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How to prepare for the Kossuth Rhetoric Contest?

Theoretical and methodological guide

“Dialectics engages the interest of very few students”
(Varro)

Abstract

The aim of this study is to introduce the new genres of the renewed Kossuth Rhetoric Contest and to give theoretical and practical advice to those preparing for the contest on how to create a rhetorical presence. In this paper we briefly review the history of the rhetoric contest, the principles of its renewal, the classical and modern interpretation of rhetoric, and the importance of the debate culture. The theoretical background of the new genres (online video, debate) will be discussed in more detail.

Keywords: speech contest, social media platform, presence, rhetoric, dialectics

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1. Introduction – On the Kossuth Rhetoric Contest

The art of rhetoric arrived (again) in Hungary only in the 1990s. Before that, under the socialist regime, there were good attempts to think about rhetoric (e.g. Fischer 1966, 1973; Deme 1974), but they could not really flourish, mainly because of the political environment. Other endeavours (e.g. Hernádi 1976) have mainly emphasised the importance of speech education, the culture of spoken language, which is also an important part of rhetoric, but not its complete system.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, but even in the first half of the 20th century, the tradition of classical rhetoric can be found in Hungary (Adamik et al. 2005, 210–241), but from the 1950s it completely disappears from school curricula. An enormous, half-century-old gap had to be bridged after the regime change: one of the guiding efforts of this work was the Kossuth Rhetoric Contest, founded in 1999 by Anna Adamikné Jászó, then head of the ELTE Faculty of Teacher Training. There had been competitions similar to the contest before (such as the ‘Sweet mother tongue’ language contest for secondary school students in Sátoraljaújhely, organised since 1973), but the oratorical contest was a real novelty at the university-college level (Aczél 1999, 397). To this day, the aim of the competition is to cultivate and develop the use and culture of the Hungarian mother tongue, and last but not least, invites participants to think together about rhetoric. And from 2022 onwards, the organisers are placing emphasis on the importance of the debate culture.

Below are a few points of view, useful information and theoretical background for those who are interested in the contest and want to learn more about the science of rhetoric.

2. On the purpose of rhetoric, the role of the speaker and presence

“Rhetoric is the counterpart of dialectics.” This thesis was formulated by Aristotle in the first systematic, scholarly work on rhetoric, the *Rhetoric* (Aristotle 1999, 1354a). And the meaning of the sentence is this: the science of eloquence can be paired with the science of correct argumentation. Rhetoric and dialectic,

together with grammar, were part of the trivium of the seven liberal arts (*septem artes liberales*). The subject matter of all three subjects of the trivium is the same: language, but 'each examines and functions it for a different purpose, grammar for correct writing and speaking, dialectics for logically correct argumentation, rhetoric for good, effective speaking' (Adamik 2010: 1069). According to Varro, "dialectics and rhetoric are like a man's clenched fist and their outstretched palm, the former narrowing words, the latter expanding them. Dialectics strives harder to discuss things, rhetoric is more eloquent in what it wants to communicate. [...] Dialectics engages the interest of very few students, this [rhetoric – P. A.] is many and massive" (Adamik 2010, 1070).

The many ways in which rhetoric has been interpreted over the centuries, and how we continue to interpret it today, we have a whole library of literature at our disposal. From the aspect of a rhetoric contest, however, it is important to emphasise the three basic factors that have determined the functioning of rhetoric since antiquity: the person of the speaker (*ethos*), the composition of the audience (*pathos*) and the message (*logos*). *Ethos* means the credibility of the speaker, the judgement of their person, *pathos* is based on the emotions and prior knowledge of the listener, and *logos* is based on the arguments -- that is, the speaker must appeal to the intellect, moral values and emotions of the listeners (Adamikné Jászó 2010, 159). This triad is also attributed to Aristotle, who put it this way: "Speech is made up of three things: the speech it speaks about and to whom it speaks; the purpose of the speech is directed at the latter, i.e. the listener" (1999, 1358b).

