

# The Application of English Rhetorical Devices in Speechwriting

—Taking the Preliminary of Kunming University in 2018 “FLTRP Cup” English Public Speaking Contest as an Example

Min Yang

School of Foreign Languages  
Kunming University  
Kunming, Yunnan, 650214

**Abstract**—Rhetoric is a kind of art which deals with how to manipulate language in speech or writing, expressively and vividly. Taking 20 English writings of prepared speech in 2018 “FLTRP Cup” English Public Speaking Contest as the example, the study analyzed the major rhetorical devices adopted by students in their writing. In order to upgrade their application of rhetoric effectively, both the teachers and students need to make efforts to make it happen.

**Keywords**—speechwriting; rhetorical devices; features; suggestions

## I. INTRODUCTION

As an international language, English has become an important information carrier and communication tool in the modern society. Being able to use English skillfully is one of the basic requirements in mastering the language. Listening, speaking, reading and writing are the four fundamental skills of English learning, in which they interrelate and interact with one another.

With the development of communication in society, the ability of using language has become more and more important and essential. Writing is always considered as one of the most important communication skills and has aroused much attention in applied linguistics. Public speaking is an act of strategic communication; it involves the use of English as a working language, namely, to make your ideas public. The success of a speech is often attributed to the skill of the speaker himself, who are confident, articulate and competent. Good speakers need to know how to use language in an accurate, appropriate and vivid way. A piece of good and memorable speech script can be informative, inspiring, or persuasive, with the purpose of arousing the feeling of audience, expounding the speaker's stand and views, convincing audience to accept their points of view.

In terms of using language effectively in public speaking, the most important target of rhetorical devices is to bring the speech to life. Just as one can be accurate without being clear, so one can be both accurate and clear without being interesting.<sup>1</sup>

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. “FLTRP Cup” English Public Speaking Contest

First launched in 2002 by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press

(FLTRP), the “FLTRP Cup” English Public Speaking Contest has aroused extensive attention both at home and abroad and has gradually developed into an English public speaking event of the highest level and with the largest number of participants in China.

For those college students who are willing and ready to express themselves and improve their ability of communication in English, the contest is one of the best choices. In the first audition, every participant needs to prepare a three-minute prepared speech in English on the given topic of that year. Besides the offline contest of the school-level, thousands of contestants could choose to participate in the online contest, which was initiated in 2014 and parallel to the offline contest.

Each year, the topic of the prepared speech would be announced by the organizing committee in advance. From the following table, we could learn about the topics in the past ten years.

TABLE I. TOPICS FOR PREPARED SPEECH OVER THE YEARS

Year	Topic
2008	1+1=2?
2009	Culture smart or science intelligent?
2010	_____ is my top concern
2011	A word that has changed the world
2012	What we cannot afford to lose
2013	When Socrates meet Confucius
2014	Change the unchangeable
2015	Make a three-minute speech based on the video from <i>Chuang Tzu</i> . Please give your speech a title.
2016	Communication is wonderful
2017	China, a global view
2018	The stone, _____

## B. English speechwriting

Throughout history, people have regarded public speaking as a vital means of communication. As its name implies, public speaking is a way of making your ideas public by sharing them with other people and influencing other people. To make a speech, the speaker's role is to tell others about your ideas and occasionally persuade them to take some action. Words are the tools of a speaker's craft. When writing a speech, the speaker should learn to use the words that are most useful and most often used to express him. Good speakers should know how to use language accurately, clearly, and vividly. Your audience will be more receptive to your efforts if you take the time to assemble your thoughts in a logical manner. Well-organized speeches have several benefits for the audience, that is, easier to understand, easier to remember, more credible and more enjoyable.<sup>2</sup>

Given its importance, it's not surprising that public speaking has been taught and studied around the globe for thousands of years. But when it comes to speechwriting, there are just a few studies being conducted previously. When writing a speech, the speaker could follow a five-step method, namely, selecting a topic, interpreting the topic, beginning the speech, organizing the body, and ending the speech.<sup>3</sup> Based on the famous Gettysburg Address delivered by Abraham Lincoln in 1863, the writer focuses on analyzing the parallel structure in it, including a series of words, a group of phrases, and a row of clauses.<sup>4</sup>

