

Enlightenment of Three Elements of Aristotle's Persuasion on College English Speech Teaching—Taking a Famous Speech “I Have a Dream” as an Example

Qian Yang

Department of Foreign Languages, Sichuan University of Media and Communications, 611745, Chengdu, China

Abstract: *English speech has become a new hot subject in college English teaching. It is imperative to introduce English rhetoric into English speech teaching. Taking Martin Luther King's famous speech “I Have a Dream” as an example, this paper illustrates the significance and effect of applying three elements of Aristotle's persuasion (logic appeal, emotion appeal and personality appeal) into speeches. It is suggested to apply English rhetoric into college English teaching and carry out specialized English rhetoric teaching and persuasive writing training based on English rhetoric. Persuasive speech teaching and evaluation are supposed to be conducted, aiming to help college students improve their critical thinking in English speeches and expand college English teaching sections.*

Keywords: *Three elements of Aristotle's persuasion, English speech, English rhetoric*

1. Introduction

Aristotle, the ancient Greek philosopher, believes that rhetoric is the combination of logic and political ethics, which is the initial definition of rhetoric. From ancient Greece to the late 19th century, it is a core part of Western education. In rhetoric, he defines "rhetoric" as "a function that can find possible ways of persuasion on any issue [1] ". Aristotle believes that persuasion is closely related to rhetoric. His three elements of rhetoric persuasion, namely logic appeal, emotion appeal and personality appeal, have a profound impact on speech. Only by comprehensively considering the three elements can speech be made effectively, so as to achieve the original purpose of persuasion. The Oxford Dictionary explains “rhetoric” as “art of using language impressively or persistently, esp. in public speaking”, indicating that rhetoric is an art of persuasion. In a speech, on the one hand, persuasion helps the speaker to always adhere to his purpose and ensure that his viewpoint is consistently illustrated. On the other hand, persuasion can stimulate listeners to actively participate in speeches, engaging them in thinking and action. Therefore, the appropriate application of the three elements of persuasion is a key to successful speech.

For college English teaching, which is no longer limited to textbooks, English speaking has gradually become a new form for college students to express their opinions and output their values. Various domestic college English speaking competitions have also been held in full swing. English speaking, as a way of outputting language and ideas for college students, can not only exercise their skills in expressing opinions but also improve their critical thinking ability. In English teaching classes, using famous speeches as materials to guide students' English speeches is of great significance. Martin Luther King, the leader of the American civil rights movement, makes a speech “I have a dream”, which is regarded as one of the most famous speeches in the twentieth century. The use of the three elements of rhetoric persuasion made the complex and abstract political ideas simple and specific. The speech deeply moves the audience on the spot and is widely considered to be an eloquent statement of black people's dreams and aspirations. His mode of persuasion and empathy not only effectively conveys information to the public at that time but also sets an example for contemporary college students to understand the essence of speeches.

2. Application of three elements of persuasion in “I Have a Dream”

2.1 Application of logic appeal (*Logos*)

Logos can be translated as “logical persuasiveness”, but its meaning is much broader than logic. Logical appeal is “the primary persuasive means of rhetoric, which impresses the audience with form, convention and reasoning mode in order to convince them [2].” It can be seen that logical appeal mainly relies on the inherent logic and causality of language to convince the listener. In order to achieve the persuasive purpose in a convincing manner, citing objective facts and data is a usual method of applying logical appeal.

In “I Have a Dream”, Martin Luther King uses logic appeal at the beginning of his speech: “Five score years ago, a great American... signed the Emancipation Proclamation.” Here “a great American” refers to Abraham Lincoln, the president of the United States who leads the abolition of black slavery. There are two other sentences saying: “When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men, yes, black men as well as white men, would be guaranteed the ‘unalienable Rights’ of ‘Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.’” The Constitution and the Declaration of Independence are authoritative founding documents. The “unalienable Right of life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness” is the concept of civil rights expressed in these documents. They are all objective pieces of information used to tell the audience by means of presenting facts, making them believe in the authenticity and reliability of the speech.