The audience is therefore the key player in rhetoric – not a good speaker is one who forgets this and does not argue accordingly. Indeed, the purpose of argumentation is to "induce or reinforce the agreement of a particular audience with the propositions that are put forward to win their consent". And this "will never come from nothing, but presupposes the interconnection of souls between the speaker and their audience: a speech must be listened to, a book must be read, for without it there is no impact" (Perelman 1977/2018: 24). Listening to the audience is all the more important, because the speaker can make what they say (and, in fact, themselves) present in the face of *pathos*: the chosen style also has an argumentative role (an inappropriate style that is not adapted to the situation and the audience will not have the right impact), but the arguments chosen are also selective: all arguments are selective, since the speaker must adapt to the actions and beliefs of the audience, as they are considered

by their audiences to be real existents and clingers (summarised in Major 2022, 152). In a school setting, e.g. the presentation and processing of contemporary Hungarian popular music texts in class (Tóth 2020), or the rhetorical analysis of advertising texts (Lózsi 2020) can be a means of creating presence.

The system of classical rhetoric (the tasks of the speaker, the parts of the rhetorical speech, the types of speech) will not be dealt with in detail here, as there have been several summaries of these in the past decades (cf. e.g. Adamik et al. 2005; Adamikné Jászó 2013).

3. Speeches at the contest, preparation

The Kossuth Rhetoric Contest has been completely revamped in 2022: the organisers have expanded the competition to three rounds and adapted it to the requirements of the 21st century. Under the new framework, participants will have a much greater opportunity to demonstrate their skills – including in establishing a speaker presence, with the chance to prove themselves online and in person. Competitors can show their skills in three rhetorical situations:¹ they can enter the competition with a video of up to 60 seconds to be uploaded on one of the social media platforms (TikTok or YouTube). The professional jury will select a maximum of 30 participants based on the videos for the second round, which will take place in person and will require participants to give a prepared oral presentation of up to three minutes. The six best speakers will eventually be selected, who can compete their skills in a debate.

The following are some practical tips for each round.

a. The online round – TikTok or elevator speech

In the 21st century, the focus has shifted to short and concise messages. The online round of the Kossuth Rhetoric Contest was inspired by the elevator speech genre and the brevity and attention-grabbing content of the TikTok social media platform. The short videos (sometimes not even primarily based on verballity) are popular and “big hits” on social media, because influencers often express their opinions on current social issues. Opinions can be expressed directly, in the form of text-based opinion videos, or quasi-indi-

¹ On the detailed concept of the rhetorical situation, see Adamikné Jászó 2013, 75-77.

rectly, in a creative way: in situational settings, with humorous, visually composed content. The organisers of the oratorical competition are looking for experiments in the first type of video, as the aim is to show the power of the spoken word – by delivering a short but pithy message in the form of an elevator speech.

The elevator speech genre may be familiar to many: the point is that the candidate has 30-60 seconds to convince their partner (be it a sales manager, a top corporate executive, a teacher, a trainer, a supervisor, etc.) to accept their position, to do the right thing, to give them the job, to promote them, and so on. All this can be done in a concise, attention-catching but appropriate form, after thorough preparation and acquiring a routine (cf. Weidinger 2015, DrPrezi). The key concepts of the 60-second argument can include the following (cf. DrPrezi website):

- catching the attention
- the delivery of the messages
- leaving a reminder

Let's take an example.

The author of these lines was invited to take part in a 60-second elevator speech contest on the following topic on the morning programme of Petőfi Radio on 19 October 2022 (*"The morning with Petőfi!"*): Social media has improved human communication – pro or con. The text has been transcribed from the radio programme and is now published in a slightly edited form, with a brief analysis.

If we approach human communication as a possible space for listening to each other, then in my opinion, social media has not improved human communication. Obviously, it's also connected to the use of smart devices, because we use social media basically on our smart devices. We use a multitude of platforms, there are already several social networking sites, and you tend to get lost in which one you are communicating on. And obviously, if you're immersed in your phone, or you're communicating on your computer, it can be quite distracting if there's a stimulus coming from the outside world. Because of this, personal communication is compromised. I can give you my own example: whenever I was talking to my friends or classmates, e.g. in a chat, it was very annoying to be personally addressed by someone on the bus or in my room at home, asking me to give up my seat, or to

wash the dishes, etc. Therefore, I think that this kind of listening to each other is not helped by social media.

