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ABSTRACT

A study investigated whether there was a relationship between contestants' speaking position and their ranking and quality ratings by judges in forensics competitions. In addition, the study examined whether these relationships varied by type of event. Subjects were contestants from two- and four-year colleges in two tournaments held in California. The tournaments consisted of three preliminary rounds and one final round per event. All rounds studied consisted of between three and seven contestants and were judged by forensics coaches, graduate students, and hired local judges. The judges were asked, in addition to filling out their normal ballots, to complete a questionnaire that asked them to list the speakers in order of actual speaking with their assigned ranks and ratings. Scores were collected for approximately 1,500 contestants. Data analysis revealed no significant relationship between speaking position and ranking in panels of three, four, six, or seven speakers when events were combined. A significant difference was found in panels of five, with an advantage to last position. This advantage disappeared, however, when the expository event was excluded from analysis. Additionally, no significant relationship was found in any instance between speaking position and quality ratings. Overall, the findings suggest that speaker position is not a significant determiner of forensic success. (FL)

THE EFFECT OF SPEAKING POSITION ON SUCCESS IN FORENSICS COMPETITION

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the effects of speaking position on two measures of forensics success: rankings and quality ratings. In the vast majority of cases, no statistically significant relationships were found. In no cases were quality ratings affected by speaker position. The two cases where rankings were affected by speaker position do not appear to reveal a clear pattern of advantage to certain speaker positions. On the whole, the authors conclude that order of speaking is not a major determinant of forensics success.

The Effect of Speaking Position on Success in Forensics Competition

Speaking position in forensics competition is frequently a subject of controversy among coaches, competitors, and tournament directors. Most tournaments utilize random assignment of speaking positions to avoid any possible bias that could result from granting some speakers a more favorable position. Despite such procedural safeguards, the recent practice of allowing competitors to enter two (and sometimes three) events in the same conflict pattern, has often allowed students to manipulate their speaker positions. It is becoming a frequent experience as a judge to be asked by students to speak out of order, because they have another round. It is not unheard of for students to deliberately show up late for a round, claiming they were double entered, when in fact they were not.

If it makes no difference what speaking position a competitor is assigned, then such practices are not harmful. However, if some speaking positions are inherently more favorable than others, then tighter controls are needed to insure that students do not manipulate speaking position and thereby obtain an unfair advantage.

Previous research on the question of the relationship between speaking position and forensic success is confusing and contradictory. Three empirical studies have been reported,

all with conflicting results. The first was conducted by Franklin Knower (1940). He examined rankings at contests held by the National Forensic League, the Northern Oratorical League, and the Intercollegiate Oratorical Association, and compared the rankings with speaker position. Knower concluded that speaking position did have a profound effect on rank assignment. He found that speakers in the first and last position were more frequently ranked in an intermediate, rather than a high or low position. Furthermore, he found that the next to last speaker position was most advantageous.

James Benson and Susan Maitlen (1975) criticize Knower's study for a number of reasons. First, he did not separate his data according to the number of speakers in each round. This could be misleading, for example, since the fifth speaker was also the last speaker in some rounds, an extreme, rather than intermediate position. Second, Knower's observation that first and last speakers were more likely to be assigned an intermediate, rather than extreme rank, is a function of mathematical probability, and is true of all speaking positions. Finally, and probably most importantly, Knower employed no tests of statistical significance, and thus we do not know if the results he obtained were simply due to chance.

Benson and Maitlen therefore conducted their own study. They examined the results from two contests, one a typical forensic tournament, the other the Peace Speech Contest with 8 competitors. They found that, with one

exception, ranking was not significantly influenced by speaking position. The one exception was in preliminary original events rounds of five speakers, the fourth speaker was most frequently assigned the rank of second, while the last speaker received that rank least often. Thus, out of 116 possible relationships investigated, only one was statistically significant. Benson and Maitlen conclude that "speaking position does not appear to be either an advantage or a disadvantage in tournament competition."

