

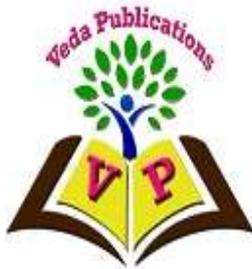


## A CRITICAL OVERVIEW OF ENGLISH RHETORIC

Dr. Yogeswari Menda

(Assistant Professor, Department of English, RGUKT, IIIT Srikakulam, S.M.Puram, A.P-532 402.)

### ABSTRACT



English Rhetoric is being the most dominant art and study of using language effectively and persuasively in our global world, the present paper tries to focus on the critical overview of English Rhetoric. The brief introduction and history is to be critically examined at the outset. Further, some master definitions by famous authors are to be mentioned. This paper deals with the key elements of Rhetoric. Rhetoric strategies with some essential components related to the modes of the persuasion is to be presented. Rhetorical devices, the resource of language are to be presented at a glance. Rhetoric refers to the art of public speaking and it is a very important branch in the communication field. Thus, public speaking has many reflections of our lives. It is the *study and practice of effective communication* and this paper attempts to draw attention on the need and importance of English rhetorical study and education in improving communication skills for English language learners.

**Keywords:** *Rhetoric Strategies, Persuasion, Rhetorical Devices, Communication Skill, Rhetorical Study and Education.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Rhetoric is the art of analyzing all the choices involving language that a writer, speaker, reader, or listener might make a situation so that the text becomes meaningful, purposeful and effective. Rhetoric is the practice of organizing, writing, and delivering speeches. *Rhetoric is the study and practice of communication*. In 350 B.C.E., philosopher Aristotle sets the foundation for the basic system of rhetoric (Allen, 2007). Aristotle promoted rhetoric language claiming that it was a human skill that could be beneficial if improved (Gross & Walzer, 2000). The term rhetoric comes from the Greek word for spoken or speech. It refers to the act of persuading or converting words into action. It is defined as the study of rules for using language effectively (Britannica, 2010). It is also referred to as a discipline, an art, a skill, or a type of language (Kjeldson, 2003). Rhetoric is the art of clear and effective use of language, written or spoken, as a vehicle for the communication of ideas (Smith). The word rhetoric originated in early classical Greek times. It has been derived by adaptation from Latin rhetorica or rhetorice which again has come from Greek rhetorike meaning the technical art of a rhetor that is an orator or public speaker. Rhetoric, therefore, originally meant the art of using language so as to persuade or influence the audience. Gradually it came to mean the art or science of using words effectively in both speaking and writing. Now it means the art of elegant and effective literary composition in both prose and verse, including the use of figures of speech.

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF RHETORIC

Humans have studied and praised rhetoric since the early days of the written word. The Mesopotamians and Ancient Egyptians both valued the ability to speak with eloquence and wisdom. However, it wasn't until the rise of Greek democracy that rhetoric became a high art that was studied and developed systematically.

## CLASSICAL RHETORIC

### RHETORIC IN ANCIENT GREECE: ARISTOTLE

In his treatise, *The Art of Rhetoric*, Aristotle established a system of understanding and teaching rhetoric. Aristotle defines rhetoric as the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of

persuasion. After establishing the need for rhetorical knowledge, Aristotle sets forth his system for effectively applying rhetoric.

- Three Means of Persuasion (logos, pathos, and ethos).
- Three Genres of Rhetoric (deliberative, forensic, and epideictic),
- Rhetorical topics, Parts of speech and Effective use of style.

### RHETORIC IN ANCIENT ROME: CICERO AND QUINTILIAN

The first master rhetorician Rome produced was the great statesman Cicero. Cicero's approach to rhetoric emphasized the importance of a liberal education. According to Cicero, to be persuasive a man needed knowledge in history, politics, art, literature, ethics, law, and medicine. By being liberally educated, a man would be able to connect with any audience he addressed.

### MEDIEVAL RHETORIC

During the middle Ages, rhetoric shifted from political to religious discourse. Instead of being a tool to lead the state, rhetoric was seen as a means to save souls. Church Fathers, like St. Augustine, explored how they could use the "pagan" art of rhetoric to better spread the gospel to the unconverted and preach to the believers. During the latter part of the medieval period, universities began forming in France, Italy, and England where students took classes on grammar, logic, and rhetoric. Medieval students poured over texts written by Aristotle to learn rhetorical theory and spent hours repeating rote exercises in Greek and Latin to improve their rhetorical skill. Despite the emphasis on a rhetorical education, however, medieval thinkers and writers made few new contributions to the study of rhetoric.

