

Logo, Pathos and Ethos in David Cameron's Political Speech: A Rhetorical Analysis

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Abstract

Effective rhetoric involves us with the drama of the present by providing convincing explanations of what is right and wrong and convinces us that the speaker is both better and stronger than his or her opponent (Jonathon Charteris-Black, 2005). Successful politicians are always capable of combining rhetoric with spoken words to convey their political opinions and persuade their audience to accept their ideas. As one of the most renowned politicians in the contemporary world, the British Prime Minister David Cameron is by no means an exception. His language of leadership enjoys worldwide reputation for its powerful communication of political ideology yet it is rarely studied. Drawing on the insight from Aristotle's classical three means of persuasion, namely logos, pathos and ethos, the paper evaluates the rhetorical strategies employed in one of David Cameron's most significant and historic political speech delivered before the voting on Scottish independence referendum, aiming to illustrate that rhetorical analysis helps to reveal the speaker's intention and goal of persuasion. Also, the paper demonstrates the relationship between rhetoric and persuasion and sheds light on a rhetorical approach to the enhancing of writing and speaking for language learners.

Keywords: Rhetoric, Aristotle, Logs, Pathos, Ethos, political speech

1. Introduction

Throughout history, politics and the art of persuading have been indispensable. As Jonathan Charteris-Black (2005) explains: “Within all types of political system, from autocratic, through oligarchic to democratic, leaders have relied on the spoken word to convince others of the benefits that arise from their leadership.” Countless political leaders have taken advantage of various rhetorical skills to successfully achieve their political goals. Among these contemporary politicians, David Cameron, the British Prime Minister, is undoubtedly one of the most renowned and capable ones in delivering persuasive and powerful public speaking. On September 16, 2014, two days before the Scottish referendum on independence, he made an impassioned plea to Scottish people to vote “No” and thus to avoid Scotland’s separation from the United Kingdom. As the last chance to win recognition and support from Scottish people, the speech was of far-reaching significance and its effectiveness and persuasiveness played a decisive role in determining Britain’s future. In this critical address, David Cameron warned Scotland that “there is no going back” from independence and that once the majority of Scots voted “yes” they might suffer from having a new currency, reduced pension, separated families and an economic downturn.

The objective of the paper is to examine some of the linguistic performances in David Cameron’s historic “No Going Back” speech on Scottish independence referendum based on the three means of persuasion by Aristotle and to demonstrate that the choice of language in communications, spoken or written, can make a difference influencing the audiences’ decisions. According to Jennifer Richards (2008), the term “rhetoric” derives from Greek *rhētorikē*, “the art of speaking”, and is defined as “the art of using language so as to persuade or influence.” In fact, ancient Greece was one of the largest contributors to present-day civilization. As early as 500-323 B. C., political freedom began

to take shape when “Athenian citizens discussed, debated and voted on issues that affected them directly” (Zhang Xiuguo, 2005). Consequently, Greece called into existence a class teachers known as sophists who “founded rhetoric schools to train the Greeks for political and legal thinking, and skillfully educated a lot of prominent statesman” (Li Yang & Qin Xianmei, 2012). They attached great importance to style and presentation even at the expense of truth. Unlike the Sophists, Aristotle (384-322 B. C.) deemed it feasible to help the listeners to perceive the truth with rhetoric. He established his profound theories of applying effectively rhetoric, including three genres of rhetoric and three means of persuasion, which tremendously promoted the progress and development of rhetoric. Since then, rhetorical analysis following Aristotle’s three devices of persuasion has become the most widely used methods of rhetorical criticism which “led to the study of a single speaker because the sheer number of topics to cover relating to the rhetor and the speech made dealing with more than a single speaker virtually impossible.” (Foss, Sonja K, 1996: 26)

2. Theoretical Framework

Aristotle identifies three components of persuasion in his *Rhetoric*: “Logos, or rational argument; ethos, the speaker’s character, particularly his trustworthiness; and pathos, the emotions aroused in an audience” (Jennifer Richards, 2008).

