The proposition identifying algorithm

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Abstract: Among various methods adopted for public speech analysis, only few focus on such an important issue as identifying the text proposition, i.e. its key statement. Whereas, this knowledge does not only deepen the understanding of the author's intention, but also improves the skills of perceiving and analysing information. The concept of 'knowledge society' is used to demonstrate the practical use of being able to process information and outline main ideas.
The following article explores ways of defining the proposition based on the mode of argumentation. First, the article discusses general techniques used for revealing the proposition (e.g. argumentation, speech title, etc.). Specific models of propositions and their features are illustrated by examples of epideictic (by Metropolitan of Volokolamsk), judicial (by American abolitionist John Brown) and deliberative (by Franklin Delano Roosevelt) speeches. The conclusions point to the fact that knowing the suggested models of propositions helps to single out the gist of the speech.

Keywords: Rhetoric, rhetorical criticism, public speaking, proposition, epideictic rhetoric, judicial rhetoric, deliberative rhetoric, knowledge society.

Rhetorical analysis, as a way to perceive and process information, can be regarded a powerful tool to the full understanding of the information one receives. Whereas, learning and proper understanding allows us to call this information – knowledge, i.e. something practical and useful for the society. Since we are making the distinction between information and knowledge societies, we can conclude that the main difference is the way people treat information – either they create it or they are able to put it to good use. It is important to understand that "knowledge societies are about capabilities to identify, produce, process, transform, disseminate and use information to build and apply knowledge for human development." [1]
Thus, with the ever-increasing amounts of information generated on the daily basis, it is becoming harder and harder to analyze it and define main ideas contained in it, especially if we are to talk about texts composed in a foreign language or at different periods of time. Therefore, there is a need for defining specific mechanisms that could facilitate this process.
This article explores procedures aimed at helping students identify the key statement of any comprehensible speech and acquire a profound understanding of its structure and purpose. Public addresses in the English language (in the original and in translation) are used as a material for the analysis.
A proposition is the most important statement of the speech. It is not supposed to be obvious for the audience; therefore, the speech argumentation structure has a goal to support it. To find and clearly define a proposition in the analysed text means to get to the bottom of the whole text and to do a good half of the analysis. A proposition is a starting point for both writing and analyzing a speech. In the Russian tradition, we also call it thesis, the main claim or the main statement. Further on these terms are used as synonyms.
Generally, a skill of elaborating a particular proposition within a given topic is hardly ever acquired by untrained speakers and even by experienced rhetors. At the same time, analysts,

consultants and even schoolchildren (e.g. while writing their text analysis essays) might also be in need of an easy proposition identifying algorithm. Meanwhile, the detailed procedure for the thesis identification has not been suggested yet. Frans H. van Eemeren, Rob Grootendorst and A. Francisca Snoek Henkemans in the book "Argumentation. Analysis, Evaluation, Presentation" proposed only two markers for thesis defining in the text: 1) "*A standpoint is seldom an utterance whose acceptability is clearly evident*" and 2) "One needs to watch out for indicators of standpoints such as 'in my opinion' and 'I think that'"[2].

We have summarized and suggested a number of techniques for revealing the proposition. This method allows to formulate the key claim for a future speech in a quick and easy manner. In this article, however, we concentrate on proposition identifying in a ready-made non-fictional text.

Let us start with some general rules. First of all, we should remember that everything in the text, from its title to examples, has to gravitate to the proposition. I always suggest that students make a plain scheme of the text argumentation. The last statement in the logical chain should convey the thesis.

If the analyzed speech is professionally written, we can expect the proposition to be the most provocative claim of the text. Other claims should be more obvious and clear for the intended audience because they serve as a foundation for the main claim demonstration.

Since any proposition is meant to be acquired and internalized by the intended audience, it may prove to be useful to ask yourself after reading the text: what is the conclusion that the orator expects the audience to make? In some cases the right question should be – what is the action he wants them to take?

It is also quite useful to look at the social, political and cultural context of the communicational act. Answer the question: what are possible motives of the speech author? Is he or she arguing with somebody? Is the speech a response to somebody's words or deeds?

There are more particular and technical proposition markers. Let us name them. The title of the speech should point at the thesis. Quite often, a title (if there is one) contains speech subjects, for instance, "I Have a Dream", "On Democracy", "Europe Today", etc. In the following titles we get the first part of the proposition. Then we need to finish the statement. What is the dream? How does the author understand democracy? What is crucial about Europe today? Look at the first two and last two or three abstracts of the text. You might find there the response and the proposition because according to rhetorical rules these are the best places for the thesis verbalization.

