

AARON BEVERLY

CHAMPIONSHIP SPEECH BREAKDOWN

Speech Transcript:

The Contest Chair was relieved, **my** title's **only 3 words long**. [R3] [CB]

But **friends**, why is this **story unbelievable**? [Q] [SM]

June 2018, **I** fly to India to attend the wedding of **my** friend Brandon and his fiancé, Devicka. [ST]

Brandon and family are White; Devicka and family are Indian. And **I** am **the only Black man there**. **I** can't help but feel different. But **I** try **my** best to blend in. [SM] [PD]

I buy formal Indian wedding attire. What do **you** think? [Q] [PD]

I even participate in a sacred Indian wedding ritual: **Protecting the groom's shoes**.

During the car ride to the wedding, **my** friend Sunit explains this ritual. [SM]

"When Brandon takes off his shoes during the ceremony, Devicka's bridesmaids will try to steal them. The groomsmen protect the shoes from the bridesmaids. If they win, they **hold the shoes ransom**, forcing Brandon to buy them back."

"It's a game" Sunit says. **I** think it **sounds like a spy movie**. Sunit says, "Aaron, the bridesmaids will try sweet talk, they will try deception, but don't give the shoes to anybody! Will you accept this mission?"

Quick fact about **me**. When **I** am given a mission, **I** take it very seriously. **I** look at Sunit and **I** say, "**I accept the mission**." [SM]

At the wedding ceremony, Brandon takes off his shoes. I swoop in, grab the shoes, sit down in the front row. Smooth, stealthy, I feel like a **black James Bond**. [R3]x2 [SM] [PD]

The leader of the bridesmaids walks over, she smiles at me. But **gentlemen**, have **you** ever seen a girlfriend or wife smile, yet at the same time, **you just felt scared?** [Q] [SM]

I call her the **Ominous Smiler**. She says, "Aaron, you look very handsome today." I say, "Thank you."

"Could you pass me Brandon's shoes?"

"No!"

Sunit said the bridesmaids will try sweet talk. Don't give the shoes to anybody! "But Aaron" she says, "That's against Indian tradition." [SM] [CB]

When I hear that the global ambassador within me gets nervous. I don't want to cause an international incident over **a pair of shoes**. I could see the headlines, **Idiot Ruins Wedding And India-US Relations**.

I almost hand over the shoes, but remember Sunit, "They will try deception. Don't give the shoes to anybody!" I say "No!" again. [SM] [CB]

Then the Ominous Smiler, she moves closer. She says, and I quote, "We can do this the easy way, or we can do this the hard way, but you will give us the shoes!" [H]x3 [SM]

I am now scared for **my life at this wedding**. However, I must protect the shoes, because when I have a mission, I take it very seriously. [SM] [CB]

So, I curl over in my seat, I press the shoes against my chest, and this is how I watch the wedding for **the next 30 minutes**. [PD] [R3]

The Ominous Smiler tries to steal the shoes, but I hold firm. Then she disappears for 20 minutes, before taking a seat to my right. [SM] [PD]

She says, "Aaron, I don't care about the shoes anymore. You win." I say, "**Do I look like a fool to you?**" But she doesn't move. I think I won. [SM]

Sunit runs over, he's ecstatic. He says, "Aaron, I'm proud of you." I say, "Thank you!"

“You took this mission very seriously.” I say, “That’s right!”

“Now, give the shoes to me.”

“No!” [CB]

Sunit said “Don’t give the shoes to anybody!” [R3] [SM] [CB]

The Ominous Smiler disappeared to recruit backup and I know a traitor when I see one. Then the Ominous Smiler pounces. [H] [SM]

She starts pullin’ my arms. Sunit joins her. 2 versus 1. They pull, I pull, but I hold firm. [R3]

The other bridesmaids run over, 5 versus 1. They pull, I pull, but I hold firm. [R3] [SM] [CB]

The other groomsmen run over; I think “Yes! The cavalry has arrived!” **But they join the bridesmaids.** 8 versus 1. [SM]

They pull, I pull, but I hold firm because when I have a mission, I take it very seriously. [R3] [CB]

They said Aaron, “Just give us the shoes.” I said, “**Neveerrrrrrrr!**”