Logos is the Greek word for “word”, but the modern definition goes beyond that, and can be most closely described as the expressed inward thought. The word “logic” is derived from logos. Since logos is based on logic or reason, the reasoning part of the presentation is the only legitimate way to influence people. “Effective logical reasoning comes from sound logical thinking which is expressed in relevant material, proper organization, coherent sentences and words that appropriately convey one’s intended meanings” (Zhang Xiuguo, 2005).

To use logos would be to cite facts and statistics, historical and literal analogies, and to cite certain authorities on a subject. Evidence can be quoted as fact too. Both reasons and evidence are used in an appeal to logic. However, reasons cannot be the only support. Consistency means not changing the unstated or stated rules supporting the arguments, which is essential to logic.

Emotion, or “pathos”, is a rhetorical device that can be used in an argument to draw the audience in and to help it connect with the argument. Aristotle argued that “a person, though by nature a rational animal, was often prompted to do something or accept something by his or her emotions. Effective appeals to the audience’s emotions depend upon the skillful, and often witty handling of language, accompanied by exposure and eloquence” (Zhang Xiuguo, 2005). Used correctly, pathos can make a bland argument come alive for the audience. Pathos offers a way for the audience to relate to the subject through commonly held emotions. However, it is important to determine when pathos will be practical.

The appeal to credibility is known as “ethos”. Ethos is a method of persuasion in which the speaker or writer attempts to persuade the audience by demonstrating his own credibility or authority. Aristotle believed that ethical appeal stemmed from the character of the speaker, especially as that character was evinced in the speech itself (Zhang Xiuguo, 2005). According to Aristotle, ethos can be categorized into phronesis, arête and eunoia. Phronesis means to show one’s practical skills in specific aspects or wisdom, which demonstrates authority. A speaker’s profound knowledge makes him reliable and the audiences are willing to believe what the speaker talks about. Arete is the essential goodness of the speaker and these great characters help him establish credibility. Eunoia describes a speaker’s goodwill towards the audience. Audiences prefer to follow a speaker who shows respect for the audiences’ interest or who sets common ground with them. In general, ethos helps the speaker create a trustworthy image, making his speech more persuasive.

Pathos works in conjunction with logos (logic) and ethos (credibility) to help form a solid argument. However, not every argument employs all three rhetorical devices and a proper balance must be kept among the three appeals. With too much logos, a speech might be full of facts and information but boring; with too much pathos, a speech might be passionate but pointless; with too much ethos, the speaker might appear too clever for the audience. All in all, each speaker must choose which combination of rhetorical devices will work well and will suit the chosen topic.

In the following part, the paper shall attempt to identify some of the most representative and typical linguistic evidences, together with the provision of necessary background information and explanation from social, historical and psychological perspective. By taking advantage of Aristotle's three key rhetorical elements, the study also analyzes respective functions of the three means of persuasion along with the relevant exemplifications. Since "each of these devices is an important of effective political communication, given their capacity to convince an audience of the orator's argument" (Andrew S. Crines, 2013), such analysis may help us to better understand the relationship between rhetoric and effective communication. However, for the convenience of illustration, when one example employs a combination of more than one rhetorical devices, it will be classified under one category of rhetorical strategy depending on its obviousness.

3. Rhetorical Strategies in Cameron's Speech

Sufficient traces of rhetorical strategies can be found in David Cameron's "No Going Back" speech delivered before Scottish referendum. The successful speech has impressed people from all walks of life. A great many Scottish people were touched by the Prime Minister's sincerity and emotion. Finally Scotland stayed in the united family after the referendum. To some extent, the power of

rhetoric in this political discourse can't be underestimated. The following sections shall illustrate how rhetoric is applied in this speech.

3.1 Logos Appeals in Cameron's speech

Logos can be understood as a speaker's attempt to appeal to the logic or reason of the audience. Appealing to facts is utilized by David Cameron to build Scottish voters' confidence in the greatness of UK. Citing facts, he inclines to persuade the people to vote "no" during the independence referendum. The following examples will be analyzed in detail.

(1) It would be the end of a country that launched the Enlightenment, that abolished slavery, that drove the industrial revolution and that defeated fascism...