It is easier to analyze a text if the proposition is clearly highlighted by the rhetor himself. Rather often orators use such constructions as "I claim that", "In my opinion, the most crucial thing is…", "I believe that the most important thing is…", etc. These assertions should concern the main topic and the title. Then it is likely to be what we are looking for.

If you were to analyze contemporary texts, the proposition would probably be repeated many times in different variations following a manipulative recommendation of the modern rhetoric textbooks to repeat the main claim up to thirty times.

You probably were familiar with the above-mentioned proposition signs. Now let us turn to the special algorithm based on the mode of the argumentation. There is an essential factor that narrows the ways in which the proposition could be stated. The crucial thing for any proposition is the mode of argumentation. Since Aristotle, we know that epideictic (or ceremonial) speeches should praise or condemn people, agencies, phenomena or any abstract category. As for deliberative (or political) argumentation, it should find the best way to treat the subject of the

speech in the future in concordance with norms, traditions and precedents; and judicial (or forensic) speeches have to specify, define and evaluate facts of the past.

Generally, students, schoolchildren and even ordinary people easily distinguish between these three types of modes when they keep in mind just such a plain rule: judicial speeches are about the past facts, deliberative speeches are about future and their subjects are models and projects, and epideictic speeches are about eternal values. As easy as this, but it helps a lot in determining the speech type.

We also know what kinds of topoi, or commonplaces, are usually used in the particular mode of argumentation. This knowledge gives us the list of possible claim models for every mode of argumentation. Therefore, we can provide public speakers, speechwriters, schoolchildren and students with three short lists of possible formulations for the proposition that they can use to either analyze or deliver a speech in a particular mode.

Let us list them. Most epideictic texts would have propositions that in some way resemble the following models:

- *To have some quality X means to do / to value / to like / to remember / etc. Y.*
- *Good state / man / society / education / any other subject of speech Y must have characteristics X, X1, X2…*
- *To honour something / to be something-worthy / to be member of some community / to do something honorable Y means to do X.*

Epideictic argumentation always arranges the hierarchy of values with a value-aim Y and a value-means X.

Analysing epideictic speeches, we should remember that this mode of argumentation is usually ceremonial. That is why it usually has two propositions: the actual one and the ostensible one. I would call the last one a motivation proposition. Normally, it contains a performative verb and such phrases as "Let me congratulate you…'', " I would like to present you a reward", etc. This ostensible motivation proposition usually causes the ritual conclusion in the text. Thus, the composition of an epideictic text could be compared to a nut: with profound argumentation and a real new statement as its core and motivational proposition and ceremonial phrases at the beginning and at the end – as its shell.

Let us read and explore a typical epideictic text –

*"*Dear participants in the Assembly!

I wholeheartedly greet you all who have gathered in the capital of Austria to discuss the state and prospects of the development of inter-religious cooperation. During the years of its activities, the World Conference of Religions for Peace has become an authoritative discussion forum that unites religious leaders from many countries.

The theme of the IX World Assembly, 'Welcoming the Other: Action for Human Dignity, Citizenship and Shared Well-being,' is very topical today as we see the gross flouting of human dignity and violation of basic human rights in the world. In the first place, this concerns the situation in Syria, where a murderous civil war has been going on for several years being dramatized by intervention of international terrorist groups. Being driven by religious hatred, the extremists commit mass murders of Christians and acts of arson against churches in Syria. Harmless people, including women and children, are ousted from their homes and exposed to violence. Many Muslims also suffer from the actions of the fundamentalists. Our duty today is to do anything possible to put an end to the conflict.

Metropolitan Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim of Aleppo from the Syriac Orthodox Church has been known to the WCRP during many years of his work. He was abducted by the extremists in Syria on April 22, 2013, together with Metropolitan Paul Yazigi of the Orthodox Church of Antioch. Their whereabouts and fate remain unknown. I call upon the Assembly to issue a special appeal to the world community to facilitate their release as soon as possible.

The problem of persecution and discrimination against Christians in other regions of the world is no less acute. Every year, about one hundred thousand Christians die by violence for their faith because of intereligious conflicts. It is necessary to acknowledge the fact that Christians are the most persecuted religious community on our planet. About one hundred million Christians are persecuted in the world at present. According to the Commission of the Episcopal Conference of the European Union, 75% of all persecutions on religious grounds occur against Christians.

I am confident that the use of all available opportunities for opposing religious extremism could considerably better the lot of those persecuted and discriminated on religious grounds.

I wish the participants in the Assembly successful work on the course of peacemaking, interreligious dialogue, and cooperation.

/+ Hilarion/

Metropolitan of Volokolamsk" [3].

