

"Trigger" Your Audience: Trigger Scripting as a Contemporary, Integrative Event

*Michelle Miller-Rassulo**

The competitors who comprise our individual events constituency increasingly include students who possess varied life experiences and desire to impact others in every aspect of their communication beyond competitive forensics. Recognizing this, communication scholars in the area of interpretation studies are focusing in on utilizing interpretation of literature as an informative and persuasive medium of communication responsive to the needs and issues of contemporary life (Valentine, 1986).

During the 1982 and 1983 action caucuses on oral interpretation in forensics, interpretation scholars resoundingly called for forensic activity to reflect current practices in performance and interpretation studies (Holloway, Allen, Barr, Cooley, Keefe, Pierce & St. Clair, 1983). This request calls for a perspective of oral interpretation in forensics to consist of the recognition that:

- 1) interpretation is both an art and a communicative act;
- 2) a presentational form can be found for literature, including but not confined to, the printed word;
- 3) audiences as well as expressive agents are to be educated; and
- 4) interpretation is the study not just of written texts, but of how literature affects participants in specific settings (Valentine, 1986, p. 399).

Messages in interpretation studies are no longer viewed as primarily the written literary text, but as literature created from "oral traditions, oral histories, interviews, documentaries and postliterate inventions" (Valentine, 1986).

Reflecting the changes in interpretation studies along with a response to the call for experimental events at forensic tournaments, I propose a unique event that integrates both persuasion and oral interpretation, group performance with rhetoric and logic with emotion. The event is TRIGGER SCRIPTING.

Performance as Persuasion

The term "trigger scripting" refers to the use of carefully selected literature to kindle responses from a targeted audience (Valentine, 1979). Carefully arranged selections of literary text are used to "trigger" a reaction, motivation, activation or change. Past

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MICHELLE MILLER-RASSULO is a Faculty Associate in Communication at Arizona State University and Director of Forensics at Scottsdale Community College, Scottsdale, AZ 85253.

research indicates that performance is a very powerful communicative event; it has the capacity to reveal experience, increase learning and knowledge, and structure the social environment rhetorically (Capo, 1983; Cloerkes & Wohr Hans, 1982; Gimmesstad & Dechiara, 1982; Hartman, Hartman, Alho & Fritsche, 1978; Manchester, 1971; Miller-Rassulo, 1987; Pelias, 1984; Smart, 1986). Performance is viewed as an instrument for discourse about change. Bormann (1985) suggests that a single dramatic case has greater impact on attitudes and commitment than statistics or other generalized statements. It is asserted that much of what has been deemed persuasion can be accounted for on the basis of "group fantasies," fantasizing in conjunction with the emotional arousal of a performance drives the participants in the communicative act toward actions and efforts to achieve them (Bormann, 1985). Drama has the potential to be rhetorically aesthetic. That is, it has the potential to be both rhetorical and aesthetic. Performance is empowering, not only to the performer but to the listener, because it gives voice and visibility to another group, to an idea, to a purpose. Performance connects us as human beings, helps us control our lives, and strengthens our sense of community (Conquergood, 1986).

Parker (1982) believes that researchers are reticent to deal with emotional approaches in communication:

Persuasive rhetoric need not eschew all the devices used by propaganda. Emotion is not only inevitable in discourse, it is a necessary base for action. Propaganda has emotion—Poetry and propaganda differ in the ends they seek, but they use the same means. Emotion is part of life, part of language (p. 9).

Performance studies research in the past two years strongly suggest that the trigger scripting method of performance has the capacity to modify attitudes, increase awareness of issues, and transform social fantasies (Mann, 1987; Miller-Rassulo, 1987; Smart, 1986). Through literature, The process of transformation is brought about by the following: 1) **Identification**—the audience member experiences emotion towards a character or situation and there is a level of emotional investment; 2) **Projection**—the audience member infers the motives involved in the programmed literature and then applies those to his/her own life; 3) **Catharsis**—the verbal or nonverbal expression of emotion in relation to the experience; and 4) **Insight**—the audience member recognizes him/herself and significant others in the symbols and characters in the literature (McInnis, 1982). The next step following transformation is 5) **Action**—the emotional, physical or social enforcement prompted by the transformation.

The trigger scripting method of performance has been used to induce attitude change and behavior change concerning issues such as assertiveness, rape, stepfamilies, handicaps, old age, and intercultural communication (Mann, 1987; Miller-Rassulo, 1987; Valentine & Valentine, 1983; Cloerkes & Wöhr Hans, 1982; Hartman, Hartman, Alho & Fritsche, 1978). Trigger scripting methods are currently being employed in the curriculum of interpretation in social contexts. The National Endowment for the Humanities provided the project, "Angle of Vision: Interpreting Contemporary Western Fiction," a sizeable grant on the basis of effectiveness of the trigger scripting method. This synthesis of persuasion, individual interpretations of literature, and readers theater is well suited to competitive forensics to broaden the scope of the available performance experiences as well as to remedy the disparity between academic oral interpretation performance and contest interpretation.