Keep in mind, **the wedding is still going on.** Devicka’s family is watching the ceremony as if nothing else is happening. I start wondering, “**Is this normal?**” [SM] [PD]

Then the Ominous Smiler signals the wedding photographer. And this dude is huge. He puts down his camera, then he starts charging. He jumps on top of me. 9 versus 1. [PD]

They pull, I pull, but I... **I lost the shoes.** [R3] [SM] [CB]

Brandon paid 10 times what those shoes were worth. But what makes this **story unbelievable** is not the shoes, nor the events. It is the context behind that game. [SM] [CB]

That game is designed for the families of the Bride and Groom to get to know each other. Which means, that among White and Indian families, a different, lonely Black man, was accepted like family, too.

We experience so much divisiveness **nowadays**, that **acceptance despite difference, seems unbelievable.**

But there are people who still believe in it. Do **you**? [Q]

Open **your** culture, **your** mind, **your** heart, to people who are different from **you**. Show the world that **acceptance despite difference is not an unbelievable story**. [R3] [CB]

This is **your** mission. Take it very seriously. [CB]

Contest Chair...

SPEECH STATS:

Word Count: 854

Speech Length: 6:58

Title: An Unbelievable Story

Click [here](#) to watch the speech.

COLOR KEY

- **Humor [H] - x 26**

This includes only parts that received genuine laughter from the audience. Laughter varies in intensity.

This speech averaged **3.73 LPMs** (Laughs Per Minute) and **32.85 WPL** (Words Per Laugh).

First laugh came at **0:04** of the speech.

Much of Aaron's humor came during the action/commotion of his story.

- **Foundational Phrase [FP] - x 4**

Foundational Phrase for this speech was a variation of this: **“Unbelievable Story”**

There were some notable phrases during the story in the form of character dialogue, but ultimately, they were unrelated to the core message of this speech, which was about the acceptance of others. There was no single phrase that both contained the essence of the speech's core message and that was memorable enough to be called a Foundational Phrase.

*** See the feedback section below for a more detailed look.*

- **“You”; “Your”; “We”; “Us”; “Our” - x 10**

I included these words that were directly aimed at the audience, dialogue excluded (character and internal). Talking *to* the audience will be more “you/your” focused. This could mean abstract ideas, “imagine this...” hypotheticals, concepts that describe how something works, etc. Those will naturally use more “you/your” words.

- **“I” or “Me” or “My” or “Myself” - x 62**

The original reason for tracking this stat was the thought that it might be useful to compare with the amount of “You” focused words. Turns out, it is. Just not in the way I originally thought.

The theory was, if this number was much greater than “You” focused words, it would show

that the speaker was more “*me, me, me*” focused and not tailoring the message to the audience.

While that is a possibility, what I’ve found thus far is that it tells more about the content of the speech. More specifically, it tells us that there are personal stories being told.

**The total number counted does not include in-story character dialogue.

- **“Ladies and Gentlemen” or “My Friends” [MF] - x 2**

The speaker used “*Friends*” and “*Gentlemen*” to address the audience.

- **Physical Descriptions or VAKS [PD] - x 7**

Descriptive physical characteristics of people, things, and locations. The ones I included were any overt words that described the setting for where the speaker was at during the story, where the speaker wanted to take the audience, or descriptions of people in the scene.

Describing complex processes may also be included since they are intended to make it easier for the audience to imagine.

Physical in this case is what was heard, smelled, and what was seen. It also means that “*We were at my house*” is not enough—this requires specifics that are intended to paint a picture in the minds of the audience. I intentionally left out what was felt emotionally or metaphorically.

- **Callbacks [CB] - x 12**

Humorous and other. It’s common for speakers to derive humor from callbacks to *something* or *someone* from the speech journey. Foundational Phrases after the first one are essentially [callbacks](#) as well.

The idea of a callback is to move on from “it” (the eventual callback) so the audience is no longer thinking about it, and then call it back later so it’s an “A HA!” moment of familiarity. For that reason, only *some* of the Foundational Phrases may be included, and some may not. Normally the Foundational Phrase (subsequent ones after the first) get counted in the Callback section, but in this speech, only the ones that had a recognizable phrase were included.

