body standards and gender discrimination. Girls were also more likely to say their shared "very personal" issues in their speech. In sum, these responses evoke traditional gendered patterns relating to politics and participating in the public sphere (Fraser 1990). Public speaking on an issue of personal importance, for girls more than boys, seems to involve a more strenuous crossing of the boundary between staying silent and speaking up in public. Reminiscent of Bourdieu (1984), gender differences tended to be less common among children from the upper classes than the lower. If both their parents had a master's degree, regardless of their language grades, girls were just as likely to be Speakers (generally finding the course easy) as boys but five times less likely if none of their parents had higher education. Similar intersections between class and gender can be found in finding the course interesting, fun or unpleasant, finding political subjects too complex for a speech and having confidence in the oral delivery.

On the social conditions for the art of rhetoric

For the adolescents forced to partake in the school course in public speaking, their reported experience varied a lot. Some found it easy, enjoyable and interesting, others quite the opposite. Also, the perceived difficulty of the rhetorical stages varied, and so did the subjects they chose and felt comfortable speaking about. The primary divide was with the general ease and comfortableness of the rhetorical process, and this tended to follow students' reported language grades, their parents' social class and favourable oral cultures in the home.

The socially privileged children were more competent and confident in their role as public speakers and more often seemed to find it enjoyable, interesting and fun. Public speaking appeared as something which comes more *naturally* for them, an ease which is linked to their grades but not fully explainable by them. While oral grades and confidence in their public speaking appear to be more dependent on parents' cultural than economic capital, and vice versa for written grades, writing and delivering a public speech were easier and more natural for children with any privileged social origin.

While some of this likely expresses more general traits of a habitus formed under social privilege - like higher self-confidence and feelings of self-worth, feelings of ease and naturalness in school settings (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990; Lareau 2011), the study also offers some evidence of the importance of language socialisation. Privileged children more often report a familial oral culture likely favourable to public speaking. They were likelier to say their parents enjoyed public speaking and did it as part of their work and that their big family gatherings were often filled with speeches. Their parents also appear to not only more often help their children with language assignments, but also to discuss social issues and reason with them, in what we, with allusion to Lareau (2011) might call a *concerted rhetorical cultivation*. In this way, teaching pupils public speaking does, in the case of upper-class children, appear clearly to some degree to teach "fish to swim" by exposing them to a use of language which they likely are already more familiar and at ease with than working-class children, who not only have to learn to speak in public, but also unlearn their long preparation for a life in public silence.

The second major divide in pupils' experiences of the course was the varying felt ease of the oral delivery, which typically varied in reverse with the ease of writing the speech. While boys were usually more comfortable with the former and girls the latter, echoing the findings of Lee (2013), there were also signs that both oral family cultures and cultural capital in parents increased the chance of children being 'talkers' and more technical vocations in parents the chance for being 'writers'. Also, the gender divisions (also regarding their subjects) appeared to be lesser among those with highly educated parents, which aligns with earlier findings that socialisation is more gender-divided in the working classes (Bourdieu 1984), also in the case of language (Kyratzis and Cook-Gumperz 2008).

While this exercise in the rhetorical arts took place in a school setting, it has broader sociological importance. Being well-equipped for public speaking via well-placed parents with a favourable linguistic culture is not just an advantage in schools. It is also a preparation for a probable future, which for the privileged includes not only higher education and its rewards but also, later, sharing the oral cultures of the powerful in society and speaking when others are listening. For the rest, silence awaits. Like for working-class children, this is also a more probable fate for girls in one of the most gender-equal countries in the world, a future of the home and hearth rather than the agora and the council.

Rather than rhetoric arts as something which for one is born a 'natural' (a charismatic ideology) or a set of skills which anyone can learn (a meritocratic ideology), rhetorical mastery in writing and speech appears as a social practice clearly marked by its particular mode of acquisition, of the social conditions of its early socialisation, and the social distance to the milieus and cultures typically associated with it (Bourdieu 1996). In this way, the study offers not just a case for the importance of family and class background for learning and practising the rhetorical arts in school. It also suggests the general importance of such socialisation in the formation of social classes, as a learned mastery or helplessness in important public and elite settings, and calls for a critical and sociologically informed *socio-rhetoric* as a challenge to many of the beliefs and pedagogy which surround this art, especially in its deliberative mode, which in the final instance is the art of social elites and a central practice in their domination.

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Online supplement

http://praktiskegrunde.dk/2024/wellbredonlinesuppl.pdf

Notes

1 In Aristotle's Rhetoric (2004), deliberative speech is one of the three rhetorical genres focused on persuasion to take a course of action. The other two genres are the epideictic (celebratory) and forensic (judicial).

2 Course website (URL)

3 *Positional* families have a clear-cut authority structure, leading to 'specific, unambiguous role identities and relatively inflexible role performances' (Basil Bernstein 1971, 184). *Person-centred* families, in contrast, have looser authority structures and more emphasis on personal qualities, which tend to lead to 'ambiguous personal identity and flexible role performances' (Ibid.). In the first type of family, variety must be reduced to ensure cultural reproduction, while in the latter, it is encouraged (Basil Bernstein 1977, 125).

4 Note that Bernstein did not see working-class language as fundamentally deficient but being well-suited to other social worlds - with "its own aesthetic, a simplicity and directness of expression, emotionally virile, pithy and powerful and a metaphoric range of considerable force and appropriateness … a beauty which many writers might well envy." (Basil Bernstein 1971, 54)

5 These scholars were not involved in the class courses but trained the school winners and judged the national competition.

6 The majority of the pupils appear to have answered the survey. On average, the school classes had 22 responses. Such classes usually have less than 30 pupils.

7 82% of the pupils submitted a manuscript, 14% said this was not required.

8 The numbers add up to more than 100% as some held the speech more than once.

9 Interesting 53%, educational 37%, boring 30%, fun 20%, unpleasant 20%.

10 For this reason, "Memory" in Table 2 is represented by the singe question of the difficulty of "remembering what to say".

11 Euclidian ascending hierarchal clustering using the first three principal axes. Cluster variance after consolidation within 3.498 and without 5.136, Pseudo F 418.541.

12 38% of Speakers said they wanted to win. The same was true for 19% of the writers, 11% of Talkers and 12% of the Speechless.

13 Note that these estimates are likely highly deflated. Not only are pupils' guesses likely often inaccurate, but the statistical effects also tend to increase by the rarity of the category and multiply in combination with other favourable properties. There are also

gender effects: Having a highly placed father has more effect on boys than on girls, and vice versa for mothers.

[14] Control for gender, school year and oral marks (1-6).

[15] The chances for a parent being said to enjoy public speaking (details in the online supplement) increase with the parent's income and educational level, and are also more common among parents with degrees in non-technical subjects (esp. humanism for fathers and social science for mothers), suggesting the importance of cultural capital. Their parents are also more likely to be said to enjoy public speaking if they have a job which requires such speaking, are active in organisations, or come from a family where speeches are common at family parties.

[16] See the online supplement for details.

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