## C. Rhetoric

Rhetoric is primarily concerned with oral discourse, which derives from the ancient Greek word "rhetorica" and Latin word "rhetorike (techne)". Plato thought, "Rhetoric is the art of winning the soul by discourse" (Aristotle, 1935). Cicero, a famous Roman politician, believed that rhetoric was one great art comprised of five lesser arts, that is, invention, disposition, elocution, memorial, and pronunciation (Cicero, 86 B.C.). In the 17th century, Francis Bacon suggested that rhetoric's purpose and function was to put reason to imagination for the better moving of will. According to Corbett (1993), rhetoric is an art which is bent on facilitating the writer or the speaker informing, persuading, and motivating the specific audience's capacity in particular situation.<sup>5</sup>

The word "rhetoric" first appeared in Chinese classic book Zhou Yi-Qian Trigram.<sup>6</sup> In Yang Hongru's opinion, the application of rhetorical devices could beautify the language, exchange ideas and express feelings better through selection, adjustment and decoration of language materials.<sup>7</sup>

Figures of speech are ways of making our language figurative. When we are using words in other than their ordinary or literal sense to lend force to an idea, to heighten effect, or to create suggestive imagery, we are said to be speaking or writing figuratively.<sup>8</sup> As an important part of English language literature, the application of rhetoric is a factor which should not be neglected in speechwriting.

## III. THE MAJOR RHETORICAL DEVICES IN STUDENTS' SPEECHWRITING

The success of a speech depends to a large extent on whether the speaker is visually using rhetorical techniques. In rhetoric, a rhetorical device is a technique which a speaker applies to convey to the listener with the target of communication and aesthetics. The most important target of speechwriting is its aesthetic effect. Aesthetic rhetoric stresses the vividness and gracefulness in expressing one's idea by artistic approaches like the use of figures of speech so as to make the language appropriate, bright, vivid, which includes devices like simile, metaphor, personification, alliteration, pun, irony and so on.

For the Preliminary of Kunming University in 2018 "FLTRP Cup" English Public Speaking Contest, the topic of the prepared speech is "The stone, \_\_\_\_\_." 40 years ago, in 1978, China awoke to a call to reform and open up to the outside world. As a result, we Chinese people began to "cross the river by feeling for the stones". During the 40 years, we have been repeatedly and carefully feeling for the stones, gauging our steps, resolved and committed. By feeling for the stones, Chinese people have reaped the fruits of vision and action. 40 years on, in 2018, when celebrating the successes, we have achieved over the years of feeling for the stones, we have entered a new era in which we strive to bring the modern world to all our citizens whilst also aiming to build a world community with a shared future for mankind, confident yet prudent, innovative yet reflective. Looking back, crossed rivers; looking ahead, more rivers. Here we are, feeling for the stones, planned and paced, committed and determined. The stones, the colorful stones, the significant stones, the valuable stones, the magic stones?

All the contestants are required to give a speech to tell their unique story of one the "stones" mentioned in the video tape. As far as the topic "stone" is concerned, it is figurative but not literal. By analyzing the students' speech scripts, the major rhetorical devices in their speechwriting are as follows.

### A. Simile

Simile is a comparison between two distinctly different things and the comparison is indicated by the word as or like.<sup>8</sup> A few examples with the use of simile are as follows.

*Example 1:* However, in the early days of reform and opening up, China was just like a crude stone.

*Example 2:* Confidence is like a stone which can make you powerful.

As we can see from the above two examples, students just compare "China" and "confidence" with a "crude stone" and "stone". Taking the top sentence as an example, in the early days of reform and opening-up, China was in an inexperienced stage, which is crude.

### B. Metaphor

It is the use of a word which originally denotes one thing to refer to another with a similar quality. It is also a comparison, but the comparison is implied, not expressed with the word as or like.<sup>8</sup> several examples with the use of metaphor are as follows.

*Example 1:* Struggle is the power of dream; innovation is the sail of dream.

*Example 2:* The stones are institution, technology and ideology which pave for the Chinese dream.

*Example 3:* The stone, the treasure.

*Example 4:* Education is the root of a country.