This speech had a unique callback right at the beginning of the speech. He said, “*The Contest Chair was relieved, my title’s only 3 words long.*” The reference to his title was a callback to his speech in the 2016 speech contest where he placed 2nd.

- **Rule of Three [R3] - x 10**

The [rule of three](#) is all inclusive. Whether used for [comedic](#) effect or not.

It's common to see the Rule of Three used all at once in a single sentence such as, "*He was tall, strong, and mean.*" Aaron primarily used it when listing descriptive details as well as in-character dialogue.

- **Questions [Q] - x 4**

Questions directly aimed at the audience (rhetorical or not).

The original intent of the Questions category was to include only thoughtful questions—things that made the audience reflect on their lives. However, even benign or rhetorical questions aimed at the audience can help build a connection to the speaker, just as addressing the audience as "My Friends" or "Ladies and Gentlemen" does. Because of that, those types of questions were included as well.

- **Time Transitions [TT] - x 2**

Transition words that indicated that there was a time change from the speaker's point of view. The idea is to show progression from one point in the speaker's life to another. So, if there are multiple time transitions within the same story, they may or may not be counted. These help to prepare the audience for a change in the story in order to prevent confusion.

There was one clear transition to let us know when the story took place ("June 2018") and there was one more subtle transition during the conclusion. He said this, "*We experience so much divisiveness nowadays, that acceptance despite difference, seems unbelievable.*"

The word "nowadays" is not a direct transition word since it doesn't pinpoint a specific point in time; however, I included it here because it does pull the audience to the present, or at least pulled them out of the story.

- **Stories [ST] - x 1**

This includes all stories told throughout the entire speech. Some stories may be slightly exaggerated, but the idea is that the speaker is telling the audience a story that happened, either in their life or somebody else's. This does not include metaphorical stories, intentionally exaggerated tales or things like "*Imagine you are...*"

In this speech there was **1** story.

- **Stage Movement [SM] - x 19**

This section covers how many times the speaker moved to a different place on the stage during the speech. Minor movements for in-story character changes (for dialogue) or for small side steps for illustrating points or addressing different parts of the audience will not be counted. I'll also keep track of anything else that's notable about the speaker's stage movements.

***Initials were put at end of sentence if multiple Color Key elements were in the same sentence.

Observations:

- **Region Quarterfinals:** This was the first year that Toastmasters implemented [Region Quarterfinals](#). The new sequence is: Club, Area, Division, District contests, [Region Quarterfinals](#), Semifinals and then Finals.

It's unique because the winner of the District contests would automatically get a chance to compete in the Semifinals in which they'd have to physically attend. Instead, now they record the District contests and then send those recorded speeches to Toastmasters for a panel of judges.

I'm not sure how I feel about this. I think the audience plays a part in the judges' decisions and there are some intangibles regarding video/audio quality of the recorded speech—there are quality requirements for it in the [rulebook](#), though.

Assuming the audio/video quality is perfect, what if there is a huge audience at one of the District contests and a smaller audience at another? The energy and tastes of the crowd might be different, too. I think the larger Semifinals is a more decisive way to conduct the contest because each speaker would compete in front of the same audience. It would also add 4 more finalists to compete in the Finals.

It does mean less work for the organizers of the Toastmasters Contest. I guess that's *something*.

- **Speech Time:** Of all the speeches I've broken down thus far, Aaron's speech was the shortest in time at 6 minutes and 58 seconds. Last year's by [Ramona J. Smith](#) had the fewest words. The 2017 winner, [Manoj Vasudevan](#), previously held the title for the shortest time at 7:04.
- **Humor Technique:** His best humor came out of his in-story character dialogue. It was well done.
- **Rule of Three:** He had some clever use of this technique. He used it in the listing capacity, but he also used it for phrasing.

Here are some examples:

"They pull, I pull, but I hold firm."

"Aaron, the bridesmaids will try sweet talk, they will try deception, but don't give the shoes to

anybody!" - This was originally a quote from Sunit, but Aaron reflected on this in the speech 3 times (a different variation each of the 3 times).