### RENAISSANCE AND ENLIGHTENMENT RHETORIC

Like the arts and sciences, the study of rhetoric experienced a re-birth during the Renaissance period. Renaissance scholars began producing new treatises and books on rhetoric. The duty and office of rhetoric is to apply reason to imagination for the better moving of the will. - Francis Bacon. Rhetoric is that art or talent by which discourse is adapted to its end. The four ends of discourse are to enlighten the understanding, please

the imagination, move the passion, and influence the will. - *George Campbell*. Rhetoric is the art of carrying on the serious business of the understanding as if it were a free play of the imagination. - *Immanuel Kant*. Rhetoric is wisdom speaking eloquently - *Giambattista Vico*

### NEW RHETORIC

Rhetoric is the study of misunderstanding and its remedies- *I.A. Richards*. Rhetoric is the art of discovering warrantable beliefs and improving those beliefs in shared discourse-*Wayne Booth*. Rhetoric comprehensively considered is an art of emphasis embodying an order of desire.- *Richard Weaver*. Rhetoric is the art of adjusting ideas to people and people to ideas.-*Donald Cross Bryant*.

### CONTEMPORARY RHETORIC

One of the most influential books on rhetoric that came out during this time was *Hugh Blair's Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles-lettres Published in 1783*. Blair's book remained a standard text on rhetoric at universities across Europe and America for over a hundred years. The proliferation of mass media in the 20th century caused another shift in the study of rhetoric. Rhetoric is symbolic action through which we humans construct the worlds in which we live -*Karlynn Kohrs Campbell*. Rhetoric is the systematic analysis of human discourse for the purpose of adducing useful precepts for future discourse - *James Murphy*. The art of adapting ideas to people and people to ideas. The rationale of informative and persuasive discourse - *Donald Bryant*. For those in power, rhetoric is offered as a serious study only by the enemies of truth, who wish to support their heresies through an unorthodox use of language- *James Berlin*. The strategic use of communication, oral or written, to achieve specifiable goals- *Andrew King and Jim Kuypers*. Rhetoric is the study and practice of persuasion- *Herbert Simons*. In the 18th and 19th centuries, universities in both Europe and America began devoting entire departments to the study of rhetoric.

### KEY ELEMENTS OF RHETORIC

*Rhetoric* is basically the strategic use of communication to accomplish purposes with target audiences. *Rhetorical Choices* means the particular choices a writer or speaker makes to achieve

meaning, purpose, or effect. *Rhetor* is the speaker who uses elements of rhetoric effectively in oral or written text. The *Rhetorical Triangle* relates directly to the three classic appeals you should consider when communicating. Ethos – Building trust by establishing your credibility and authority (Writer). Pathos – Appealing to emotion by connecting with your audience through their values and interests (Audience). Logos – Appeal to intelligence with well-constructed and clearly argued ideas (Context).

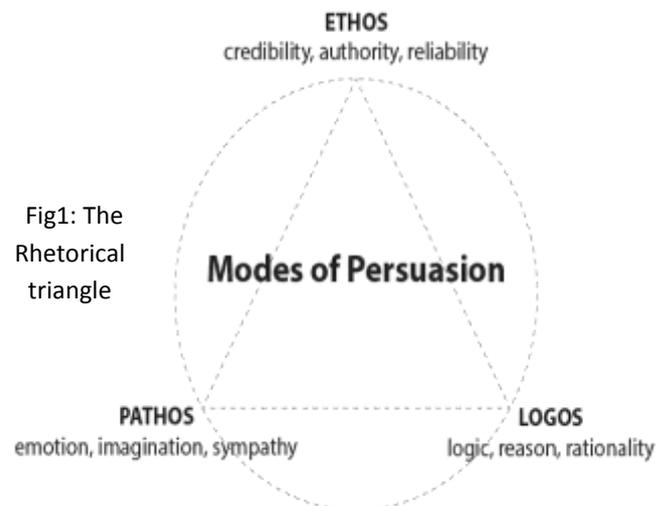


Fig1: The Rhetorical triangle

**Rhetoric situation** is the convergence in a situation of exigency (the need to write), audience and purpose. The rhetorical situation is a fundamental and useful concept for developing as a writer (and as a critical reader). First used by Lloyd Bitzer (1968), the rhetorical situation refers to the context within which speakers or writers create rhetorical discourse. The features of the rhetorical situation are sender (or rhetor), receiver (or audience), message (delivered language), purpose, and exigence (a particular need and moment for a suitable rhetorical transaction). All of these features are interrelated and interdependent. The design of a persuasive argument is particular to any given rhetorical situation, which takes into account four basic components: 1) the author, 2) the audience, 3) the text and 4) its context.

