

A Main Rhetorical Technique used in George Bush's Political Speech

—Contrast of Moral Terms—

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This treatise analyzes a rhetorical technique used in the oration of a popular politician, namely former U.S. president George W. Bush. By conducting this analysis, this treatise attempts to apply his distinguished rhetorical techniques to improve the speeches of students participating in "The Annual English Presentation Contest for Colleges of Technology," or who must give presentations or speeches in English generally.

This paper takes a political speech of George Bush, delivered on September 23rd, 2003, as an example, and intends to reveal his rhetorical techniques to win the audience's attention and interest. After analyzing the speech, this treatise concludes that the speaker uses intentionally opposing concept words to emphasis polarity between the speaker, i.e., himself, and the opponent. In so doing, the speaker tries to enlist his audience as supporters of his opinion.

Based on the knowledge it obtains, the final purpose of this paper is to improve students' speeches by making them more persuasive. Because one must only report true facts in scientific academic presentations, such that the presenter must not pervert the truth by embellishing the sentences with rhetorical tactics, this rhetorical method can be applied only to non-academic speeches; nevertheless, it should help students to more successfully deliver general presentations or speeches.

Keywords: English speech, Rhetorical techniques, Antithesis of moral concept keywords.

1. Introduction

This treatise examines the rhetorical strategies employed in the speech, in which "President Bush Addresses United Nations General Assembly, The United Nations, in New York." ¹⁾ After this treatise identifies his rhetorical techniques, it attempts to determine the way to adapt them to students' daily English presentations, to make these presentations more persuasive.

2. Analysis of a rhetorical technique used in George Bush's political speech

We can observe how the speaker, former U.S.

president George W. Bush, establishes conflict in his opening sentences by introducing certain key themes through concept words or phrases, which he then carries forward and develops into a thematic struggle between the defense (in this case, the U.S.) and the prosecution side (in this case, former Iraqi president Saddam Hussein). We observe here this citation:

"Twenty-four months ago -- and yesterday in the memory of America -- the center of New York City became a battlefield, and a graveyard, and the symbol of an unfinished war. [...] terrorists brought their war to the United Nations itself. The U.N. headquarters in Baghdad stood for order and compassion -- and for that reason, the terrorists decided it must be destroyed. [...]"

Events during the past two years have set before us the clearest of divides: between those who seek

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order, and those who spread chaos; between those who work for peaceful change, and those who adopt the methods of gangsters; between those who honor the rights of man, and those who deliberately take the lives of men and women and children without mercy or shame.

Between these alternatives there is no neutral ground. All governments that support terror are complicit in a war against civilization." (1.-5. paragraphs)

From this introduction, Bush's speech describes two very determinate contrasts. He juxtaposes his (and the U.S. Government's) nature and actions with those of his opponent (in short, Saddam Hussein) as seen in the following table.

Table 1

	Bush himself (or the whole U.S.)	Bush's opponent (the former administrations of Afghanistan and Iraq, Hussein and the Taliban, etc.)
antithesis of concept terms	order and compassion	war, chaos
	those who work for <u>peaceful</u> change	those who adopt the methods of <u>gangsters</u> , <u>terrorists</u>
	those who honor the <u>rights</u> of man	those who deliberately take the lives of men and women and children <u>without mercy or shame</u>
	civilization	complicit in a war

From observing the contrast of these concept words on Table 1, the speaker's intention becomes clear: he depicts himself and the U.S. in a ward, as "peace," and Hussein as "war." Here, the speaker intends to prejudice his audience in favor of himself and against Hussein by delineating

their character (persona).

On the contrary, his opponents (the former administrations of Afghanistan and Iraq, Hussein and the Taliban, respectively) are described as "terrorists" and "those who adopt the methods of gangsters." He uses negative words, such as genocide and murder, which mean the opposite of his side.