Another example of applying logic appeal is as follows: “We can never be satisfied as long as the Negro is the victim of the unspeakable horrors of police brutality. We can never be satisfied as long as our bodies, heavy with the fatigue of travel, cannot gain lodging in the motels of the highways and the hotels of the cities. We cannot be satisfied as long as the Negro’s basic mobility is from a smaller ghetto to a larger one. We can never be satisfied as long as our children are stripped of their selfhood and robbed of their dignity by signs stating ‘for whites only’. We cannot be satisfied as long as a Negro in Mississippi cannot vote and a Negro in New York believes he has nothing for which to vote. ” This description of the differential treatment of black people reflects the real situation in American society at that time. As listeners, black people must have experienced and witnessed the above situation firsthand. With this example of “presenting facts”, it can be seen that Martin Luther King is fully prepared for the background information of the speech, which could easily arouse the audience’s expectation of the follow-up content.

2.2 Application of emotional appeals (*Pathos*)

If only with facts presented, the audience may feel that the speech content is unrelated to themselves. Therefore, it is necessary to arouse their emotions in a targeted manner. In rhetoric, Aristotle “believes that the audience’s attitudes towards the speaker are different and thus their judgments are different. Therefore, the speaker must understand the audience’s psychology in order to stimulate or control their emotions [1]”. Emotional appeal, as a persuasive element, aims to stimulate the audience’s emotions, gain their sympathy and arouse their self-identity. In “I Have a Dream”, Martin Luther King also uses emotional appeal to achieve interaction with the audience in his speech.

Martin Luther King uses first person plural pronouns such as “we” and “our” to indicate that he and the audience belong to the same group and the interests of these group members are closely related. For example, the following paragraph says, “But we cannot distrust all white people because of this. Because many of our white brothers have realized that their fate is closely linked to ours, and their participation in the parade today is a testament to this. Their freedom is closely related to our freedom. We cannot act alone.” In addition, he also uses noun phrases such as “my friends” and “My brothers” to indicate the audience are their friends and family members, which can easily cause the audience’s emotional resonance.

Martin Luther King repeatedly uses parallelism in his speech to enhance the language force. For example, the following sentence says: “With this faith, we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.” Multiple phrases ended with “together” form a parallel, making the audience feel that Martin Luther King’s appeal and persuasion are for the common interests of the black people. Anaphora is another way to enhance the language force. The phrase “I have a dream” has been used

nine times to express Martin Luther King's strong desire for freedom, fairness and justice. Using anaphora in a speech not only makes it easier for the audience to remember the speaker's viewpoints but also brings a strong sense of rhythm to the speech. In this way, the on-site appeal is enhanced and the inspiring effect is achieved.

2.3 Application of personality appeal (Ethos)

"Personality appeal, as a mode of persuasion, can be theoretically explained from two aspects: firstly, describing the speaker's good morality as a prerequisite; secondly, it is to rely on the speaker to create a credible feature in a specific rhetorical context [3]." Martin Luther King, as a Baptist priest and a theologian doctor, has rich knowledge and good morality, which is the prerequisite for him to use the first personality appeal. Impromptu speeches mainly use the second method, creating a credible feature in specific rhetorical situations by citing theoretical concepts and academic authority, allowing the audience to follow their ideas and achieve successful persuasion. In a speech, "rhetoricians must therefore determine and project the most appropriate and effective rhetorical personality based on their assigned roles in public discourse and their interaction with the target audience [4]."

Martin Luther King cites many words and phrases from the Bible as theoretical concepts. For example, he uses the biblical term "captivity" given in Emancipation Proclamation. Here is one example: "It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of bad captivity." Here Martin Luther King intends to describe the imprisonment and suppression of black people by white people. Another example is as follows: "We will not be satisfied until 'justice rolls down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream'." Martin Luther King uses this sentence to call for social fairness and justice. For many Christians in the audience, these classic words can make them identify with the speaker's identity of a pastor and be convinced of his academic background. In this way, Martin Luther King successfully creates a credible feature and realizes what Aristotle calls "effective rhetorical personality".

3. Application of English rhetoric in college English speech teaching

Martin Luther King makes full use of the three elements of Aristotle's persuasion in the speech "I Have a Dream", which is taken as a classic by means of reasoning and emotional inspiration. To guide college students to prepare for English speeches, teachers should fully consider the impact of English rhetoric on speakers, listeners and the speech process, so that speeches are not just proof of language ability but a comprehensive presentation of a language and its rhetoric.