Jerold Hale (1981) criticizes the Benson and Maitlen study on methodological grounds. He claims they employed inappropriate statistical techniques that may have masked over order effects. For example, the Chi Square test is, according to Hale, insensitive to order effects. Hale also claims that one-sample tests were inappropriate for comparisons of preliminary, semi-final, and final rounds, and comparisons between types of events. He criticizes the use of separate tests of significance for each speaker position, arguing one test of rank assignments across all positions is preferable. Finally, he notes that Benson and Maitlen used statistical techniques that were appropriate for nominal levels of measurement, whereas rank order is at least ordinal in nature. Hale also criticizes both Knower and Benson and Maitlen for considering only speaker rankings and ignoring quality ratings.

To remedy the defects he found in previous studies, Hale conducted an experiment utilizing six videotaped speeches on the same subject (the effects of televised violence on the behavior of children). Speeches were judged by 177 undergraduate students (mostly lower division) enrolled in basic communication classes. The tapes of speakers were duplicated and spliced into six different stimulus tapes. Thus, subjects were exposed to all six speeches, but each judge viewed one of six possible orderings. Speakers were ranked first through sixth, and rated on a scale ranging from superior to poor. Analysis of variance was performed on the results and two statistically significant results were found for rankings and two for ratings. In both cases, speaker order and the speakers themselves were found to affect the results. Scheffe's (1959) a posteriori test of mean differences was performed, and indicated that first speaker was ranked significantly worse than fourth, fifth, or sixth speaker and was rated significantly worse than fifth and sixth speakers. However, while speaking order did have a statistically significant effect on rankings and ratings, this effect was much weaker than the effect for the speaker. Thus, Hale concludes: "First, speaking order does exert a significant influence over a speakers [sic] success. Second, the order effect is a recency effect. And, finally, the effect of speaking order is minimal, and compares in no way to the effect of making a good presentation."

While Hale's study is a methodological improvement over previous research, the validity of the findings for forensics competition is hampered by the experimental design. First, the judging of speakers was performed by undergraduates in basic communication courses. These are not trained critics. More experienced forensic judges might well be able to compensate for the effect of time in dulling their memory of earlier speeches. Second, the experiment used six speeches on the same topic and based on the same resource material. In fact, all the speeches employed the same organizational pattern (problem-solution). This similarity of speeches is virtually impossible in a forensics tournament, where each student prepares an original speech on a subject of his or her choice. After hearing six speeches, similar in content and design, a novice critic might well be confused as to which speaker had made which speech. Thus, the most recent speeches would be the easiest to remember, and might well be ranked more highly. It is doubtful if this effect would occur in tournament competition where speeches would differ in subject and approach. Third, Hale explored only one event, persuasive speaking. Since forensics tournaments typically offer many different events, some as diverse as oral interpretation and speeches to entertain, the order effects present in one event might not be present in others. Finally, forensics speeches are presented by live competitors in a face to face situation, whereas Hale used videotaped speeches. As forensics

coaches, we have known students, who when assigned a late speaking position, become anxious while listening to their competitors. Thus, any recency effect may be offset by the psychological effects of listening to one's competitors before speaking. Such a balancing of recency effects with psychological impacts of speaking late would not be detected by the use of videotaped speeches.

In sum, the previous research on speaking positions and forensic success is confusing, contradictory, and not always applicable to contemporary forensic practice. The present study was undertaken to provide a naturalistic assessment of how different speaker positions affect actual rankings and ratings given by judges in forensics tournaments. In this study we sought to meet the legitimate methodological criticisms offered by Hale of Benson and Maitlen's study. Three specific research questions were addressed:

1. Is there a relationship between speaking position and ranking in panels of three to seven speakers in forensics competition?
2. Is there a relationship between speaking position and quality ratings in panels of three to seven speakers in forensics competition?
3. Do the relationships addressed in questions one and two vary by type of event?