The composition of the conflict between two the sides is simple and clear: the speaker stresses that his own side symbolizes positive one, and that the other, polar opposite side, is negative. In sum, Bush created a composition called "civilization (creating) vs. war (destroying)."

In the aforementioned passage of Bush's speech, we can observe that the speaker tries to depict two opposite relations:

The speaker, Bush, the whole U.S., the United Nations, and the people of Afghanistan and Iraq

vs.

Hussein and the Taliban, the former administrations of Iraq and Afghanistan, as Bush's opponents

By contrasting these two sides with moral concept words, the speaker tries to isolate his opponent's side and to enlist all the rest people as his supporters, to enforce his insistence.

In another passage of his speech, we can see again how strongly the speaker uses concept words to characterize the adversarial relation between the speaker and his opponent.

"We are dedicated to the defense of our collective security, and to the advance of human rights. [...]"

First, we must stand with the people of Afghanistan and Iraq as they build free and stable countries. The terrorists and their allies fear and fight this progress above all, because free people embrace hope over resentment, and choose peace over violence." (10.-11. paragraph)

"All the challenges I have spoken of this morning require urgent attention and moral clarity. Helping Afghanistan and Iraq to succeed as free nations in a transformed region, cutting off the avenues of proliferation, abolishing modern forms of slavery -- these are the kinds of great tasks for which the United Nations was founded. In each case, careful discussion is needed, and also decisive action. Our good intentions will be credited only if we achieve good outcomes." (31. paragraph)

In this paragraph, the speaker uses "moral clarity", emphasizing that his actions and ideas are based on morals. In delivering his speech, Bush relies on the power of the word "moral" rather than appealing to facts or the contents of the speech itself. This means that Bush should prove the legitimacy of the claims made in his speech; for example, if Hussein truly hid "weapons of mass destruction" (cf. 7., 14., 20., 23. paragraphs) or "weapons of mass murder" (cf. 20. paragraph), where did he hide them? Without such proof, Bush's attacks on Hussein would be purely *ad hominem* in nature.

As Table 2 displays, he describes and compares himself and his opponent by using moral terms and concept terms. In his speech, he emphasizes the difference between his ally and opponent by comparing opposing moral terms.

The speaker isolates his opposition by characterizing it in terms that are antithetical to those he uses to describe his own side.

Table 2

	Bush himself (or the U.S.)	Bush's opponent, Hussein
antithesis of concept terms	(defender of) security and human rights	terrorists and their allies
	(defender of) Afghanistan and Iraq's freedom	(promoter of their) slavery
	hope, peace, great tasks, good intentions	resentment, violence

This traditional rhetorical technique is called "*contrarium*"

(antithesis) in Latin. ²⁾ In the rhetorical work of the ancient Roman Marcus Tullius Cicero, it is paraphrased as "comparison" (*comparatio*). This effective rhetorical technique is employed to symbolize two opposing positions or sides through using moral keywords that have the exact opposite concept or meaning.

Each moral keyword has a special meaning for each people. For example, the concept word of "freedom" is vital to the Afghani and Iraqi people, who long for "peace," "security," and "human rights," free from the state of "slavery" and "violence" of the Gulf War. These concept words have the strong power to appeal to a global audience.

In support of the abovementioned analysis, we find the same type of rhetoric in an earlier speech that Bush delivered in 2001 ³⁾. Following the 9/11 Al-Qaeda attacks, Bush accused the perpetrators of carrying out the attacks because they were jealous of America's freedom—a statement he has often been criticized for.

"The enemy of America is not our many Muslim friends. It is not our many Arab friends. Our enemy is a radical network of terrorists and every government that supports them. [...]"

Americans are asking "Why do they hate us?"

They hate what they see right here in this chamber: a democratically elected government. Their leaders are self-appointed. They hate our freedoms: our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other.