A brief analysis of the speech in terms of elevator speech can be as follows:

viewpoint	textual appearance	activity
catching the attention	communication as the space for listening to each other; social media has not improved human communication	reframing of the concept (communication as paying attention), stating the position at the beginning of the speech
the delivery of the messages	social media is connected to smart devices; there are several social media sites; personal communication – between each other – is compromised, but we also tend to get lost on our own platforms; presenting own example	communicating facts based on experiences, observations, opinions; mentioning everyday problems, conflicts, personalising the issue by example
reminder	paying attention to each other, repeating the point	reinforcement of reframing, confirmation of the unchanged status of the position

Table 1. A brief analysis of the speech in terms of elevator speech

As the table shows, the power of the short rhetoric, the creation of a rhetorical presence, is that the speaker captures attention by reframing the key concept (communication), thus giving the topic a specific perspective. In addition, the speaker sustains the attention by citing everyday, personal examples and conflicts, then reinforces the reframing and makes their own position seem immovable. The text can also be used to express an opposing point of view in reflection. So being brief can be informative, even inspiring to speak out, because its strength lies precisely in the fact that there is no possibility of a multi-directional tour of the topic, so the speakers on each topic can put together the “whole” picture themselves: thus revealing a range of approaches, emphases and argu-

ments. Short speeches in the online round also have the advantage of being asynchronous: as the material is video, multiple attempts can be made to record it, so that the contestant can submit the material they (and/or their coach) consider the best. However, it is important that the video is not edited: the 60 seconds of text must be recorded in one take.

For interest, here are the topics for the online round of the 2022 Rhetoric Contest, for which entrants have created 60-second videos:

- Social media has improved human communication – pro or con.
- Who do you think is a celebrity today?
- Selective waste collection – is it efficient in its current form?
- Is there really a friendship between a man and a woman?
- If you pay with a smart device, do you spend money more?

Brevity is not unknown in classical rhetoric: centuries ago it was considered a virtue, if someone could get their point across in a concise way, highlighting only the most important points. The article on brevity is quoted from Anna Adamikné Jászó's *Stilisztikai kishótár [Stylistic Dictionary]* (2019, 165–166)

“**Brevity**’ (in Latin *brevitas*). A train of thought about editing (disposition). »There are three requirements in a narrative: brevity, clarity and plausibility. [...] The way to make the case briefly is to start from where it seems necessary, and not from the very beginning; if we leave out the details and give the main points; if we do not follow the plot through, but only as far as necessary; if we avoid any transition; if we do not wander away from the subject we have begun; [...] Let us beware of saying the same thing twice or more” (Rhetorica ad Herennium I, IX, 14, translated by Tamás Adamik). It impresses with its compactness. The essence of humorous texts is also brevity, which is always emphasised in rhetoric. (Its opposite is → loquaciousness. Writers often characterise their uneducated or cunning characters by starting the narrative of something with Adam and Eve.)”

b. The mandatory speech

In the second round of the speech contest, prepared speeches will be delivered. The primary aim of this is to allow the contestant to demonstrate their independent writing and performing skills to the jury and the audience. The

three-minute time frame also provides an opportunity to explore the chosen topic in more depth, presenting more arguments.

The experience of the organisers suggests that there are people in the field who are instinctively good speakers and who need almost no special preparation to deliver a good speech. In the following, however, we would like to present aspects which can help everyone if they get stuck in their preparations. The author of the present study (Pölcz 2020) has already given some hints to the participants of the speech contest about the preparation for the mandatory speech in relation to the previous genres of the contest. We now present the relevant parts of this article – in an edited form, modified as necessary.