From the above examples, we could tell that there are also comparisons in each sentence. But the basic form is “X is Y”. In example 4, for the purpose of highlighting the importance of education for a country, it is compared as the “root”, whose literal meaning is “the part of a plant that grows down into the soil in search of food and water”, and here it has a new extended or figurative meaning as “the fact from which something begins”, “the foundation” or “the basis”. In the third example, it shows that the metaphor structure can work in an even more concise way, “X, Y”.

### C. Parallelism

Parallelism is a kind of rhetorical devices, which means the similar arrangement of a pair or series of related words, phrases, or sentences.<sup>1</sup> “Parallelism is a very effective device to emphasize what people write or say. It is a structure that ideas of equal value are parallel, or expressed in the same grammatical structure, hence the reader or audience can regard two or more things (coordinate ideas) as related and equal in significance”.<sup>9</sup>

*Example 1:* It has been a process of learning through practice, establishing while exploring, pushing the boundaries of knowledge.

*Example 2:* Fortunately, in the constant exploration of becoming a better me, I have touched some beautiful stones, which represent self-cognition, self-change, self-exploration and self-reflection.

*Example 3:* Without the stone, I will not able to take part in this contest; without the stone, I will not able to express my thoughts and chase my dreams.

*Example 4:* That’s the first time for her to be a mom, firstly hearing a baby crying, firstly teaching me how to walk, firstly feeding me up. For me, that’s also the first time, firstly hearing my mom singing, firstly tasting her cooking, and even firstly quarreling with her.

*Example 5:* In a word, stones, not obstacles, but stepping stones, make me more confident, more capable, and more powerful.

*Example 6:* I was nervous but desired, I was shy but I had to be brave, I was frightened but I had to be dependable.

As it is shown above, by using parallelism, ideas that the speaker wants to convey is emphasized and enhanced, and it helps to produce a powerful and catchy rhythm so that the listener can follow easily, like “more confident, more capable, and more powerful”. Afterward, it can encourage and inspire the audience. When it comes to the use of words, the parallelism can be reflected with the form of nouns, adjectives and adverbs. In example 4, the word “firstly” highlights the

fact that those are all first-time experiences for both the mother and the daughter.

### D. Quotation

To quote a phrase or short piece of writing or saying taken from a longer work of literature, poetry, etc. or what someone else has said, is a rhetorical device called quotation.

*Example 1:* As the saying goes, “Path is shown up only when thousands of people walk through”.

*Example 2:* Karl Marx once said, “There is no royal road to science, and only those who do not dread the fatiguing climb of gaining its numinous summits”.

*Example 3:* There is a common saying in China that no accumulation of steps can’t lead to a thousand miles; no integration of streams can’t result in oceans.

*Example 4:* Charles Dickens said in the *Tale of Two Cities*, “it was the best of times; it was the worst of times.”

As we can see from the above examples, the figure of speech, quotation, has been used in speechwriting. In quoting some famous sayings or sentences, it could highlight the theme of the speech, and make it more convincing to the audience. In example 3, when using the sentence “no accumulation of steps can’t lead to thousand miles, no integration of streams can’t result in oceans”, the speaker wants to express that there is no short cut for China’s development.

### E. Overstatement

Overstatement is an act of stating something more profoundly than it actually is, in order to make the point more serious or important or beautiful.<sup>9</sup> In overstatement, the diction exaggerates the subject.

*Example 1:* As expected, the smog, which is from the overuse of coal, has caused serious environmental pollution. We suffered a lot, especially in the winter; every piece of snowflakes was mixed with the soot.

*Example 2:* I was dying to know what I could do.

Overstatement is also called hyperbole, which is to make the statement or description impressive or interesting.<sup>10</sup> In example 2, the speaker is not really dying, the word “dying” is to exaggerate a kind of eagerness or a strong desire to know what to do.

### F. Antithesis

It is a figure of speech which represents a contrast or opposition of things, actions, qualities, conditions, effects, etc. Antithesis usually consists of a pair of opposite things which are expressed in two phrases or sentences. The opposite things are usually expressed in a parallel structure.<sup>8</sup>

*Example 1:* I was shy but I had to be brave, I was frightened but I had to be dependable.