3.1 To carry out specialized English rhetoric teaching

Contemporary college students have their own values and certain expression ability. On this basis, they should also learn the basic knowledge of English rhetoric, including the three elements of Aristotle's persuasion. These contents need to be passed on to students through special rhetoric courses or special rhetoric lectures. Many texts in the English reading courses are also classic articles with appropriate rhetoric. The traditional "interpretive" teaching mode, which explains the meaning of words and sentences to students word by word, often makes the classes boring. Teachers can teach texts from the perspective of rhetoric, interpret ideas of the article through the analysis of rhetoric elements, guide students to explore logical argumentation, emotional rendering and rhetorical personality of the author. Not only can this stimulate students' interest in reading original English works, but it also helps to improve their language appreciation and English critical thinking ability.

It should be noted that English rhetoric is quite different from Chinese rhetoric. As students who learn English as a second language, they are inevitably influenced by the Chinese way of thinking, which may result in a "Chinese" style speech. First, learning English rhetoric, such as Aristotle's rhetoric, requires students to distinguish between objective facts and subjective experience. Chinese rhetoric mainly relies on experience and replaces logical argumentation with experiential perception; however, traditional English rhetoric emphasizes rationality, adapting different ways of thinking and expression based on different objects and contents. Secondly, Chinese rhetoric attaches great importance to connotation, the inner beauty of speech and rhetoric; however, English rhetoric has a strong sense of formalization, which regards rhetoric as a technique. English speeches have debate as its essence. The exertion of this debate technology relies on the personality of the speaker, arousing the emotions of the audience and powerful logical argument to produce persuasiveness. Thirdly, "in terms of language expression, the semantic relations between Chinese sentences and paragraphs are not

expressed by explicit conjunction like English but by the semantic relations between them which focuses on ‘parataxis’ [5].” “English combines sentences through explicit language elements such as conjunction and pays attention to ‘hypotaxis’, which is reflected in many long sentences and complex structures [5].” This is also confirmed in Martin Luther King’s speech “I Have a Dream”, in which he repeatedly uses parallelism to arouse the enthusiasm of the audience.

3.2 To combine English rhetoric with persuasive writing training

In English writing classes, it is not difficult to find that although students can write sentences with correct grammar and appropriate vocabulary. Nevertheless, it is difficult to create articles with rigorous logical argumentation, persuasiveness and infectious power from the perspective of English rhetoric. English speech is based on the oral output of English writing, so the level of students’ writing directly determines the quality of their speech. Speech itself is a persuasive output of information, so persuasive writing has a fundamental impact on students’ speeches. Persuasive writing is essentially a speculative style of argumentative writing, with clear viewpoints as the core. Presenting facts and reasoning are common ways to argue viewpoints. The success of argument selection directly affects the effectiveness of persuasiveness, and the expression of viewpoints, presentation of arguments and application of persuasive elements in the persuasive process require good logical thinking. In writing teaching, logical thinking training can be conducted at different levels. Firstly, students can learn how to clearly articulate their viewpoints. Secondly, they can be taught how to effectively select arguments. Thirdly, they are required to know how to analyze arguments. For college students who have not yet fully matured their thinking, distinguishing between facts and viewpoints is a difficulty in cultivating their logical reasoning ability. Allowing students to analyze their logical problems in writing on their own can be a way to improve their logical reasoning ability.

In addition to application of logical appeal in writing training, the impact of emotional appeal and personality appeal should also be considered. On the basis of mastering the theoretical knowledge of rhetoric, students should firstly comprehend the whole rhetorical situation, including the venue, audience, background and expected effect. Once students have acquired the rhetorical situation, the second most important thing is to choose an appropriate way of expression. Many factors can affect the outcome of a persuasive event, including language choice, ethics, projected images and the relationship between the speaker and the audience. We can refer to the teaching model of “process-oriented writing”, which originated from the “process-oriented writing” movement in the United States in the 1920s. This writing mode is defined in this way: “Writing is a psychological cognitive activity that involves problem-solving and social interaction. During the writing process, the writing subject, under the contextual constraints of the social environment and writing environment, conveys information to readers or completes a writing task and engages in social interaction by means of writing. Throughout the writing process, the writer should consider the needs of the readers and the requirements of the writing task [6].” “The concept of ‘process-oriented writing’ is based on communication theory and emphasizes the existence of communicative objects. After clarifying the writing purpose, the author needs to determine the writing form based on the cognitive characteristics of the readers. The main characteristic of this stage is based on purpose and centered on readers [7].” If students want to get closer to the audience, they need to take into account the feelings of the audience and their cultural literacy. They can not only use the first person plural pronouns to empathize with the audience many times like Martin Luther King, but also use classics and power to create effective rhetorical personality.