Also, a more unconventional use of the Rule of Three was his opening sentence. *"The Contest Chair was relieved, my title's only 3 words long."* Why not 2, why not 1, why not 4, 5, 6, etc.? Surely, he was aware of the power of three, that's why.

- **Props:** His traditional Indian clothing was his prop.
- **Confident:** Of all 6 finalists for this year, Aaron appeared the most confident to me. That alone doesn't necessarily make a championship speech, but he certainly exuded a confidence that showed that he belonged on the stage.
- **Vocal Variety:** His storytelling used contrast in volume and in excitement. It kept me guessing and had me interested in what would come next.
- **Dialogue:** One area where he was strong was his showcasing of character dialogue. It was a good mix of "she said," followed by dialogue, but then he would have instances where he'd jump right into dialogue without first saying something like *"then I said"* beforehand. It was a good variety.
- **Simplicity:** The structure of his speech is about as simple as it gets. This is not a bad thing. It had an opening that jumped right into a story. He only had one story. He made his point and gave a call to action. Done.
- **Creations:** From a technical standpoint, I think this is the single greatest takeaway from this speech. Within the story Aaron turned dialogue parts into repetitive "callbacks." They became "things" or "anchors."

Examples are the admonition from Sunit and how he reflected back on it throughout the story, the way he said "No!" during moments of in-character dialogue, how he takes missions very seriously, and his line during the struggle to rip the shoes (*"They pull, I pull, but I hold firm"*).

- *"When I am given a mission, I take it very seriously."*

- *"...the bridesmaids will try sweet talk, they will try deception, but don't give the shoes to anybody!"*

- *"No!"*

- *"They pull, I pull, but I hold firm"*

He created these moments and then was able to call back to them to generate humor and excitement. Repetition was one reason it worked out this way, but mostly they worked because the energy he gave to the lines using his voice. By doing this, he drew attention to them and made them unique anchors that the audience could easily recognize. This was a powerful technique.

- **Clever Use & Organization:** The following sentence helped organize the sequence of his story: *"Aaron, the bridesmaids will try sweet talk, they will try deception, but don't give the shoes to anybody!"*

When Aaron was in the midst of the story, he reflected on what Sunit said. The first time was this: *"Sunit said the bridesmaids will try sweet talk. Don't give the shoes to anybody!"*

This was just a portion of what he originally said—the part about deception was left out since that was yet to come.

Then, after the Ominous Smiler says he violated Indian tradition, he reflected on what Sunit said again: *“I almost hand over the shoes, but remember Sunit, “They will try deception. Don’t give the shoes to anybody!”*

He reflected one final time without any of the techniques they’d use to get the shoes: *“Sunit said “Don’t give the shoes to anybody!”*

- **Cliff Notes:** The way the story was told felt fast paced. It seemed like the whole thing was a list of bulleted points as if summarizing a story rather than a story. I liked it since his delivery was good, but it could have had a little more variety of pace and storytelling style.
- **Gurus and Side Characters:**
 - **Gurus:** The Indian wedding ritual was the Guru of this speech.
 - **Side Characters:** Aaron, Brandon, Devicka, Sunit, bridesmaids, groomsmen, Ominous Smiler, Devicka's family, and the wedding photographer were all side characters. Side characters are part of the stories but don’t directly contribute to a learning moment. This isn’t a problem, just an observation. Side characters help give depth to a story.
 - A Guru is someone or something in the speech that teaches the speaker (and ultimately the audience) something meaningful. As a speaker, you don’t want to be the wise Guru. You want to be the dolt who learns from the guru(s), and that’s who end up teaching the audience as well. **Tip:** Self-deprecation can be an important element in allowing the guru to shine.
- **Confident Exit:** As he was leaving the stage he turned around to wave to the crowd. A nice play to the crowd and the judges. Unrelated, but the handshake after the speech was awkward. It looked like the Contest Chair was not looking at Aaron when they shook hands.
- **Tie Up Loose Ends:** In his opening he asked the audience, *“But friends, why is this story unbelievable?”* His final point circled back to this and this was ultimately the loop that needed to be tied.

After the story he said this, *“But what makes this story unbelievable is not the shoes, nor the events. It is the context behind that game.”* He referenced “unbelievable” 2 more times in closing.

