

Mastery of Argumentative strategies in Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King, and Barack Obama's speeches

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ABSTRACT: This article examined the convincing strategies that speakers used in their speeches, especially Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King, and Barack Obama. It withdrew linguistic realities in different speeches by using a contextual and pragmatic view of the speeches. The results revealed that the non-mastery of the argumentative strategies used by these speakers lead the listener to inadequate interpretation of the message and ideals conveyed by the speakers. It also suggested hard tasks to the listener while interpreting these speeches that embody different devices to convince the audience.

KEYWORDS: Understanding, argumentation, interpretation, ideals, message.

1 INTRODUCTION

Politicians are often by the fact of convincing their audience. This issue motivates them to use some argumentative strategies. They may be strategies to communicate ideals, revolt or change.

Some specific strategies are common in politicians' speeches. The three figures targeted in this investigation are not excluded for this reality.

2 PROBLEM

Listeners often come across problems of understanding and grasping meanings in speeches of politicians and other important figure. One of the sources of this problem is the non-mastery of some argumentative strategies used the way data is arranged by the speakers.

3 METHODOLOGY

This investigation was carried out by documentary method with pragmatic approach. It gathered some information from books and attempted to apply it on the context textual and situation context of the speeches.

Textual approach helped me to make a critical discussion of the source and provided me relevant data for the stud. So evidences were drawn from speeches and to support the analysis.

Linguistic approach helped me to study different language pragmatic used in the speeches. Close reading technique and internet browsing supported me in collecting needed information/data.

4 ANALYSIS

Argumentative strategies fall into many kinds but some of them capture our attention in the present study. They are: metaphors, similes, contrasts and oppositions, inferences, social consensus, correlations, deductions and inductions.

4.1 METAPHORS

Metaphors are kinds of comparisons made between two things to show similarities. Oxford advanced Learners's Dictionary defines a metaphor as a word or phrase to describe somebody/something used in a way that is different from the normal use. Making these comparisons gives a powerful description to things. In metaphor the speaker convey implied meanings of things.

The three figures understudy used this strategy as stated in the quotations bellow.

*One hundred years later the negro
Lives on a lonely island of poverty
In the midst of the vast ocean of
Material property (Martin Luther King)*

This passage shows the comparison that the speaker makes between the richness of America and the width of the ocean. But the comparison does not give the overt meaning. The implied meaning is that black Americans of that time were living in a country where richness was but they were victims of sufferings.

He goes on comparing America which is used for justice to a dark and desolate valley of segregation, as mentioned in the quotation hereafter.

*Now it is time on rise from
the dark and desolate valley
of segregation to submit path of
partial justice(Martin Luther King)*

In this sentence the listener has to understand what the adjective "dark" symbolizes and where it leads ideas. It simply expresses segregation and sufferings, which are negative aspects of a human society's social life. Here the speaker needs support of his fellows to put an end to these negative practices in his society.

*I have a dream that one day
Every valley shall be exalted,
every hill and mountain shall
Shall be made low, the through
Places shall be made plain and
the crooked places will be made
straight and glory of the Lord shall
be revealed and all flesh shall see it
together (Martin Luther King)*

Listening to this passage is passage, the listener can realize that spirituality and intellectuality are mixed. The speaker quoted the Bible.

But what he means is not that the a valley can be exalted but made .Besides, in saying that the rough places will be made plain and crooked places will be made straight an. He means that everywhere where there is injustice and where equality of people is not respected, People struggling together will restore justice and human equality.

*Yet, every so often an oath is
Taken a midst gathering clouds ad
Raging storms (president Barack Obama)*

BY clouds and raging storms, Barack Obama means all the challenges that the United States Of America goes through are needs that will be inferred.

4.2 SIMILES

Simile is a comparison which is made by the use of words such as like, as, resembles,... both both of which are comparison. But the way they are made establishes differences between them, one using comparative words and the other does not.

The quotations from these three speeches avails this reality.

*“we will not be satisfied until
Justice rolls down like water
And righteousness like a mighty
Stream (Martin Luther King)*

In the quotations mentioned above the speakers use metaphors to make their audience to be convinced about their ideals by comparing aspects of fighting for freedom with other aspects related to freedom that was found elsewhere.

Referring to the above quotation, can notice that justice is compared to waters and righteousness to a mighty stream.

For the speaker, justice should not be static, it should be dynamic since it has to roll. Indeed when there is wave, water on the river (lake, ocean,..) waters roll from down to up and vice versa. So justice should punish up those who are mistaken and punish down or leave free those who are innocent. Justice should provide righteousness as strongly mighty waters behave, they anything they come across in their way. In other words, justice must should concern strong and weak people despite their social ranks.