They want to overthrow existing governments in many Muslim countries such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan. They want to drive Israel out of the Middle East. They want to drive Christians and Jews out of vast regions of Asia and Africa." (44. - 49. paragraphs)

In this quote, Bush symbolizes the United States as a force of liberty and defines his enemy, Al-Qaeda, as being jealous of its freedom. He depicts not only a conflict relation between the United States and Al-Qaeda—

identifying the latter as a terrorist group—but, furthermore, includes a large group of Islamic nations, existing governments, Israel, Christians, and Jews as his allies, thereby defining all of them as enemies of Al-Qaeda.

Moreover, he extends the range of Al-Qaeda's enemies, constructing a polarity between the world and Al-Qaeda in the following:

"The hour is coming when America will act, and you will make us proud.

This is not, however, just America's fight. And what is at stake is not just America's freedom.

This is the world's fight. This is civilization's fight. This is the fight of all who believe in progress and pluralism, tolerance and freedom.

We ask every nation to join us. We will ask and we will need the help of police forces, intelligence service and banking systems around the world. The United States is grateful that many nations and many international organizations have already responded with sympathy and with support--nations from Latin America to Asia to Africa to Europe to the Islamic world." (67.-70. paragraphs)

Here, by directing appeals from the American people to the entire world, Bush emphasizes that the battle is not just between the United States and Al Qaeda but between Al Qaeda and the entire world. This is another rhetorical technique that has been used since ancient times: in his speech, Bush regards his opponent as the enemy of the entire world.

In this citation, the other rhetorical technique, in which a speaker moves the audience to the direction which he/she will lead them, can be observed.

In the conclusion of the same speech, Bush again uses the rhetorical technique of "*contrarium*."

"I will not forget the wound to our country and those who inflicted it. I will not yield, I will not rest, I will not relent in waging this struggle for freedom and security for the American people.

The course of this conflict is not known, yet its outcome is certain. Freedom and fear, justice and cruelty, have always been at war, and we know that God is not neutral between them.

Fellow citizens, we'll meet violence with patient justice, assured of the rightness of our cause and confident of the victories to come." (106.-108. paragraphs)

Also, in this place, the contrast between the United States (representing freedom, security, justice) and the opponent party (representing fear, cruelty, violence) is used, as seen in his 2003 speech. Clearly, Bush uses moral terminology as one of the greatest rhetorical skills to enhance his speech. In the next table, the conflict between these moral terms is summarized:

Table 3

	Bush himself (or the U.S.)	Bush's opponent, Al-Qaeda
antithesis of concept terms	freedom, security for the American people	fear
	justice	cruelty, violence

As demonstrated by Table 3, it can be seen that the comparing of moral terms has a great effect on speech. Bush identifies himself and the United States in his arguments (cf. his above speech in 2003, 10. paragraph), describing himself as a guardian of the world while describing his opponent as a common enemy to the world. The rhetorical technique that emphasizes the ultimate contrast by using concept words is seen almost consistently in his speeches.

3. Traditional rhetorical theory in relation to Bush's speech technique

In a rhetorical theory book published by Cicero nearly 2,000 years ago, there is the description of the same rhetorical techniques used by the modern politician, Bush:

"A potent factor in success, then, is for the characters, principles, conduct and course of life, both of those who are to plead cases and of their clients, to be approved, and conversely those of their opponents condemned; and for the feelings of the tribunal to be won over, as far as possible, to goodwill towards the advocate and the advocate's client as well. Now feelings are won over by a man's merit, achievements or reputable life, qualifications easier to embellish, if only they are real, than to fabricate where non-existent." ⁴⁾

Bush uses the rhetorical techniques (namely to use positive moral concept words) to be approved himself and his allies to win his audience over to his side. Contrarily, the speaker attacks his opponents' character by using negative concept words. The effect of using this technique is to win the audience's sympathy and approval, winning them over to his side. In the same book on rhetorical theory, Cicero explains how to use concept words concretely.