Mandatory speeches at the Kossuth Rhetoric Contest may not exceed three minutes. Time is measured by the jury. If someone's time is up, they may finish the thought they started, but they may not start a new one. Irregular time overruns will result in a deduction of points. The speaker's tasks can be summarised in the following 10 points to make a good speech:

Collection of material

When formulating the proposals, the traditional paper-based preparation technique is mentioned, but these can be replaced by electronic devices: Using Word files, voice memos, etc., other note-taking techniques (e.g. mind maps).

1. Let's take a sheet of A4 paper! It is advisable to fold the sheet in half along the longer side, so that it is divided into two columns. On the left column, write the most important arguments, ideas and opening quotes of the speech, while on the right column you can elaborate on the main train of thought in detail. This will create a clear, concise note, which will also help the contestant to memorise (see point 8).

2. The collection of material phase is where the most important arguments are found and recorded, so the contestant should note down all the important arguments and ideas that arise, because it is still easier to miss out on a lot than to make a meaningful idea out of a little.

3. The contestant is mainly on their own during the preparation, but they can use external help (smart devices, coaching teacher, books, etc.) or even work from their own resources.

4. The contestant should also pay attention to who the audience is and whether the jury has defined a speaking situation, a real or imaginary audience to whom the speech should be addressed. Addressing – if necessary – should

also be adapted to this. The speech situation should be kept in mind from the beginning of the collection of material.

Arrangement

5. Finally, of the material collected, only the content that you intend to use should be kept in mind. By knowing the speech situation and deciding on the composition of the audience, it's easier to get rid of unnecessary thoughts and data from the sheet.

6. If you want to change the sequence of the arguments, you can do so by clearly marking (e.g. by numbering, reordering) the sequence of ideas.

Style, finishing

7. In fact, we are already working on the style as we gather our arguments: we are trying to formulate our message with an internal monologue. In this way, the collection of material and the drafting are actually done at the same time: this way, in the course of preparation, it can become clear what needs to be left out of the text.

Memory

8. With a prepared speech, it is important to learn the text, because when you are giving a speech, you cannot have an outline in your hands to help you keep going. However, it is handy to have the prepared text with one of the accompanying persons, so that the contestant can get help if they get stuck. Memorising the text is an individual task, everyone achieves the result in a different way. It may be practical to memorise the text in parts (e.g. paragraph by paragraph) and recite it out loud to someone, because there is a huge difference between silent memorisation and recitation. A text is considered learned when the ideas and words follow each other in a natural sequence, and there is no need to pause before the contestant guesses the next sentence.

Presentation

9. When giving a speech, you should pay attention to the volume: the size of the room, the number of people in the room and the distance between them. In a speech contest, there is – in principle – no microphone available, so the contestant must use their own abilities to fill the room with their voice, paying

attention to their breathing and breath control. Just as important is accurate articulation, the right speech tempo and the right speech melody.

10. Even when developing the style, it is worth thinking about body language. In everyday life, we take it for granted that we accompany our speech with facial expressions and gestures. Why would it be any different when it comes to rhetoric? Delivering a speech is not a stage art, but an intense two-way communication process that also requires authentic, sincere body language. The speaker should feel free to use their hands, assume a comfortable posture and involve their own body in the communication. Hands should not be held close to or in front of the body. No stand is available at the contest.

c. The debate

The best six contestants will qualify for the third, the debate round of the speech contest. According to the requirements of classical dialectics, the aim of the debate round is to draw attention to the legitimacy of different ideas and to provide a controlled, cultured framework for the clash of sometimes opposing thoughts. The best of the best who make it to the debating round now have to focus on more than just getting their own ideas across, but also have to deal with any opposition that may arise, they also need to respond to them. To do this, however, the purpose and function of the debate must be clarified, and the way to do this is through a new understanding of rhetoric.

Throughout the 20th century, rhetoric was also interpreted as the science of motifs, style, values, ethics and the teaching of composition – all of which were closely related to the text being produced or written. Recent research, however, no longer understands rhetoric as a set of tools for writing a speech, but as social intelligence, behaviour and attitudes. According to the latter, rhetoric is a phenomenon “that provides the individual with the skills of entering the community, self-assertion and understanding of others. It therefore includes the ethical cognitive skills and knowledge needed to interpret and shape social situations” (Aczél 2017, 8). Rhetoric has still not let go of the text, since it is through it that communication itself and the building of social relations can be achieved, but it can be considered a major change to emphasise that the ability to understand others is a natural part of the process. And consequently, what else could be the purpose of the debate if not the necessity to understand the other person?