*For us they fought and died, in
Places like concord and gettyburth:
Normandy and Khe sahn. (Barack Obama)*

In the above quotation qualities of places are attached to concord and and, Gettyburgh, Normandy, and Khe sahn.

*Like other black churches across
The country, Trinity embodies the
Black community in its entirety
(Obama)*

This sentence compares trinity to predominantly black churches. The similes uses “like” to set up the comparison.

*Like the anger with in the black
Community, these resentments
Are not always expressed in
Polite company. (B.Obama)*

Here resentments are compared to the black community, the simile is set by the use of like.

4.3 CONTRASTS AND OPPOSITIONS

Contrasts and oppositions are somehow the same because both of the seem to contradict an idea and other but they are not totally the same.

The after coming extracts are samples to confirm the point:

*But the violence that we chosen to
Adopt was not terrorism. (Mandela)*

Mandela wanted to show that the kind of violence that they chose to practice was not terrorism by simply means to search for freedom.

*I and nineteen colleagues were
Were convicted for the role which we
Played in organizing the campaign,
But our sentences were suspended
Mainly because the pledge found
That discipline and non-violence
Had been stressed throughout (Nelson Mandela)*

The contrast in this quotation is marked by the fact that although the speaker and his colleagues were tried to the court and should be judged, the judge suspended their sentences because he found discipline and non-violence in their actions.

*Evidence dealing with volunteers
And their pledges has been introduced
Into this case, but completely out of context
(Nelson Mandela)*

This extract, opposition is announced because it is impossible to miss volunteers who can accept to contribute so as they can be freed.

*The non-violence policy of the ANC
Was put in issue by the state, but when
The court gave judgement some five years
later it found that the ANC did not have
a policy of violence. (Mandela)*

Contrast is expressed in this quotation because the state was judging the ANC in a wrong way whereas the court did not find any evidence proving that the ANC should be guilty of violence.

*We did not do so because we desired
Such a course, but solely because
The government had left us with no
Other choice. (Nelson Mandela)*

The above sentence shows opposition since the policy of the ANC was against violence but they finally adopted it. They justify it by the fact that the government put them in unbearable life conditions.

*The whites failed to respond by
Suggesting change; they responded
To our call by suggesting the leaguer.
(Nelson Mandela)*

Contrast is shown throughout the response given to the black Africans who suggested to the change to their opponents but in their turn they suggested the leaguer instead of the change.

*Instead of honoring this sacred
Obligation, America has given the
Negro a bad cheque, a cheque which
Has come back marked "insufficient
Funds" (Martin Luther King)*

In this passage the speaker traces opposition between the cheque with funds of less importance and what exactly must be given to them.

*"But we refuse to believe that the bank
Of justice is bankrupt" (Martin Luther King)*

Contrast is shown because they do not accept what the reality is whereas they know it.

*Our economy is badly weakened, a
Consequence of greed and irresponsibility
On the part of some, but also our collective
Failure to make choices and prepare the nation
For a new age. (Barack Obama)*

The speaker expressed contrast as first he condemns a number of vices that characterized some people, that, second, he extends the failure to the whole community which cannot make choice

In the sense of *preparing* the nation for a new age.

*We remain a young nation but in the words
Of scripture, the time has come to set aside
Childish things (Barack Obama)*

The speaker expressed contrast as far as his nation is concerned. He himself declared that the nation still young but courageously he wants it to accomplish actions of mature nations.

*On the other hand, we have heard my
My former pastor, Reverend Jeremiaiah
Wright use incendiary language to express
Views that have the potential not only to*

*Widen the racial divide, but views that denigrate
Both the greatness and the goodness of our nation.
(Martin Luther King)*

Opposition is clarified by the drawing that the pastor's language was not only incendiary but also destroyed the goodness of their nation. However, as far as a pastor is concerned, he is a person expected to give constructive ideals in a nation by helping people improve their minds positively but Jeremiaah is just destroying the nation.

In short, all the three figures use oppositions and contrasts to convince their audience. They also used cause-effect strategy to entertain the listeners.

4.4 CAUSE –EFFECT RELATIONS

This argumentation strategy is unable to convey the reality of causes followed by effects. This strategy is set up through the reality that when X cause is present, Y effect is produced.

The following quotations from these three figures highlights the point:

*The government resorted to show of force
To crush oppositions to its policies. Only
Then did we decide to answer violence
With violence. (Nelson Mandela)*

In this extract Mandela proves that it was the reaction of the government which pushed them to violence. The use of force by the government was the cause of violence which is the effect. so there is a cause which produces the effect here.