The rhetorical situation is the nature of the context in which speakers or writers create appropriate rhetorical discourse. These four elements of meaning guide writers in their writing choices, choices based on (1) their own values; (2) the values of their audience; (3) the possible range of



messages; and (4) the nature of the context (universe or reality). *Rhetorical context* refers to the circumstances surrounding any writing situation and includes purpose, audience, and focus. Rhetorical is an adjective that means by the act of communication or intending to transmit meaning.

**Rhetorical Strategies:** Refers to how a paragraph is organized and the methods used to support and explain the main idea.

- **Illustration:** This strategy focuses on using brief, specific examples that are explained in great detail to support a main idea.
- **Narration:** This strategy focuses on the use of stories about you, people you know, people you've heard about, and/or hypothetical that is relevant to a main idea and explains the points you want to make.
- **Description:** Using description means focusing on the use of concrete, sensory diction to describe a location, person, event, object, memory, etc. that explains your main point and/or specific words
- **Cause and Effect:** These terms refer to reasons and results or consequences.
- **Compare and Contrast:** Writers use this strategy to show the similarities, differences, or both among two or more things by first presenting the items of comparison and criteria or qualities being compared/contrasted
- **Process:** This strategy focuses on giving instructions or giving the sequence of steps or stages of some kind of progressive action.
- **Classification:** This strategy is used to categorize information according to specified topics, which are the explained in detail one by one and organized in a way that best represents and supports a main idea.
- **Extended Definition:** This strategy is used to provide detailed definitions and meanings.
- **Refutation:** The verb to refute means to argue against. Presenting counterarguments helps writers to improve their ethos by demonstrating their knowledge and fairness.
- **Argumentation:** This is sort of a catch-all category in which writers may use one or

many of the strategies described above to help him/her argue a position on a controversial issue. Controversy is the key to using this argument strategy well:

## RHETORICAL DEVICES

Rhetorical device, resource of language is a technique that an author or speaker uses to convey to the listener or reader a meaning with the goal of persuading him or her towards considering a topic from a different perspective, using sentences designed to encourage or provoke an emotional display of a given perspective or action. A rhetorical device that an author or speaker uses to convey to the listener or reader a meaning with the goal of persuading him or her towards considering a topic from a different perspective. **Rhetorical devices used by writers and speakers:** - *Figures based on similarity* (Simile, Metaphor, Analogy, Allegory, Parable, Fable). *Figured based on Association* (Metonymy, Synecdoche, Transferred epithet, Allusion). *Figures based on Contrast* (Antithesis, Oxymoron, Epigram, Paradox, Climax, and Anticlimax). *Figures based on Imagination* (Personification, Personal metaphor, pathetic fallacy, Apostrophe, Hyperbole). *Figures based on Indirectness* (Innuendo, Irony, Sarcasm, Periphrasis, Euphemism, Leiosis, litotes). *Figures based on Sound* (Onomatopoeia, Pun, Alliteration, Assonance). *Figures based on Construction* (Interrogation, Exclamation, Chiasmus, Hendiadys, Zugma, Asyndeton, Polysyndeton, Hyperbaton, Epanaphora).

## NEED AND IMPORTANCE OF RHETORIC STUDY

The archaic definition of rhetoric is the art and study on the use of language with persuasive effect in any given field; as such, rhetoric connotes the art of trickery, a way of masquerading qualities and obscuring information (Dawson, 1998; Maynard, 1998). Michael Billig (1993:121) identifies rhetoric as the traditional study and practice of argumentation. Billig's comment recaptures an ancient understanding that there is an essential connection between rhetoric and argumentation. It harkens back to the linking of these ideas in *Aristotle's Rhetoric*. "Rhetoric is the art of ruling the minds of men." wrote Plato.