METHODOLOGY

Subjects

Subjects for this study were forensics contestants from two and four year colleges at two tournaments held in the Northern California area. The first tournament was held at Sacramento City College on October 16, 1982. The second tournament was held at San Joaquin Delta College in Stockton on December 3-4, 1982. Tournaments consisted of three preliminary rounds and one final round per event. All rounds analyzed consisted of between three and seven contestants. Rounds were judged by forensics coaches, graduate students, and hired local judges. One judge was used per panel of preliminary competition and three judges were employed in final rounds.

Procedure

Speakers competed in a variety of events, including prepared original events (expository, persuasive, after dinner speaking, and communication analysis), limited preparation events (impromptu and extemporaneous), and interpretation events (poetry, prose, and duet acting). In prepared events, speeches were the original work of the students. Limited preparation events required students to present an original speech on one of three topics assigned to them. The interpretation events allowed students to choose from a variety of literary materials to compose a program of their own choice.

Speakers in each event were randomly assigned to panels of three to seven contestants. Panels in the same event were not always of equal size. Speaker positions were randomly assigned and posted, but students were frequently allowed to speak out of the posted order, due to double entries.

Judges were requested, in addition to filling out their normal ballots, to fill out a questionaire, which asked them to list the speakers in the order of actual speaking with their assigned ranks (1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th) and ratings (Superior, Excellent, Good, Fair, Poor). Rankings reflect the order of finish in the round. However, judges were not allowed to rank speakers lower than 4th, due to tournament regulations, thus creating ties for last position in rounds of more than four contestants. Quality ratings, on the other hand, represent the judges' subjective opinion of speakers' excellence in comparison to all college speakers. (For purposes of compiling results, quality ratings were assigned a numerical value of 1 for Superior, 2 for Excellent, etc.) Ties were permitted in quality ratings.

Because the questionaires were voluntary, not all judges filled them out. In addition, at the second tournament, administrative difficulties prevented the use of questionaires in all rounds. No final round ballots were obtained from the second tournament. Because of the limited number of final round ballots, no separate analysis was performed for them. Overall, we collected scores for 1455 contestants, with no reason to believe our sample was in any way unrepresentative.

Method of Analysis

Events were grouped by size of panels, with all panels of a given size subjected to analysis as a group. To determine the effects of speaking order on both rank and quality rating assignments, a oneway analysis of variance was performed, using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) (Nie, et. al. 1975). Scheffe's (1959) a posteriori test of mean differences was performed to determine if mean ranks and ratings differed among speaker positions. This follows Hale's (1981) recommendation. Each event where more than five panels of data were available was also subjected to individual analysis using the same procedures.[1]

RESULTS

Tables 1 through 5 report the results of the analysis of panels of varying sizes, without separating events. No significant differences were found in quality ratings for any sized panels of speakers. No significant differences were found in rankings in panels of three, four, six, or seven speakers. Only in panels of five did rankings differ significantly by speaker position, with the F probability at .023. (See table 3.) Scheffe's test of mean differences showed that speakers in fifth position (last) scored significantly better than those in first position, but not significantly better than those in other positions.

When specific events were analyzed separately, no significant differences were found in quality ratings.

However, two of the fifteen cases produced significant differences in rankings. (See tables 6 and 7.) In prose interpretation, panels of six speakers, the F probability reached significance at .032. However, Scheffe's test indicated all speaker positions formed a homogeneous subset. That is, no speaker position differed by more than the shortest significant range for a subset of that size. In expository speaking, panels of five speakers, the F probability reached significance at .001 for rankings with no significant differences in ratings. In addition, the Scheffe test showed that last speaker (fifth position) had a significant advantage over all other speakers in the round, with an average ranking of 1.86, compared to the next best ranking of 3.0 for second and fourth speakers. No other significant differences among means was detected by the Scheffe test.