*Because of our need for preparation, it
Was decided that, after the conference
I would undertake a turn of African states
with a view to obtaining facilities for the
training of soldiers. (Nelson Mandela)*

In the above quotation, the conference held by the ANC was the cause which pushed Mandela to undertake a turn in African states as they were preparing an eventual fight.

*We honor them not only because they are guardians of
Our liberty but because they embody the spirit of service,
A willingness to find meaning in something greater than
Themselves. (Nelson Mandela)*

In this passage we there are to causes which pushed to honor these people. The first one is that those people use guardians of liberty, and the second is that those people embody the spirit of service and willingness to find meaning in something greater than themselves. The effect that is produced by the described qualities is to honor those people.

4.5 INFERENCES

In terms of meaning, an inference is a kind of meaning that the listener establishes in reference to his/her prior knowledge. At this point, interpretation can be made in reference to the tools/devices used.

The following quotation highlights this point:

*This was our feeling in June of 1961
When we decided to press for a change
In the policy of the national liberation
Movement. I can say that I felt morally
Obliged to do what I did. (Nelson Mandela)*

The meaning that can be inferred here is that Mandela decided not to submit to the government all the time by revolting his people. He was confused from his life experience about freedom that pressure could enable him to bring about a national liberation of South- Africans.

*That anger may not get expressed in
Public-in front of the white co-workers*

*And white friends. But it does find voice
In the barbershop or around the kitchen
Table. (Barack Obama)*

In this statement, Barack Obama showed that even though black Americans are free, they get angry sometimes when they remember the treatment they underwent during slavery. But he does not say it overtly.

*I can tell you that in the next election,
Will be talking some other distraction.
And then another one. And nothing will
change. (Barack Obama)*

In his sentence Barack Obama tackles the matter of politics that breeds division, conflict and cynicism but all this is stated in the word “distraction”, which simply consists of a talk or disposition for a waste of time without changing anything.

“Mr X” and “Mr Z”

N. Mandela shows that there is no freedom in the country that is why he fears citing people’s names. He preferred using alphabetical letters to avoid annoyance.

In addition, the three figures under study did not leave out realities which are universally accepted by their communities.

4.6 SOCIAL CONSENSUS

Social consensus originates from the beliefs and culture that people have in terms of different social realities. These three figures whose speeches are used in the present investigation did not forget to use social consensus.

*The African people were not part of
The government and did not make laws
Which they were governed. We believe
In words of the universal Declaration of the
Human Rights, that” the will of the people
shall be the basis of authority of the government”
(N. Mandela)*

In the paragraph above, the speaker clarifies that what the Universal Declaration of the Human Rights suggests is their motto. So, all these people believe that this is what is true. This Universal Declaration of Rights is their guideline to go along with.

*“And as we walk, we must make the
Pledge that we shall march ahead. We
Cannot turn back. There are those who
Are asking the devotee of civil rights
“when will you be satisfied ?” we can
never be satisfied our bodies already with
fatigue of travel, cannot gain lodging in
the hotel high way and the hotels of the cities.
(Martin Luther King)*

Martin Luther King shows that determination for freedom has become the culture of his association so black Americans can be freed. The speaker and his fellows believed in that and made this way of doing their motto and policy: they cannot feel satisfied until freedom is retrieved.

*“To people of poor nations, we pledge
to work alongside you to make your farms
flourish and let clean waters flow, to nourish
starved bodies and let feed hungry minds .
And those nations like our that enjoy relative denty
we say we can no longer afford indifference to the
suffering outside our borders: nor can we consume
one world’s resources without regard to effect. For the
world has changed with it.” (Barack Obama)*

The speaker confirms that Americans believe in philanthropic and caritative actions for all the other nations which are still facing poverty. For him, one should not feel at ease when his fellow is facing a number of plagues and or hardships of life.

4.7 CORRELATIONS

Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary define the term “correlation” as a connection between two things in which ones changes as the other does.

In reference to speeches in this study one can notice that ther are certain things which change as far as the things which precede them change.

The sentence given here bellow clears the matter:

*For the world has changed and
We must change with it. (Barack Obama)*

Correlation is presented in the above quotation in the way that it could be difficult for Americans to change if the world did not change. But Barack Obama invites the Americans to change with the world.

*These people are a part of me. And
they are a part of America, this country
I love. (B.Barack)*

Correlation is established by Obama in the way that he thinks that the people who are a part of are ipso facto a part of America. Indeed, the speaker is right because he represents America after being elected president of the USA. So whoever cannot cope with America without considering Obama.