Our world is so complex, diverse and multifaceted that the concept of persuasion, which is inherently the domain of rhetoric and debate, has also been reassessed. A 20th century predecessor of this interpretation may be Ivor Armstrong Richards' definition of rhetoric, given in his *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1936, cited by Adamikné Jászó 2013). In it he defined rhetoric as "the study of misunderstanding and its antidotes". According to Anna Adamikné Jászó (2013), Richards' theory is based on semantic relativism: that is, that everyone has a different understanding of certain concepts (tolerance, democracy, religiousness, etc.). And the task of rhetoric is to create consensus between differently understood concepts. Wacha (1999, 127–128) still discusses the debate explicitly in the context of persuasion: "The purpose of the discussion [...] is nothing else but to convince the partner of the correctness of our own statements, views, and the purposefulness of our own, so that the partner accepts them, adopts them, and thus takes our "side"" (Wacha 1999, 127). Of course, Wacha also points out that the debate is not about defeating the other (only as a last resort), but he also defines consensus building as a "worse case" (Wacha 1999, 127–128). In the debate round of the Kossuth Rhetoric Contest, the aim was also redefined: not necessarily to persuade, but to clash views and explore the perspectives of people from different places (perhaps of different ages and genders) on a particular topic.

At the start of the debate round, the contestants are drawn into pairs, so three pairs are formed. Each pair is given a topic, and a draw is also used to decide who will be the pro and who will be the con. Arbitrary allocation of roles is good not only for practical organisation, but also because if someone is forced to express a point of view with which they might disagree, they will be forced to think about the issue from a different point of view.) The debaters will be given 20-25 minutes of preparation time, during which they are encouraged to prepare using the aspects of this study given in the mandatory speech and the notes on improvisation (Pölcz 2020). The third participant in the debate is a moderator, who, after introducing the debaters, starts the round with a debate starter.

The role of the debate starter, according to Wacha (1999, 134–135), is to turn off the "only I can be right" and "only I can win" attitudes – which is in line with the newly formulated goals of the Kossuth Rhetoric Contest. It also aims to raise certain problematic points and deliberately leave certain issues open, whereby the moderator actually encourages the debaters to discuss them, sort of giving them a binding handhold. In their own way, the debate starter also participates in the debate by formulating their own position: by pointing out its weaknesses

and strengths, they also stimulate the debaters' thinking and make them react (Wacha 1999, 135).

Participants in the debate round can expect the following points from the debate leader (based on Wacha 1999, 135):

- History and definition of the issue;
- Description of the current situation;
- Definition of the purpose;
- Exposing the disputed issues;
- Presenting opposing views and opinions;
- Presentation of the moderator's own opinion;
- Presentation of firm and dubious points (description of other options, variants);
- A description of what needs to be decided
- Proposals (e.g. for the order of speaking);

After the debate starter, first the pro and then the con contestant may speak for 3 to 3 minutes. After the contributions are made, there is a 5-minute free debate led by the moderator, where the parties are free to respond to each other's arguments and thoughts. The debate concludes with a summary by the moderator.

Summary

The Kossuth Rhetoric Contest now being organised for the 23rd time, will present new challenges to the contestant. The contest will consist of three rounds (online videos, speech in presence, debate in presence) and will be run on a qualifying basis. The best performers will have the opportunity to demonstrate their ability to create a rhetorical presence and connect with their audience in three rhetorical situations, as there are different requirements for the online space, for the speech in presence and others for the debate situation. The key concept in online speeches is brevity, while in mandatory speeches it is structured and planned, and listening to the other side plays an important role in the debate. It is the intention of the organisers to ensure that the speech contest continues to play its part in the 21st century as well. The aim is for the contestants to demonstrate their oral skills in the renewed language usage arena, and to fill social media platforms with quality content.

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