This illustrates that without rhetoric in our personal and relationship lives, we would have no



control over anything. Public speaking is a very important branch in the communication field within this area of communication there are sub-areas known as argumentation and political communication. Thus, rhetoric and public speaking have many reflections of our lives. Rhetoric is artistic. It is organized according to principles, flexible to personal interpretation, expressive, with aesthetic considerations, and disposed toward utility. Rhetoric is used every day and all over the world. It is a type of language that can be useful and helpful at any given time in any given situation. Using rhetoric language improves communication skills, and it heightens the ability to understand others. Rhetoric is an important part of communication and without it, language would be incomplete. The art or skill of speaking or writing formally and effectively especially as a way to persuade or influence people. The art of persuading someone through your speech and writing. It is a discourse that aims to improve the capability of writers or speakers to inform, persuade, or motivate a particular audience in certain situations.

Rhetoric is the study of effective speaking and writing and the art of persuasion. In its long and vigorous history, rhetoric has enjoyed many definitions, accommodated differing purposes, and varied widely in what it included. And yet, for most of its history it has maintained its fundamental character as a discipline for training students.1) to perceive how language is at work orally and in writing, and 2) to become proficient in applying the resources of language in their own speaking and writing. We study rhetoric because it helps us to better identify and appreciate appeals to our ethos, pathos, & logos. It helps us to become more effective persuasive speakers and writers. The art or science of all specialized literary uses of language in prose or verse, including the figures of speech. The study of the effective use of language. The ability to use language effectively. The art of influencing the thought and conduct of an audience.

### **CONCLUSION**

Studying language, and in particular studying the art of persuasion, gives us a glimpse into the world-shaking and world-making possibilities that the subtlest shifts in meaning can make upon people's understanding. . Rhetoric is important as it

encourages an individual to improve further in the use and knowledge of language. It brings deeper understanding of strategic communication and guides our practical use of it. *"A more contemporary definition for rhetorical literacy refers to skills on understanding the audience roles in shaping discourse, identifying and responding to the audience in terms of writing situation and being aware of one's own ideological stance and the audience's stance"* (Cook, 2002). *In other words, rhetorical literacy skill refers to the skill to understand, analyze, evaluate and employ various writing strategies based on their comprehension of the audience, purpose, writing situations, research methods, genre, style and delivery techniques and media. Rather than having a fix practices in writing, rhetorical literacy provide the writers with the rhetoric tools to create and shape meaning within contexts of audience, purpose and writing situations* (Cook, 2002).

Rhetoric is an art through which people learn to improve their own communication and adapt it to specific audiences and purposes. It also helps us learn to discern the excellence and weakness of our own and others' rhetoric. In actuality, rhetoric helps an individual to properly communicate one's thoughts into something easily understood by the audience, and in turn be influenced by the message that was sent. The fact is that language is powerful. It has the ability to transform our thoughts and ideas into words which can be transferred to other people in a form of communication. Rhetoric is an important tool that makes use of the power of language in order to efficiently inform others of what we think, or feel, and persuade them to agree with the concept that we have. Rhetoric Study is advantageous as it encourages an individual to think of the means on how to effectively express one's thought, in addition to the content of the message. Rhetoric is important in order to convince other people to accept our own opinion and take our ideas as something applicable. Having knowledge in rhetoric will also enable an individual to defend oneself from people who use it to their own advantage, and the disadvantage of others.

Rhetorical study and education occurs through several means: Individual, ELL's constant practice and reflection on one's own communication.



ELLs gain proficiency through painful trial and error. They can find examples about effective rhetoric in self-help books, magazine articles, and churches, among other places. This is usually facilitated through Rhetoric courses at an institution of higher education, or through a speaking or debate club or corporate workshop that incorporates the rhetorical tradition. University courses usually teach the rhetorical traditions represented by a canon of rhetorical theorists and famous orators or writers. They engage students in applying rhetorical principles to their production of discourse in writing, speech, or other media. Those who are skilled at rhetoric are more likely to achieve their goal convincing others of their point of view. Rhetorical skill depends on the speaker's purposeful use of appeals and devices combined with well developed content and effective delivery. So, understanding rhetoric is useful for being a critical listener or reader who can determine when a speaker or writer is using rhetoric to hide the truth.

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