"It is very helpful to display the tokens of good-nature, kindness, calmness, loyalty and a disposition that is pleasing and not grasping or covetous, and all the qualities belonging to men who are upright, unassuming and not given to haste, stubbornness, strife or harshness, are powerful in winning goodwill, while the want of them estranges it from such as do not possess them; accordingly the very opposites of these qualities must be ascribed to our opponents." ⁵⁾

Another of Cicero's rhetoric books also states that the speaker can gain the audience's favor by referring to his/her opponent's personality.

"The first of these topics (i.e. to secure a friendly hearing) consists in our own personality and those of judges and of our opponents: from which the first steps to secure goodwill are achieved by extolling our own merits or worth or virtue of some kind, particularly generosity, sense of duty, justice and good faith, and by assigning the opposite qualities to our opponents, and by indicating some reason for or expectation of agreement with the

persons deciding the case; [...]" ⁶⁾

In this case, Cicero explains this court speech rhetoric, designating the audience as "judges"; in the case of Bush's speech, however, the "judges" correspond to the general audience of his speech.

Bush implements exactly what Cicero explains in this passage of his rhetorical theoretical textbook. Bush makes a clear distinction between the nature of vices of his opponents and the virtues of his allies, thereby attracting his audience's attention to himself and manipulating public opinion in his favor.

"And so to paint their characters in words, as being upright, stainless, conscientious, modest and long-suffering under injustice, has a really wonderful effect; and this topic, whether in opening, or in stating the case, or in winding-up, is so compelling, when agreeably and feelingly handled, as often to be worth more than the merits of the case. Moreover so much is done by good taste and style in speaking, that the speech seems to depict the speaker's character. For by means of particular types of thought and diction, and the employment besides of a delivery that is unruffled and eloquent of good-nature, the speakers are made to appear upright, well-bred and virtuous men." ⁷⁾

In addition, the rhetorical technique used by Bush that relies on the power of personality rather than on the content of the character is further described in this citation. From the above, the technique used by in Bush's speech is one that has been used since ancient times by many orators in various places and occasions, such as in politics and courts of law, to deliver successful orations. This paper elucidated this rhetorical technique, which still has great power in modern political stages.

4. The ways for modern students to employ this rhetorical technique in their speeches

Because academic scientific articles, which many college students will write in their future, may not include such concept words or the presenter's subjective feelings or emotions, the students cannot apply this theory to academic papers. However, they can apply it non-

academic presentations such as "The Annual English Presentation Contest for Colleges of Technology" or "Kindai University Technical College, English Presentation Contest," where the contestants may select almost any theme for their presentations. Likewise, in private occasions or in the other situations such as in lawsuits, they can employ this rhetorical technique in their speeches to win the audience's approval.

5. Conclusion

Generally, the more influential and popular the speaker is, the better the speaker can deliver his/her speech. If teachers diligently observe a presentation of a popular speaker, especially president of a country, they can find ways to win the audience's approval, to move people's hearts and influence them, and to make the audience stand by themselves.

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Endnotes

- 1) The text source of the speech is: "<https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/09/20030923-4.html>".
- 2) Cf. Marcus Tullius Cicero (Roman politician), *De*

oratore, 3,207. Cicero paraphrases it also with "*contentio*" (contrasting opposites, *ibid.* 3, 205) or "*comparatio*" (*ibid.* 3,117).

- 3) Cf. Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Cicero III, De oratore, Books I-II*, Harvard University Press, London 1988, p. 327 (*De oratore* 3,182).
- 4) Cf. Marcus Tullius Cicero, *ibid.*, p. 329 (*De oratore* 3,182).
- 5) The text source of the speech is: "https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/specials/attacked/transcripts/bushaddress_092001.html".
- 6) Cf. Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Cicero De oratore Book III. De fato. Paradoxa Stoicorum. De partitione oratoria*, Harvard University Press, London 1992, p. 333. (*De partitione oratoria*, 1,28)
- 7) Cf. Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Cicero III, De oratore, Books I-II*, p.329 (*De oratore*, 2,184).