Because of the large discrepancy between results in expository, panels of five, and all other panels of five, a separate analysis was performed of all events, except expository, in panels of five. (See table 8.) Without expository, no significant differences emerged in either rankings or ratings. Thus, the significant differences reported above for panels of five in all events, appears to be attributable to one event, expository speaking.

Because expository, panels of five, presented an anomaly, further investigation of that event was undertaken. Of the 21 ballots, all but three were from preliminary rounds.

The three other ballots were from the same final round, in which all three judges had given the last speaker first place. To determine the effect of triple counting the same round on our overall results for expository, we performed an analysis of the 18 preliminary rounds (Table 9). Once again, we found a significant difference in rankings only. The F probability was .029, rather than .001. The Scheffe test, however, found that the highest and lowest means were not significantly different from one another, forming a homogeneous subset.

DISCUSSION

In general, these results support the findings of Bensen and Maitlen. Specifically we found:

1. No significant relationship between speaking position and ranking in panels of three, four, six, or seven speakers when events are combined. A significant difference was found in panels of five, with an advantage to last position. However, this advantage disappeared when one event, expository, was excluded from analysis.
2. No significant relationship was found in any instance between speaking position and quality ratings.
3. In only two out of fifteen events which were compared did speaker position appear to significantly influence ranking. In the case of prose interpretation, panels of 6, the F probability was significant, but the Scheffe test failed to indicate any one position was significantly advantageous.

In the case of expository, panels of five, last speaker did have a significant advantage over other speakers. However, this result was somewhat tempered by the triple counting of one final round where all judges gave first place to last speaker. Thus, in the vast majority of comparisons, speaker position was not a significant determiner of forensic success.

These findings conflict with the earlier findings of Knower (1940). But for the reasons outlined by Benson and Maitlen (1975), and reviewed earlier in this essay, the Knower study does not provide reliable evidence of significant differences among speaker positions. These findings also differ from Hale's (1981). However, because of the reasons discussed earlier in this paper, his results are not generalizable to forensics competition. His criticism of Benson and Maitlen rests on two pillars: their failure to include quality ratings and their choice of statistical tests. We have met both of these objections and obtained substantially the same results as Benson and Maitlen. Thus, we feel confident that speaker position has little if any influence on forensics success.

We would hope, however, that further investigation would continue into these issues. Our study was limited to one geographic region. Perhaps there are regional differences in judging that we did not detect. Our study focused on a local tournament, where levels of speakers probably varied greatly. Would speaker position become a more important factor at a national level tournament, where all speakers

presumably would be excellent? Finally, we are intrigued by the anomaly of expository speaking, at least in panels of five speakers. Follow up investigations should be conducted to determine if this pattern appears consistently or is just an isolated instance.

On the whole, however, we find that forensics directors and competitors should not be overly concerned with the effects of speaker position. We should have confidence in our judges to fairly and impartially assign rankings and ratings, without being unduly influenced by speaker position.

NOTES

[1]The following events were subjected to separate analysis: Speech to Entertain (10 panels of 4 speakers), Poetry (9 panels of 4, 10 panels of 5, 8 panels of 6), Prose (21 panels of 5, 18 panels of 6), Persuasive (15 panels of 4, 25 panels of 5), Expository (12 panels of 4, 21 panels of 5, 13 panels of 6), Impromptu (6 panels of 4, 26 panels of 5, 24 panels of 6, 19 panels of 7). The following events were included in the combined analysis of panels of each size, but were deemed too small to be analyzed separately: Speech to Entertain (4 panels of 3, 4 panels of 5), Duet Acting (5 panels of 3, 4 panels of 4, 3 panels of 5), Extemp (2 panels of 4, 3 panels of 5, 2 panels of 6, 1 panel of 7), Prose (1 panel of 3, 4 panels of 4), Persuasive (1 panel of 3, 3 panels of 6), Expository (1 panel of 3), Impromptu (3 panels of 3), Communication Analysis (1 panel of 4, 3 panels of 7), Argument Analysis (3 panels of 4, 1 panel of 5), and Poetry (1 panel of 7).