*Who will deny that thirty years of my life
Have been spent in vain, patiently, moderately,
And modestly at a closed and barred door?
What have been the fruits of moderation?
The past thirty years have seen the greatest
Number of laws restricting our rights and
Progress, until today we have reached a stage
Where we have almost no rights at all.” (N.Mandela)*

Correlation is shown by Mandela in the above Paragraph as he mentions that all the thirty years were in vain ,and at the stage they are they have no rights at all. So there is correlation between the two periods; something very important for the listener to grasp the message conveyed.

Furthermore, these three speaker thought about using ideas in a specific arrangement. They either used main ideas at the beginning (deduction),or at the end(induction).

4.8 DEDUCTION AND INDUCTION

Deduction implies the use of main ideas at the beginning of the speech and subsidiary ones are left to come after the main idea. On the other hand induction places subsidiary ideas at the beginning and the main one at the end.

*“Five score years ago, a great American,
in whose symbolic shadow we stand today,
signed the Emancipation proclamation. This
momentous decree came as a great beacon-
light of hope to millions of negro slaves who
scared in the flames of withering injustice. It came
as joyous day break to end the long night of their
capacity. But 100 years later, one negro still is not free.
On hundred years later; one life of one negro is still sadly
Crippled by the menace of segregation and the chains
Of discrimination.” (Martin Luther King)*

The above paragraph is an introduction to deduction as an argument strategy in the speech of Martin Luther King. What is stated in this paragraph is the head of the whole speech. The speaker is fighting against social injustice, discrimination,...so, he gives one main idea at the beginning of the speech and supporting ideas come after it.

I am the first accused. I had a bachelor's degree in art and practiced as an attorney in Johannesburg for a number of years in partnership with Oliver Tambo. I am a convicted prisoner serving five years for living the country without a permit and for inciting people to go on strike at one End of May 1961. (Mandela)

In this speech, N. Mandela presents a series of his sufferings but he starts giving details about himself, it is only at the end that he announced the motif under which he was accused and arrested.

These speakers used different argumentative strategies to convey their ideals. They either arranged ideas in special ways or resorted to different devices to make their audience cope with them.

5 DISCUSSION

The present section provides few reasons for which the listener has to master the speakers' argumentative strategies while listening to these speeches.

In reference to section 3 it was highlighted that speakers used metaphors and similes to make comparisons. Suppose the listener confuses the comparison made in one of these argumentative strategies, the kind of interpretation that he will come to will not be related to the speech as far as the message is concerned. e.g, the richness of America is compared to the width of the ocean. If the listener does not understand this comparison made, his interpretation will be wrong.

As far as contrasts and oppositions are concerned, these speakers used them to weaken the ideals rooted in their societies. They were just revealing the vices of which their people are victims of.

For them, it is a way of attacking the vices and manage to convince their fellows and audience to make efforts to free themselves. Suppose the listener takes the action of Reverend Jeremiaiah as being positive, at this time he will not be able to understand the ideal the speaker wishes to convey. Here the speaker is showing that a pastor should not be a person inciting people to conflict, but he must teach good examples to people.

At this level, the role of the listener is to show his capacity of interpreting things in relationship with the context of the speech.

By cause-effect strategies, these speakers proved that all the actions or policies they took were motivated by prior actions(causes). If for example the listener blames Mandela and Martin Luther King for their choice of violence, their fellows will justify their reaction by the fact that the governments of the white people of their time ill-treated them. They made a plea but in vain. So they resorted to violence to free their communities. Here the listener must understand why X cause lead to Y effect during the interpretation of the message.

In reference to social consensus, it is clear that these speakers support their actions or ideals by all what the community accepts. If they decide to undertake violence, they refer to a given convention in the community. The listener must understand why did the speaker adopt a given option. This theory must be applied to correlations too.

In terms of inferences, much of the task must be done here as far as interpretation is concerned. Contexts and his life experience are of paramount importance.

The arrangement of the material in the speech needs a clear mastery. If the reader fails to discover the main ideas, he is likely to fail the interpretation of the conveyed message.

6 CONCLUSION

The present article under the title of "Mastery of Argumentative Strategies in Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King, and Barack Obama's speeches" tackled argumentative strategies one of the factors which frequently make a barrier in the understanding and grasping of the meanings and the conveyed message by the speakers.

It presents a short introduction, the methodology used to collect and analyze the data/speeches. Then the proper study consisted of analyzing different speeches embodying various strategies and the realities revealed by this analysis led to a discussion that avails proofs under which the listener has to play a great task so as to come up with accurate understanding of the message and ideals conveyed by the speakers.

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