*Example 2:* There is only one good that is knowledge; there is only one evil that is ignorance.

From the above two examples, we could see that parallel structures of the contrasted phrases or clauses are used, like “...but I had to ...” or “there is only one..., that is ...”, to draw

the listener's or reader's attention. The word "knowledge" and "ignorance" are used in the sentence above to emphasize the good thing and the evil thing for every human being.

#### IV. DISCUSSION

##### A. Major findings

As a speaker, your role is to tell your audience about your ideas and occasionally persuade them to take some action, inspire them to improve personally and emotionally. As mentioned before, words are the tools of a speaker's craft. How to make the words persuasive and impressive is not only depending on the verbs, adjective chosen but also the varieties of rhetoric devices adopted. The application of various rhetoric in speechwriting has made the speech-language precise, vivid, and rhythmic. After having analyzed 20 scripts of prepared speech titled "The stone, \_\_\_\_\_", the major findings are as follows.

##### 1) Students have basic consciousness of using rhetorical devices in speechwriting

As it is shown in Part III, students in the research employed a variety of rhetorical devices when writing their speeches. No matter how many times each rhetorical device may appear, the major devices could be identified in most of the speeches.

When writing a speech, students would remember to use different rhetorical devices to achieve the goal of making their language persuasive, convincing, or vivid. By using simile or metaphor, it could make a comparison between two different things with at least one quality or characteristic in common. By using the parallel words or sentences of relevant meanings and similar structures, it could add balance and rhythm to the sentence, and more importantly, clarity to it.

##### 2) Students lack the ability to use various rhetorical devices in speechwriting

Although some common and major rhetorical devices were used so as to produce a piece of well-organized and coherent speech, students being investigated did not make full use of various ones. As we can see from all the above examples, it is clear that students in this research did not employ some other rhetorical devices like personification, irony, repetition, and so on.

In the famous speech by Martin Luther King, Jr., "*I have a dream*", the repetition is the most successful feature, by consciously repeating some words and sentences in the speech many times to receive a stronger effect.

*I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up, live up to the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."*

*I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave-owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.*

*I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin by the content of their character.*

...

By making use of irony, the use of words which are clearly opposite to what is meant; the speech could achieve a special

effect. Through personification, a specific sentence is to treat a thing or an idea as if it were human or had human qualities.

##### B. Suggestions

Abundant evidence shows that rhetoric is beneficial to the promotion of language quality and make the expression more vivid, appropriate, and more impressive. Furthermore, the use of English rhetoric in speechwriting adds color to the speech.

The emphasis on rhetoric in college English teaching needs to be further strengthened and the cultivation of students' rhetorical sense and ability needs to be improved. Firstly, in the daily teaching, teachers could consciously cultivate students' rhetorical awareness and rhetorical ability, by helping students analyze and understand the texts in the course book from multiple perspectives and truly experience the beauty of English language, so as to promote the humanistic literacy of students. With the teacher's guidance, students could learn to appreciate some inspirational speeches, like Michelle Obama's speech in the United States Military Academy at West Point, "For Freedom, We Fight", or Mark Zuckerberg's speech "There's No Shortcut to Success" in Belle Haven Elementary School. Secondly, after having helping students to recognize, identify, appreciate the rhetorical devices, teachers could guide them to imitate and use them in their writing.

When it comes to students, they could be encouraged to use some other writing strategies, like the recitation and process-genre approach, or imitating writing. After the rhetoric "parallelism" has been introduced in class, students could be asked to imitate the structure in their writing, firstly the parallelism of phrases, then the parallelism of infinitives or sentences. Therefore, they could further master the technique on how to make use of parallelism in speechwriting.

#### V. CONCLUSION

The application of rhetorical devices in speechwriting can achieve the goals which the speeches aim at, that is, using language accurately and effectively. With the carefully-chosen words and well-balanced sentences, the effect of the speech is produced in an artistic and aesthetic way. Using language vividly helps bring your speech to life. The speaker should not only choose to use concrete language, simile, and metaphor, but also explore the rhythm of language with parallelism, repetition, alliteration, and antithesis. In that case, when writing a speech, the speaker could convince and impress the audience after having applied a heap of rhetorical skills.

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