Cameron stated the refulgent history to stress the undoubted strength in this country. He intended to convince the audience that extraordinary achievements in world history have been made by United Kingdom and more progress will be created by this incredible country. Listing facts of successful history, Cameron has encouraged his people to hold their belief in UK. The facts implies the enormous influence of United Kingdom and shows democratic attitude, generosity and magnanimity of this government.

(2) It would mean we no longer share the same currency....It would mean that we no longer pool resources across the whole of the UK to pay for institutions like the NHS (National Health Service) or our welfare system...This is not guesswork. There are no question marks, no maybe this or maybe that... These are the facts. This is what would happen.

With the parallel sentence structure "it would mean", Cameron made a list of all the appalling consequences of a "Yes" vote in the independence referendum. Following that, he emphasized that "these are the facts" and "this is what would happen". These seemingly simple assertions conveyed a clear

and definite message to his audience: if you vote “No”, you can still enjoy the favors provided by the British government, including strong military might, decent pension fund, great convenience in traveling abroad, stable economic security and excellent social insurance. These facts are convincing enough to make the Scottish people stay.

(3) In human relations, it's almost never a good thing to turn away from each other, put up walls, score new lines on the map.

In retrospect, deviating from each other, isolating with rampart and redrawing boundaries usually lead to catastrophes. Berlin Wall, the symbol of division, finally came down. Cameron warned his audiences of what exactly have happened in the history to convince the voters that independence shouldn't be their choice. Citing historical facts, Cameron created objectivity of his speech and established democracy and sense of publicity in listeners' psychological level. The objectivity helps him speak for British government from an outsider's perspective to persuade his audience. To sum up, facts provides strong evidence for Cameron to reach his persuasive goal.

3.2 Pathos Appeals in Cameron's speech

In Aristotle's Rhetoric, he identified pathos as awakening emotion in the audience so as to induce them to make the judgment desired. Adopting pathos in this speech, Cameron impressively aroused the audiences' two emotions: Scottish national pride and woes of a broken family.

(4) It only becomes Great Britain because of the greatness of Scotland. Because of the thinkers, writers, artists, leaders, soldiers, inventors who have made this country what it is...and all the millions of people who have played their part in this extraordinary success story...We did all this together.

Cameron laid an emphasis that any British citizen, including Scottish people, should be proud of the wonders this country have creat-

ed due to the significant contributions made by Scottish. The greatness of United Kingdom came along with the illustriousness of Scotland from the very beginning of this country. Cameron endeavored to arouse the resonance of all British people's emotion to share this Scottish pride. It is the unity that has brought up the accomplishments of Scotland as well as the whole union.

(5) Scotland is shaping and changing the United Kingdom for the better--more so today than at any point in the last three hundred years and will continue to help shape the constitution of our country.

Undoubtedly, Scotland has made glorious efforts to prosper United Kingdom and Cameron implied that further progress would be made by Scotland as part of the country. He evoked audiences' emotion of trusting a brighter future of an intact country. Psychologically, men change their opinion in regard to their judgment as such emotions have specific causes and effects. It is Scotland that completes the United Kingdom, which causes audiences' sense of pride for Scotland. And this pride always comes along with the goal to make the United Kingdom proud. Cameron pointed out that Scottish national pride is part of the British pride, demonstrating his intention to influence the audience judgment.

(6) For the people of Scotland to walk away now would be like painstakingly building a home--and then walking out the door and throwing away the keys.

Cameron reminded his people of the hardships during the process in building this home and he utilized metaphor to refer to the essence that Scottish might lose forever. Audiences' attention was therefore grasped by the mention of treasures, the values and the faith eventually shaped during a long span of history. The possibility that all these treasures, values and faith would be thrown away recalled Scottish people's woes of losing their own preciousness. Cameron's words made an implication that the pain of leaving

could be tremendous and utterly heart-broken because no one would like to lose the most important things they possess. He established himself as a sincere speaker to knock out audiences' psychological defense, which made his words more convincing and helped him to convey the ideology of national pride.

(7) Independence would not be a trial separation. It would be a painful divorce...Why should the next generation of that family be forced to choose whether to identify only with Edinburgh or only with London, choose which embassy they want to go to when they are in trouble abroad, or pack their passport when they're going to see friends, loved ones and their family.