The nut's core and the main topic here is the argumentation concerning the situation in Syria. The shell are the two propositions: the ceremonial one "*I wholeheartedly greet you all who gave gathered in the capital of Austria…*" and the real one: "*I call upon the Assembly to issue a special appeal to the world community to facilitate their release as soon as possible*".

Let us pass to judicial speeches now. Some specifications are to be made for them due to their status structure. It is important to remember that judicial argumentation in its full version consists of three stages called statuses: the status of ascertainment, the status of definition, the status of estimation. At the first stage, we have to identify the agent, the deed, the object, the circumstances, the consequences and the motives. At the second stage, that is, in the second status we have to qualify the action and at the third stage we have to estimate the facts and make a decision about future actions. Every status has its mode of arguments and that is why it has its own modes of propositions. Let us have a look at them.

- «X has performed / has not performed a deed У in the circumstances Z with consequence P» (for the status of ascertainment),
- «the deed У is / is not Q» (for the status of definition),
- «the deed У or circumstances P are good / or bad, because …» (for the status of estimation),
- «the deed У is / is not similar to the deed R» (for the status of estimation), when X is the agent, which performed the deed У in the circumstances Z with the consequence P; and Q is a phenomenon of higher taxon than Y; R – is phenomenon of the same taxon than Y.

Therefore, the proposition of the estimation status is the main claim, but some speeches about the past do not come to this stage. We can find some reports that simply stop at the first stage or some historical prose that do not go further than the status of definition.

Let us have a look at the example of a judicial speech by the American abolitionist John Brown:

"I have, may it please the court, a few words to say. In the first place, I deny everything but what I have all along admitted -- the design on my part to free the slaves. I intended certainly to have made a clean thing of that matter, as I did last winter when I went into Missouri and

there took slaves without the snapping of a gun on either side, moved them through the country, and finally left them in Canada. I designed to have done the same thing again on a larger scale. That was all I intended. I never did intend murder, or treason, or the destruction of property, or to excite or incite slaves to rebellion, or to make insurrection.

I have another objection; and that is, it is unjust that I should suffer such a penalty. Had I interfered in the manner which I admit, and which I admit has been fairly proved (for I admire the truthfulness and candor of the greater portion of the witnesses who have testified in this case)--had I so interfered in behalf of the rich, the powerful, the intelligent, the so-called great, or in behalf of any of their friends--either father, mother, brother, sister, wife, or children, or any of that class--and suffered and sacrificed what I have in this interference, it would have been all right; and every man in this court would have deemed it an act worthy of reward rather than punishment.

This court acknowledges, as I suppose, the validity of the law of God. I see a book kissed here which I suppose to be the Bible, or at least the New Testament. That teaches me that all things whatsoever I would that men should do to me, I should do even so to them. It teaches me, further, to "remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them. I endeavored to act up to that instruction. I say I am yet too young to understand that God is any respecter of persons. I believe that to have interfered as I have done--as I have always freely admitted I have done--in behalf of His despised poor was not wrong, but right. Now, if it is deemed necessary that I should forfeit my life for the furtherance of the ends of justice, and mingle my blood further with the blood of my children and with the blood of millions in this slave country whose rights are disregarded by wicked, cruel, and unjust enactments--I submit; so let it be done!

Let me say one word further.

I feel entirely satisfied with the treatment I have received on my trial. Considering all the circumstances it has been more generous than I expected. But I feel no consciousness of guilt. I have stated that from the first what was my intention and what was not. I never had any design against the life of any person, nor any disposition to commit treason, or excite slaves to rebel, or make any general insurrection. I never encouraged any man to do so, but always discouraged any idea of that kind.

Let me say also a word in regard to the statements made by some of those connected with me. I hear it has been stated by some of them that I have induced them to join me. But the contrary is true. I do not say this to injure them, but as regretting their weakness. There is not one of them but joined me of his own accord, and the greater part of them at their own expense. A number of them I never saw, and never had a word of conversation with till the day they came to me; and that was for the purpose I have stated. Now I have done." [4].

This is a speech in self-defence following the conviction of John Brown on November 2, 1859. He was to be executed for treason, so he addressed the court explaining his actions. All three statuses can be found here: ascertainment ("*I deny everything but what I have all along admitted*"), definition ("*I never did intend murder, or treason, or the destruction of property…*", "*it is unjust that I should suffer such a penalty*") and estimation ("*I believe that to have interfered as I have done <…> was not wrong, but right*"). They also correlate with the models mentioned above.

