

Rhetorical Analysis of English Speech from the Perspective of Pathos ----Case Study on Michelle Obama's Final Speech at the White House in 2017

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Abstract: Aristotle's famous theory on rhetoric (Logos, Pathos, Ethos,) is a cornerstone in public speech. The paper would focus on Ethos and its implement in rhetoric devices in public speech. It would make an analysis on Michelle Obama's farewell speech at the White House on its rhetorical applications in lexis, syntax, phonetics and gestures. From the paper, the readers can obtain some experiences for appreciating public speeches and the teachers can find more effective ways in composition teaching of public speech.

Keywords: Pathos; English public speech; Rhetoric devices

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1 Introduction

Emotional appeal is an important concept in western classical rhetoric, which means a speaker should arouse his audiences' emotions effectively in the process of persuading them in reasoning. In this way, the audiences could have similar emotional experience with the speaker, so that they could accept the speaker's ideas more easily (Qi Shouhua, 2005). And the rhetoric devices are important means in achieving the speaker's emotional appeal (Hu Shuzhong, 2004). On this point, the author of this paper holds that rhetoric devices are not only referring to those traditional ones such as lexical devices, syntactical devices and so on. Gestures

and variations in pronunciation and intonation should be included in.

Some Chinese scholars (He Xiaoqin, 2004, Zhang, 2010, Lv Nian, 2015, Chen Yu, 2015) had done analysis on the ways of rhetoric implementation on emotional appeal in public speech. However most of them merely offered some examples of rhetoric devices on the implementations of Logos, Ethos, and pathos, not detailed analysis on each of them. The thesis statement will focus on emotional appeal (pathos) and explore detailed ways in the rhetoric devices with vivid examples. The author of the paper hope to help her readers to understand how the speaker arouse the audience' emotion deeply and in the future readers are expected to understand public speeches from an overall aspect.

Michelle Obama's farewell speech is excellent in its emotional appeal which is filled with words that were gracious, natural and inspiring; in addition, Michelle's pronunciation is pure, humorous, sincere, lively and graceful. All these rhetorical factors have greatly inspire the audience's emotion.

2 Theoretical analysis

In the 4th century AD, Aristotle, one of the forefathers of western classical rhetoric, in his masterpiece *Rhetoric* had put forward his famous theory for public speech. In the book, he argued, a good speaker is exposed to persuade his audience in his speech, through rational appeal (Logos), emotional appeals (pathos), personality appeal (ethos), of which emotional appeal refers to

the capacity of arousing emotion among audiences (Hu Shuzhong, 2004). Quintilian, a famous ancient Greek rhetorician had pointed out rhetoric devices are powerful ways that help us appeal the audience's emotions, and wins the speaker praise (Hu Shuzhong, 2004).

In modern rhetoric, the specific rhetorical devices include: lexical rhetoric, syntactic rhetoric, phonetic rhetoric. The postmodern rhetoric holds that in the process of using language, voice and body language are also concrete expressions of rhetoric (Hu Shuzhong, 2004).

The thesis statement will deal with the analysis on four aspects---lexis, syntax, phonetics and gesture.

3 Corpus Analysis

The public speech was last speech given by Michelle Obama at White House in 2017 honoring the excellent instructors all through the United States. In the speech Michelle wanted to express two kinds of deep feelings: (1) praising and inspiring those instructors who had made great contributions to the national education; (2) inspiring American younger generations to overcome difficulties and move forward to realize their American dreams.

In order to realize these two emotions, Michelle applied mainly four rhetoric means. She used words that are exact, appropriate and generous; her sentence structures are in great varieties, such as parallels, climax, repetitions and so on. Her pronunciation and intonations are pure, humorous, powerful, and moving. In addition, her gestures, that are natural, suitable and powerful.

In the following, the author will analyze the main rhetorical mode one by one to illustrate the analysis

3.1 Lexical devices

3.1.1 Exactness

Exactness and appropriateness are two basic standards for lexical devices (Hu Shuzhong, 2004). In this speech, Michelle was meant to honor the wonderful instructors all through America and inspire the younger generation to strive to realize their American dream. She had used words that are exact and sincere to express her warm emotions.

The following are some examples.

*i.....to have such **powerful respected and admired individuals**.....*

ii I especially want to recognize all the

extraordinary leadership team....

*iii they are both **brilliant, they are creative**, they have worked miracles....*

*iiii we wanted everyone to know about..... these **phenomenal men and women**.....*

In these examples, words as *powerful, respected, admired, extraordinary, brilliant, creative, phenomenal, perfect* and so on, they are positive words to describe the greatness of personal characters, qualities and achievements. Those positive expressions are much more powerful than the common words as *good, great, wonderful*, that are very appropriate and powerful to in Michelle's compliment for those excellent educators and inspirations for them.

3.1.2 Vividness

The advantages of metaphor lie in the concretization of abstract things, making the object to be decorated more vivid and easy to understand. An appropriate metaphor can stimulate the emotions of the audience and readers, thus achieving twice the result with half the effort.