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TABLE 1

15 PANELS OF 3 SPEAKERS

Speaker Positions	$\bar{X}$ Rank	s	$\bar{X}$ Rating	s
1	1.73	.59	1.93	.70
2	2.00	.85	2.33	.90
3	2.27	.96	2.13	.92

Analysis of Variance of Rank

Source	DF	SS	$\bar{X}^2$	F Ratio	F Prob
Between Groups	2	2.133	1.067	1.608	.212
Within Groups	42	27.867	.663		
Total	44	30			

Analysis of Variance of Rating

Source	DF	SS	$\bar{X}^2$	F Ratio	F Prob
Between Groups	2	1.2	.6	.84	.439
Within Groups	42	30	.714		
Total	44	31.2			

*Significant at .05

TABLE 2

66 PANELS OF 4 SPEAKERS

Speaker Positions	$\bar{X}$ Rank	s	$\bar{X}$ Rating	s
1	2.44	1.11	2.02	.69
2	2.68	1.18	2.14	.82
3	2.26	1.01	1.92	.73
4	2.62	1.15	2.11	.79

Analysis of Variance of Rank

Source	DF	SS	$\bar{X}^2$	F Ratio	F Prob
Between Groups	3	7.273	2.424	1.953	.121
Within Groups	260	322.727	1.241		
Total	263	330			

Analysis of Variance of Rating

Source	DF	SS	$\bar{X}^2$	F Ratio	F Prob
Between Groups	3	1.818	.606	1.053	.37
Within Groups	260	149.636	.576		
Total	263	151.455	.		

*Significant at .05

TABLE 3

114 PANELS OF 5 SPEAKERS

Speaker Position	$\bar{X}$ Rank	s	$\bar{X}$ Rating	s
1	3.03	1.12	2.17	.69
2	2.82	1.04	2.11	.68
3	2.85	1.15	2.06	.71
4	2.78	1.20	2.09	.78
5	2.52	1.26	1.97	.86

Analysis of Variance of Rank

Source	DF	SS	$\bar{X}^2$	F Ratio	F Prob
Between Groups	4	15.34	3.835	2.852	.023*
Within Groups	565	759.86	1.345		
Total	569	775.2			

Analysis of Variance of Rating

Source	DF	SS	$\bar{X}^2$	F Ratio	F Prob
Between Groups	4	2.323	.581	1.045	.383
Within Groups	565	313.965	.556		
Total	569	316.288			

*Significant at .05

TABLE 4

68 PANELS OF 6 SPEAKERS

Speaker Positions	$\bar{X}$ Rank	s	X Rating	s
1	3.35	.97	2.43	.85
2	2.94	1.28	2.34	.82
3	2.97	1.17	2.34	.84
4	2.78	1.22	2.13	.91
5	3.04	1.14	2.32	.87
6	2.9	1.08	2.28	.75

Analysis of Variance of Rank

Source	DF	SS	$\bar{X}^2$	F Ratio	F Prob
Between Groups	5	12.924	2.585	1.96	.084
Within Groups	402	530.074	1.319		
Total	407	542.998			

Analysis of Variance of Rating

Source	DF	SS	$\bar{X}^2$	F Ratio	F Prob
Between Groups	5	3.248	.650	.915	.471
Within Groups	402	285.456	.71		
Total	407	288.703			

*Significant at .05

TABLE 5

24 PANELS OF 7 SPEAKERS

Speaker Positions	$\bar{X}$ Rank	s	$\bar{X}$ Rating	s
1	3.21	.98	2.17	.82
2	3.46	.78	2.42	.83
3	2.67	1.24	1.75	.68
4	3.38	1.13	2.08	.65
5	2.96	1.33	1.88	.8
6	3.25	1.03	1.96	.75
7	3.08	1.25	2	.88

Analysis of Variance of Rank

Source	DF	SS	$\bar{X}^2$	F Ratio	F Prob
Between Groups	6	10.405	1.734	1.381	.225
Within Groups	161	202.167	1.256		
Total	167	212.571			