3.3 To conduct persuasive speech teaching and evaluation

Persuasive speaking requires a systematic understanding of the concept of persuasion and the mastery of reasonable persuasive techniques. Speech training can be conducted at both individual and collaborative levels. At the individual level, students need to establish their own credibility. “The credibility of a speaker is influenced by many factors, including social skills, mental status and postural attractiveness. The two most important factors are ability and quality [8].” The higher the listener’s evaluation of the speaker’s ability and quality, the more likely they are to accept the speaker’s reasoning. Meanwhile, students can choose role models to imitate. They can identify the charm of an excellent speaker, like what influential speech traits he has, what rhetorical devices he uses, whether the speech content includes specific examples and whether the speaker adjusts and changes their content on the spot. With regards to the collaborative level, students need to think from multiple perspectives and listen to others’ opinions in order to apply rhetorical knowledge and techniques for persuasive speeches. An inclusive and upward cooperative attitude is necessary for the speech preparation. At the same time,

an important idea can be conveyed to students that an excellent speaker should be sincere and firm, full of emotional traits with critical thinking.

After students present their speeches, the teacher can firstly organize a mutual evaluation between students. To avoid random judgment, it is necessary to establish evaluation criteria with a focus on specific aspects, for example, whether the choice of speech arguments is appropriate, whether the structure is reasonable, whether the arguments are persuasive and logical, whether the thinking has breadth and depth and whether emotional expression is sufficient. By means of mutual evaluation, students can gain inspiration from peer performance, effectively achieving self-comparison, self-reflection and self-improvement. The role transforming from a learner to a judge can promote students' understanding of the evaluation criteria for critical thinking ability. Meanwhile, teacher evaluation can figure out the strengths and weaknesses of students' speeches from different perspectives. When it comes to fallacies in reasoning logic, the teacher should point out specific types of mistakes such as invalid analogy, incorrect attribution and hasty conclusion. With students' mutual evaluation and teacher evaluation combined, excellent speeches can be selected to encourage students pursue better application of English rhetoric. The problems that arise in the evaluation can be set as key points and difficult points in subsequent speech courses, and suggestions for improvement can be offered by both students and teachers.

4. Conclusion

College English speech teaching must attach importance to rhetoric teaching. "To achieve a real breakthrough in foreign language teaching in China, it is necessary to achieve a leap from language to discourse, expression to response, communication to persuasion and explanation to debate [9]." Speech is a teaching activity that tests students' comprehensive English abilities, integrating their oral, writing and on-site reaction abilities. If students can fully consider the impact of English rhetoric on the essence of speech in the preparation of speeches and during the speeches, the presentation must have a valid and sincere effect. College English teachers are supposed to have a good command of English rhetoric knowledge and direct students to apply it to the actual English speeches. This is of practical significance for improving the comprehensive English literacy of college students and expanding the scope of college English teaching.

References

- [1] Aristotle. (2006). *Rhetoric* (Trans. Luo Niansheng). Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House.
- [2] Wen Kexue. (2006). *English and Chinese Comparative Rhetoric*. Nanning: School of Foreign Languages, Guangxi University.
- [3] Tan Dangui. (2009). *Application of Three Persuasion Models of Aristotle's Rhetoric in Persuasion*. *Journal of Xianning University*, no. 1, p. 65.
- [4] Zhang Xiaowei, Jin, Jing. (2007). "Authority" in Bush's Second Inaugural Address. *Knowledge Economy. Health*, no. 11, p. 169.
- [5] Yang Qian. (2011). *Chinese Students' English Writing Seen from the Difference between Chinese and English Modes of Thinking*. *Journal of Jiamusi Education College*, no. 5, pp. 289-290.
- [6] Sun Zhiwei. (2013). *Research on the Usability of Writing Textbooks—Taking American "The Choice of Authors" as a Reference*. Shanghai Normal University, p. 65.
- [7] Hao Yue. (2017). *The Writer's Choice High School Period of Persuasive Writing*. Suzhou University, p. 41.
- [8] Lucas SE. *The Art of Speech*. (2021). Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, p. 16.
- [9] Yuan Hongyan. (2013). *On Rhetoric and Rhetorical Teaching Concept in the Teaching of English Majors*. *Journal of Jixi University*, no. 2, p. 77.