Rationale

The results of the 1984 Developmental Conference on Forensics provided encouragement for the creation of experimental events that are not sanctioned by the NIET (Manchester & Friedley, 1986). The inclusion of a group performance of literature with the purpose to persuade follows this encouragement and is a natural offshoot from the already existing events of persuasive speaking and oral interpretation of literature.

Most importantly, forensic experience should be relevant to the students' lives, and the skills learned must have transfer value to the world outside of the classroom. Participants in a trigger scripting event would specifically derive the following benefits: 1) analyzing relationships between literary messages, audience, and themselves; 2) analyzing persuasive messages as acceptable means of effecting social change; 3) exposure to new and different literary texts; 4) literature as a rich source of supporting material; 5) adapting rate, pitch, loudness, quality, articulation, and pronunciation so as to communicate the persuasive message effectively; 6) studying the impact and adaptation of nonverbal communication on the interaction of audience and interpreter; 7) learning, as they work on group performances, to select a leader, research material, script and edit material, and add their expertise and ideas to the group process during the give-and-take interaction preceding and during the course of forensic competition; 8) realization of the power and relevance of literature as a communicating and persuasive event (adapted from Valentine, 1986, p. 402). Overall, trigger scripting provides a framework to develop those skills utilized in

FIGURE 1

Coping and Groping as a Stepped-On Parent

COMMANDMENT #2

All: Don't expect instant love.

Stepchild: DEAR DIARY: Mom's really furious with me, but I don't care. My stepdad said hello and I didn't respond. Just because someone says hello to you doesn't mean that you have to answer. The main problem with Joel is that he is always being so nice. And he is soooooo nosey!! He just comes in my room and goes, "Hi." Do you believe that! (Ephron, 1986)

LITERARY
TEXT

Stepfather: DEAR DIARY: Jenny's reacting to the fact that there is a new man in her mother's life. Usually I arrive home and she retreats to her room. But this time I went into her room to give her a present. She wouldn't look at me. Anne suggested that she say thanks. She did. To be precise she said, "Thanks. Now can I go back to what I was doing?" Anne was pretty upset about it. Actually I find the whole thing amusing. She's just a kid. It'll pass. (Ephron, 1986).

LITERARY
TEXT

Narrator 1: Don't ignore problems. Deal with them early on.

Narrator 2: Stepparents also have the right to enforce the rules of the house. Avoid dividing up your family, such as, "It's your kid – you take care of it."

Stepmother: He undercuts me. I'm not really the parent when his children visit. He feels bad about the broken marriage and can set very few limits. They can do whatever they want. They don't listen to me and they get away with murder. They come every weekend and I can't wait for them to leave. I feel helpless.

NARRATIVE
MATERIAL

Narrator 1: There are currently 35 million stepfamily systems in the United States. Thirteen hundred new stepfamilies are formed each day. The stepfamily represents the fastest growing family form (Glick, 1984).

Narrator 2: Experts predict that the stepfamily will be the most common family form by the mid-1990's (Glick, 1984).

STATISTICS

ALL: Society hasn't prepared us.

	COMMANDMENT #3 Don't take all of the responsibility.
Stepmother:	You're just like the rest of us mothers – gluttons for punishment – greedy for guilt. Every time one of our kids does something wrong, we blame ourselves. But let me tell you, when Joey got the zipper in his fly caught on his you-know-what, and came screaming to his kindergarten teacher, I decided for the first time in my life that that wasn't my fault (Vail-Thorne, 1983).
LITERARY TEXT	
Narrator 2:	Blame is a waste of time.
SF:	I look at them. . .
SM:	. . . our children
SC:	Separate and strong
SM:	And with more power against us than any God. . .
SF:	The conflict is. . . that we compare them. . .
SM:	. . .to each other. . . and to ourselves.
SC:	But they are separate. . . They are not the same
SF:	They are no us. . . And
SM:	They are not ours. . .
SF:	We transfer to them all that we wished for ourselves.
SM:	So it is we. . . That are bound to them. . . En-route to ourselves...
SC:	So let them be. . .
SM:	Less like we are. . . And more like ourselves. . .
SC:	Then. . . maybe. . . That will set us free
SF:	From trying to be different than we are (Malloy, 1977)
	<i>The scripting of narrative material could consist of monologues, dialogues, and adaptation of monologic narration into a scene. For example:</i>
Narrative	It's so confusing this issue of "names." When I was living with
Story:	Mary and Jeffrey, I never knew what to call him, you know, how to refer to him. One time a friend of his called and asked for Jeffrey; he was out and the kid asked who I was. I didn't know what to say! Am I his friend, his father, John, uncle – what?
	Now Mary and I are married and I can, at least, refer to myself as Jeffrey's "stepfather."