Analysis of Variance of Rating

Source	DF	SS	$\bar{X}^2$	F Ratio	F Prob
Between Groups	6	6.702	1.117	1.853	.092
Within Groups	161	97.083	.603		
Total	167	103.786			

*Significant at .05

TABLE 6

PROSE

18 PANELS OF 6 SPEAKERS

Speaker Positions	$\bar{X}$ Rank	s	$\bar{X}$ Rating	s
1	3.72	.57	2.44	.62
2	3.06	1.30	2.44	.7
3	2.5	1.25	1.89	.68
4	2.78	1.22	2	.91
5	3.11	1.13	2.33	.77
6	2.78	1.06	2.22	.81

Analysis of Variance of Rank

Source	DF	SS	$\bar{X}^2$	F Ratio	F Prob
Between Groups	5	15.935	3.187	2.559	.032*
Within Groups	102	127.056	1.246		
Total	107	142.991			

Analysis of Variance of Rating

Source	DF	SS	$\bar{X}^2$	F Ratio	F Prob
Between Groups	5	4.889	.978	1.726	.135
Within Groups	102	57.778	.566		
Total	107	62.667			

*Significant at .05

TABLE 7

EXPOSITORY

21 PANELS OF 5 SPEAKERS

Speaker Positions	$\bar{X}$ Rank	s	$\bar{X}$ Rating	s
1	3.10	1.09	2.19	.6
2	3	1	2.29	.56
3	3.05	1.2	2.24	.54
4	3	1	2.14	.73
5	1.86	1.15	1.76	.89

Analysis of Variance of Rank

Source	DF	SS	$\bar{X}^2$	F Ratio	F Prob
Between Groups	4	23.476	5.867	4.916	.001*
Within Groups	100	119.333	1.193		
Total	104	142.8			

Analysis of Variance of Rating

Source	DF	SS	$\bar{X}^2$	F Ratio	F Prob
Between Groups	4	3.676	.919	2.010	.099
Within Groups	100	45.714	.457		
Total	104	49.390			

*Significant at .05

TABLE 8

93 PANELS OF 5 SPEAKERS EXCLUDING EXPOSITORY

Speaker Positions	$\bar{X}$ Rank	s	$\bar{X}$ Rating	s
1	3.01	1.14	2.16	.71
2	2.78	1.05	2.08	.7
3	2.81	1.14	2.02	.74
4	2.73	1.24	2.08	.8
5	2.67	1.25	2.02	.85

Analysis of Variance of Rank

Source	DF	SS	$\bar{X}^2$	F Ratio	F Prob
Between Groups	4	6.249	1.562	1.148	.333
Within Groups	460	626.151	1.361		
Total	464	632.4			

Analysis of Variance of Rating

Source	DF	SS	$\bar{X}^2$	F Ratio	F Prob
Between Groups	4	1.217	.304	.527	.716
Within Groups	460	265.441	.577		
Total	464	266.658			

*Significant at .05

TABLE 9

EXPOSITORY

18 PRELIMINARY PANELS

Speaker Positions	$\bar{X}$ Rank	s	$\bar{X}$ Rating	s
1	3.0	1.14	2.22	.65
2	3.0	1.03	2.33	.59
3	3.0	1.24	2.28	.57
4	3.0	1.03	2.17	.79
5	2.0	1.19	1.78	.94

Analysis of Variance of Rank

Source	DF	SS	$\bar{X}^2$	F Ratio	F Prob
Between Groups	4	14.4	3.6	2.833	.029*
Within Groups	85	108	1.271		
Total	89	122.4			

Analysis of Variance of Rating

Source	DF	SS	$\bar{X}^2$	F Ratio	F Prob
Between Groups	4	3.489	.872	1.672	.164
Within Groups	85	44.333	.522		
Total	89	47.822			

*Significant at .05