*i.....add your voice to **our national conversation**, you need to prepare yourself to be informed and engaged as a citizen to serve and to lead, to stand up for proud American values and honor them in your daily lives.*

*ii we decided to **flip this script, and shine a big, bright spotlight light on** all things educational.*

In example No.1,

Michelle Obama compared national affairs to a big dialogue, encouraging young people to improve their ability to participate in national affairs through good education, to serve our country, to serve the public. The image here is kind and vivid, but also reflects the tradition of western democracy, encouraging young people to fight bravely and contribute actively

In example No.2,

She compared the reform of the country to the revision of the script, compared the attention of the country to the spotlight the public desires, reminded the audience of success and hope vividly, and gave them more expectations and efforts for education.

3.2 Syntax devices

3.2.1 Powerful parallels

Parallelism is a series of phrases or sentences with the same structure, meaning and tone. It is a kind of powerful rhetorical style. The advantage of parallelism is that the sentence pattern is neat, the momentum is

strong, and the expression of emotion is intense.

i. So you can think critically. So you can express yourself clearly. So you can get a good job to support yourself and your family. So you can be a positive force in your communities.

ii you need to be preparing yourself to add your voice to your national conversation, you need to prepare yourself to be informed and engaged as a citizen to serve and to lead, to stand up for proud American values and to honor them in your daily lives.

This sentence strongly expresses Michelle's expectation for young people to develop their positive abilities through good education in the future. Michelle Obama's vision of a future in which young people can develop positive skills through good education gives young people a strong sense of hope, motivation, and confidence in themselves.

3.2.2 Progressive climax

Climax is a rhetorical method that increases from small to large, from less to more, from light to heavy, etc. according to the logical relationship between things. Readers can feel the gradual deepening of the speaker's emotion and ideation.

i young people don't be afraid. Be focused. Be determined. Be hopeful. Be empowered.

ii lead by example, with hope, never fear.

iii I will be with you, rooting for you and working to support you.

In the examples above, Michelle Obama has high hopes for the younger generation to take on the responsibilities of the future without fear: She offered to support them, to stand with them, and her feelings grew with the words she used, strong and solid.

3.2.3 Deep repetition

The meaning of repetition lies in the repetition of the center. And the expressions of the meaning is well deepened in the repetition

ithat is the power of hope, the belief that

ii It is our fundamental belief in the power of hope that has allowed us to rise above....

iii The hope that when people see us for who we truly are,.....

iiii That is the hope of students like Kyra, who fight to discover their gifts.....

iiiii That's the kind of hope, that every single one of us.....

In the above example, at the end of the speech,

Michelle repeatedly emphasized the word *hope*, strongly expressed her hope for the younger generation on behalf of the state as first lady. She gave her sincere hopes to them---hoping young people can have the courage to fight; never fear of the difficulty, achieving their personal goals and expectations that family and nation have given to them. Her highly national emotional sincerity is beyond words, exciting, exhilarating, and moved. Here, the audiences' emotions are greatly aroused.

3.3 Pronunciation and intonation

Stress, rhythm and intonation are prominent features of English phonetics, that are also the important manifestations of the discourse. They make public speech alive and vivid to convey various emotions as sadness, anger and so on (Chen Yunlong, 2016). Thus, in the speech, the speaker's proper use of pronunciation and intonation is an important rhetorical mean of emotional appeals to appeal the audiences' emotions.

Example:

I want our young people to know that they matter, that they belong. So don't be afraid, you hear me? Young people don't be afraid. Be focused. Be determined. Be hopeful. Be empowered. Empower yourselves with a good education, then get out there and use that education to build a country worthy of your boundless promise.

In this example, Michelle was accurate in her pronunciation; moderate in her speed; proper, cordial and forceful in the variation of her tones. Her deep feelings and great affections moved those educators. They could feel the first lady's deep love and positive emotions. Michelle couldn't help but shed tears at the end of her speech, the audience was extremely touched and she maximized the skills of emotional appeal at the point.

3.4 Gestures

Gesture is an important ideographic form of human beings, which plays a role in expressing emotions and promoting the speaker when he/she expresses his/her personal opinions and propositions (Yan Minfen, 2013). So in the public speech, the speaker would like to use the appropriate gesture to match his language, which could have the great effects of blending the voice and emotion with the scene. Gestures are divided into four types: graphic gestures, metaphor gesture, indicative, and beat gestures (beats) (McNeill, 1992). As the name suggests, these four types of gestures are meant to

represent shapes, abstract concepts, pointing to specific things, and emphasizing what is said.

In Michelle's 21-minute speech, there are more than 300 hand gestures, including 60 metaphorical gestures, 44 indicative gestures, 102 metronomic gestures and 86 pictorial gestures, that are natural and suitable to the situation. Those gestures were used naturally with the speaker's emotions and situations in the speech with little affectation.

4 Conclusion

Through the analysis of means of rhetoric devices in lexis, syntax, phonetics and gesture of Michelle Obama's magnificent speech on the implementation of emotional appeal, the author found that the good speakers form comprehensive systems of rhetoric devices to arouse his audiences' feelings to achieve their purpose of persuasion. A great speech should be given in multiple manners rather than single way. So in the future, in order to attract their audience, learners of public speech should not only enhance their abilities in writing of their script of speech but also improve their

practical capacities in pronunciation and intonation and their body language.

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