Finally, we have come to deliberative speeches. According to Aristotle's Rhetoric, this kind of speaking urges us "either to do or not to do something: one of these two courses is always taken by private counsellors, as well as by men who address public assemblies." [5]. That is, they are probably the easiest type of texts to be analyzed because deliberative argumentation always

contains an appeal concerning the subject of the speech. "Let's vote for that nice guy", "let's build a new stadium", "let us organize a rhetorician conference", etc. Although, for the same reason deliberative speeches are usually more aggressive and that is why the proposition of such texts generally includes the main supporting argument and the proposition turns out to be longer and more complex than a direct appeal. Most popular models for deliberative speeches are:

- For you/ for your family / for the nation / for the company / etc. (any beneficiary) it is good / bad to do X with the subject of speech Y.
- The agent Z (we, you, they, etc.) should do X with the subject of speech Y, and it will cause good consequences P / otherwise bad consequences Q will come.

Let us explore one of the most prominent political speeches by Franklin Delano Roosevelt called "The Infamy Speech". It was delivered on December 8, 1941 one day after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii:

"Mr. Vice President, Mr. Speaker, Members of the Senate, and of the House of Representatives: Yesterday, December 7th, 1941 -- a date which will live in infamy -- the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan. The United States was at peace with that nation and, at the solicitation of Japan, was still in conversation with its government and its emperor looking toward the maintenance of peace in the Pacific.

Indeed, one hour after Japanese air squadrons had commenced bombing in the American island of Oahu, the Japanese ambassador to the United States and his colleague delivered to our Secretary of State a formal reply to a recent American message. And while this reply stated that it seemed useless to continue the existing diplomatic negotiations, it contained no threat or hint of war or of armed attack.

It will be recorded that the distance of Hawaii from Japan makes it obvious that the attack was deliberately planned many days or even weeks ago. During the intervening time, the Japanese government has deliberately sought to deceive the United States by false statements and expressions of hope for continued peace.

The attack yesterday on the Hawaiian islands has caused severe damage to American naval and military forces. I regret to tell you that very many American lives have been lost. In addition, American ships have been reported torpedoed on the high seas between San Francisco and Honolulu.

Yesterday, the Japanese government also launched an attack against Malaya. Last night, Japanese forces attacked Hong Kong. Last night, Japanese forces attacked Guam. Last night, Japanese forces attacked the Philippine Islands. Last night, the Japanese attacked Wake Island. And this morning, the Japanese attacked Midway Island.

Japan has, therefore, undertaken a surprise offensive extending throughout the Pacific area. The facts of yesterday and today speak for themselves. The people of the United States have already formed their opinions and well understand the implications to the very life and safety of our nation.

As Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy, I have directed that all measures be taken for our defense. But always will our whole nation remember the character of the onslaught against us.

No matter how long it may take us to overcome this premeditated invasion, the American people in their righteous might will win through to absolute victory.
I believe that I interpret the will of the Congress and of the people when I assert that we will not only defend ourselves to the uttermost, but will make it very certain that this form of treachery shall never again endanger us.
Hostilities exist. There is no blinking at the fact that our people, our territory, and our interests are in grave danger. With confidence in our armed forces, with the unbounding determination of our people, we will gain the inevitable triumph -- so help us God.

I ask that the Congress declare that since the unprovoked and dastardly attack by Japan on Sunday, December 7th, 1941, a state of war has existed between the United States and the Japanese empire" [6].

Brief and to the point, Roosevelt's speech had a very strong impact on the audience. The orator accumulated his arguments in the first half of his speech in order to introduce the proposition in the second part. Models referring to good and bad consequences can be found towards the end of his speech: "...the American people in their righteous might will win through to absolute victory" or "With confidence in our armed forces, with the unbounding determination of our people, we will gain the inevitable triumph..." [6].
Thus, the mode of the argumentation narrows the way in which the proposition might be formulated. Naturally, not all speeches are clearly structured allowing us to instantly pick up its meaning and purpose. The main idea can be surrounded with secondary issues and confusing arguments. That is why it is important to have a plain algorithm of proposition identifying based on universal models according to the mode of argumentation.
The proposed procedure has been tested in text analysis within the framework of rhetoric and rhetorical criticism courses at the Lomonosov Moscow State University. The results showed that having a toolkit of above described models in hand proved to simplify proposition identifying for the majority of students.
To conclude, let us remind ourselves that proposition is the dominant idea of the text, i.e. its purpose and purport. Being able to outline it offers opportunities for better understanding and better application of the knowledge contained in a text. Thus, if we enhance our learning abilities it will prove to be useful for the development of our society as a knowledge society, i.e. the society that takes full advantage of the information it has at its disposal.

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