“We experience so much divisiveness nowadays, that acceptance despite difference, seems unbelievable.”

“Show the world that acceptance despite difference is not an unbelievable story.”

- **Perfection:** In most of the championship speeches there is a minor hitch and it’s a good reminder that it’s okay to make mistakes, even champions do it. Keep in mind I said MOST...in this speech, Aaron didn’t make a single mistake. There is maybe one time where he had to collect his thoughts right after the *“black James Bond”* line (you [decide](#)), but that’s nitpicking on my part since there was no real delay or awkwardness even if he did forget for a split second. But other than that, there was no obvious hiccup. That’s impressive.

Feedback / Criticism:

- **Ominous Smiler:** The character name was a little silly and not easy on the tongue. I think a name may have worked better to humanize them, or perhaps just a better nickname.
- **Embellishment:** The part in the story when 9 people were dogpiling Aaron trying to grab shoes seems extreme, *an unbelievable part of the story* perhaps? Exaggeration works to get laughs, but I wonder, when there is a story that is clearly over-the-top, does that hurt credibility? The 2nd place winner, Louisa Montalvo, had some *incredible* moments in her speech, too. But hey, they did win 1st and 2nd so apparently it didn't hurt them too much.
- **Predictable Twist?** The context behind the Indian wedding tradition *was* a surprise; however, the message itself was predictable. Early in the speech he mentioned explicit things about race/ethnicity. I believe this gave away too much information as to where the speech was headed.
- **Overused Message:** The message was nothing we haven't heard before. It's pretty mainstream. Even the 2nd and 3rd place speakers had a similar message relating to the acceptance of others ([Luisa Montalvo](#), and [Kwong Yue Yang](#)). In contrast, the [2017 finalists](#) all had different messages and they were all, at least to me, novel ideas.
- **Foundational Phrase:** This speech did not have a clear-cut Foundational Phrase. It had some components, but clear, catchy, or memorable were not part of those components.
 - The title of the speech gives us a possibility: **An Unbelievable Story**
 - Then during the speech, he leads into the story with this line: "***But friends, why is this story unbelievable?***"
 - After his core story he says, "***But what makes this story unbelievable...***"
 - Then he introduces a thought-provoking line in combination with a part of his title: "***...that acceptance despite difference, seems unbelievable.***"
 - Finally, he brings up that line again and again includes the words from his title: "***...acceptance despite difference is not an unbelievable story.***"

He had several other repeated phrases during the speech that ultimately became "familiar" to the audience. But, they were in-story character dialogue bits and did not meet the criteria to be considered the Foundational Phrase, since they had nothing to do with the core message of the speech.

Another option is a phrase that was introduced toward the end of the speech that *did* relate to his core message:

"...that acceptance despite difference, seems unbelievable."

"...acceptance despite difference is not an unbelievable story."

The thing about those, though, is that they weren't even the same exact phrase and they were a combo between that new phrase and a variation of his title. However, I think it *is* a better choice since it's novel and includes the familiar words from his speech's title.

I decided to include any variation of phrases/sentences that included “Unbelievable” or “Story” that alluded to the title. This makes a total of 4 uses throughout the speech.

Overall, I don’t believe it was a very effective Foundational Phrase. It wasn’t easy to remember, heck, it wasn’t even easy to decide what it was. Most of his repetitive phrases from the story were more memorable than this, but they simply weren’t related to the core message.

Best case scenario is an audience member remembers a line from his story such as, “*They pull, I pull, but I hold firm...*” but then are still unable to remember the message of the speech.

I dunno, maybe he was going for the volume approach of trying to create so many anchors that hopefully something stuck.

- **Entertaining vs. Inspirational:** The speech was without a doubt *entertaining*. His storytelling and voices (particularly during character dialogue) reminded me a lot of Craig Valentine, the 1999 Champion of Public Speaking. With that said, although it was entertaining, the speech should be first and foremost, inspirational. It may not be in the rulebook, but the Toastmasters *International* Speech Contest has been synonymous with the *Inspirational* Speech Contest. I didn’t really leave feeling that way.
- **Ending:** The ending felt abrupt or maybe rushed is a better way to put it. Perhaps the length of the story made it feel even shorter.