Unity creates communication and bonds. How suffering it is to untie the intimate relationship between friends, lovers and families! To half Scottish families, this independence may cruelly lead to actual splitting up of those lovely families. Cameron seized voters' sentiment and aroused some Scottish people's woe of the cruel situation. "Divorce" and "separation" construct negative uncertain emotion in human cognition. "Friend" and "family" create positive sense of safety and happiness. With the combination of these two categories of words, Cameron guided his audiences to voluntarily choose the latter one because people would easily follow the subconsciously positive approach. Appealing to pathos, Cameron induced the voters to make their decision with the emotional exclusion of pain and woe.

3.3 Ethos Appeals in Cameron's speech

Ethos is a method of persuasion in which the speaker or writer attempts to persuade the audience by demonstrating his own credibility or authority. The following examples illustrate how Cameron gains credibility and makes his speech convincing by exploiting ethos.

(8) It is my duty to be clear about the likely consequences of a Yes Vote. And as Prime Minister I have to tell you what that would mean.

Performing Prime Minister's duty in public in critical moment, Cameron created an image of a qualified and trustworthy country leader to build a good character, which can be deemed as a simple application of ethos.

(9) To warn of the consequences is not to scare-monger, it is like warning a friend about a decision they might take that will affect the rest of their lives--and the lives of their children...Now I know that some people say: we've heard about the risks and the uncertainties but we still want change.

Cameron pointed out that maintaining the unity of a country is every citizen's duty. Using the word "friend", the prime minister inclined to speak amiably and sincerely in tone to tell the Scottish that they will never be back once leaving. The usage of "I" indicated that he sent the entire message in person, as a citizen instead of a political leader. First pronoun shows a closer relationship between the speaker and audiences. In particular, the plural first pronoun "we" implied that all the British people should be discussed as a whole. He set a common ground with the audience to show goodwill and demonstrate ethos.

4. Conclusion

The study makes a linguistic analysis of David Cameron's address, drawing from Aristotle's three devices of persuasion. By exercising all three appeals, The Prime Minister raises the audiences' pride for the country, explains the consequences of the political event, guides the people's faith and belief, arouses Scottish voter's painful emotion of leaving, tells them the precious they should cherish, shows his essential character and establishes a common ground with his people. All these demonstrate his clear message: please vote "No"! The final result of the referendum came out several days after the speech. With 2,001,926 (55.3%) voters voting "No" and 1,617,989 (44.7%) voting "Yes", Scotland declined

independence and stayed in the United Kingdom (BBC, 2014). The result proves the effective rhetoric utilized by David Cameron in his political persuasion.

The study finds out that rhetorical use of language has been effectively implemented in Cameron's speech. In terms of logos appeals, Cameron is greatly skillful in utilizing facts and reasoning to caution the audience of the serious consequences. In terms of pathos appeals, Cameron stirs up the emotions of Scottish national pride and woe of a broken family. Scottish pride is repeatedly mentioned in the speech to recall the audience of the warm embrace from the UK. People's emotions are also affected by pains of breaking a fantastic family. In terms of ethos, the Prime Minister builds up his image as a citizen together with his people to establish credibility. To sum up, effective rhetoric is frequently utilized in the speech to persuade the audience. The three modes of persuasion, when working together skillfully, can best enhance the power of language. As put forward by Richard Andrews (2014), "most of the time we are unconscious of rhetoric...it operates in the everyday world...to provide a framework for designing, making and understanding discourse...once rhetoric is recognized and defined, it can be learnt and/or taught, thus enhancing the power of rhetoric to improve the quality of communication." However, the rhetorical analysis in this paper is by no means an exhaustive one. Rather, it is an exploration of rhetoric in modern political discourse on a macro level, following the traditional approach. Further research could aim at a micro-level, more detailed linguistic analysis in terms of the choice of words, the choice of sentence and figure of speech, syntactically and semantically. More importantly, speakers and writers, including language learners, must raise their awareness of rhetoric and familiarize themselves with these principles to produce convincing speeches and writings.

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