Adaptation for scripting:

Friend: Is Jeffrey at home?
John: No, he's out.
Friend: Oh, is this his father?
John: No, this is Jeffrey's er . . . I never knew what was the right answer; then Mary and I married. Now I'm able to respond, "This is Jeffrey's stepfather." Jeffrey, on the other hand, continues to introduce me as his "er. . .".

Event Guidelines

The audience should have a feeling of a unified whole in which each performer contributes to the total persuasive effect. Team entries will consist of a minimum of (3) performers and a maximum of (14) performers. Time limits are suggested to adhere to 25 minutes maximum, including set up and take down.

In establishing parameters for this event, the goal is not one of attempting to confine performers, the goal is one of attempting to define the possibilities for this event. In light of defining the possibilities for this event, the following mechanics of the presentation are posited (adapted from Phi Rho Pi Handbook, 1986):

- 2) Costuming should not be the focus of the presentation; however, suggestions in ensemble dress may be used.
- 3) Off-stage, on-stage and audience focus may be utilized to reflect accurately the message of the script.
- 4) Reading stands, chairs, stools, ladders, platforms, and steps may be used; however, facility limitations (space, equipment, time, etc.) should govern the director's choice.
- 5) Performers may stand, sit, or both, or may move in the designated stage space. The movement should be consistent with the ideas or moods of the literature and the over all concept.
- 6) Music/sound effects, lighting effects or visual aids are acceptable as long as they do not dominate or distract from the presentation.
- 7) Two teams will compete in each panel. Three judges will be in each preliminary round and three in the final rounds.
- 8) Judging will be accomplished via a win/loss and quality points approach.

Each team in a panel will be awarded a win or loss. Quality points to each team will utilize the following scale suggestion: 40-50 superior, 30-39 Excellent, 20-29 Good, 10-19 Fair, and 0-9 Unprepared. (See Figures 2 and 3 for example ballot and criteria.)

FIGURE 2

Trigger Scripting Performance Ballot

Round	Time	Room	Judge
Performing First (Team Code) _____			Title _____
Performing Second (Team Code) ____			Title _____
Quality Points:	40-50 Superior 30-39 Excellent	20-29 Good	10-19 Fair 0-9 Unprepared

Win		
(Team Code)	(Title)	(Quality Points)
Loss		
(Team Code)	(Title)	(Quality Points)

(Judge's Signature)	(Judge's School)
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Comments:
Team 1: _____
Team 2: _____

Reasons for Decision: _____

FIGURE 3
Trigger Scripting

Overview:	The Trigger Scripting event is a group performance event to synthesize persuasion and the oral interpretation of literature.
Description:	A thematic program is to be presented through performance with the purpose to persuade, actuate or motivate the audience.
Judging Criteria	
Scripting:	Scripting addresses the content and arrangement of the materials selected for performance. Specific aspects may include: reasoning, argument, development, balanced use of appeals, appropriate supporting materials, credibility, referencing, continuity, editing, creativity, emotional range and impact.
Performance:	Performance addresses those vocal and physical aspects of the performance which facilitate the communication of the message. Specific aspects may include: vocal variation (volume, rate, pitch, intensity, projection, articulation, pronunciation) and physicalization (gestures, body posture, nervousness, energy, eye contact) .
Blocking:	Blocking addresses the overall physical staging of the trigger scripted performance. Specific aspects may include: balanced staging, creativity, enhances message, motivated movement.
Purpose:	Purpose addresses the overall issue of whether the message was persuasive, was it effective "triggering" attitude or behavior change? Specific aspects may include: clarity of purpose, arguments well supported, overall achievement of purpose.

Research Possibilities

Despite the popularity and assumed efficacy of the individual speaking events in forensics, few researchers have dealt with empirically validating this efficacy. A coherent body of knowledge is necessary to generate growth in the area of individual events.

Experimental studies are needed to assist in the examination of the audience/performer/text relationship. Focus on persuasive effectiveness of performance on both audience and performer is viable for forensic investigation. The trigger scripting event provides an opportunity for research in several areas. Attitude change, audience response, behavior change, perspective-taking abilities, message construction, and analysis of competitive success are all possible foci for forensic pedagogy and scholarship concerning the proposed event—trigger scripting.

Within the forensic community, interpretation with intent to persuade will link public speakers with interpreters in an effort to make informed choices and decisions about their lives and influence the world around them through the sensitive communication of literature. The adoption of this event as an experimental event at recognized forensic competitions acknowledges an effort to contemporize current oral interpretation practices to reflect current interpretation theory. Adoption of the trigger scripting event also has the potential to benefit the student participants, the judges, the audiences and the scholars whose research interests lie in performance and/or persuasion.

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