

# Rhetorical Study of Winston Churchill's National-Crises-Solving Speeches

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British Prime Minister Winston Churchill was an eloquent and outstanding orator, and many national crises during World War II were magically solved after his delivery of speeches. This paper examines the most frequent rhetorical devices used in Winston Churchill's famous World War II speeches such as "Blood, Sweat, and Tears", "We Shall Fight", "Their Finest Hour", and "Speech on Hitler's Invasion of the U.S.A." from phonological, lexical, and syntactic levels. Besides, by quoting the concrete examples in the above speeches, this paper explores the roles logical appeal, emotional appeal, and ethical appeal based on Aristotelian rhetorical theory playing in Winston Churchill's national-crises-solving speeches during the wartime.

*Keywords:* Winston Churchill, national-crises-solving speeches, rhetorical devices, three appeals

## Introduction

British Prime Minister Winston Churchill was one of the most important political leaders of the 20th century, who not only led the British people to win the Second World War, but was also listed as one of the most persuasive orators in the world in the last century. Winston Churchill's first speech as Prime Minister was "Blood, Sweat and Tears", which was delivered on May 13, 1940. Then, on June 4, 1940, at the end of the retreat of the British and French forces from Dunkirk, he delivered "We Shall Fight" in the House of Commons, and on June 18, 1940, he delivered "Their Finest Hour". In June 1941, he delivered the "Speech on Hitler's Invasion of the U.S.S.R.", impressing his audience with his confident and forceful words in the face of a great national crisis. The rhetoric presented in his speech created a tremendous emotional force that strengthened the confidence of the citizens to resist the fascist invasion and protect their country, bringing about a radical change in Britain and even the whole world. His speech can be regarded as a milestone in the resolution of the national crisis, turning the wartime situation around with intelligent rhetorical strategies, emotional appeals.

## Literature Review

Research on Winston Churchill's speeches at home and abroad is characterized as follows.

Domestically, in her article "Stylistic Analysis of Speech on Hitler's Invasion of the United States", Cai Yingying (2012) discussed Churchill's speech style in terms of words, phonology, syntax, and semantics; she also emphasizes that the use of rhetoric makes Churchill's speeches concise and powerful with high literary value. Li Xiaolong (2015) of Yunnan University points out that Churchill extensively used rhetorical devices, such as

repetition, metaphor, and parallelism in his speeches; moreover, she analyzes the effects of these rhetorical strategies with examples.

Abroad, there are also many researchers who focus on the rhetorical study of Churchill's speeches. Richard Toye (2014) studied Winston Churchill's wartime radio speeches in terms of audience feedback; Eliecer Crespo-Fernández (2013) explored the vocabulary and expressions in Churchill's wartime speeches in terms of the metaphors in them; Maguire Lori (2014) analyzed Winston Churchill's wartime speeches in depth from a rhetorical point of view, and also examines the Prime Minister's responses to crisis conflict resolution at both the concrete and abstract levels.

### **Winston Churchill's Rhetorical Strategies in Addressing Speech**

#### **Alliteration and Onomatopoeia**

Alliteration refers to the repetition of the initial consonant sounds in sentences. It not only adds the beauty of language in the speech, but also makes it easier for audience to understand, so it is widely used in speeches.

I see also the dull, drilled, docile, brutish masses of the Hun soldier, plodding on like a swarm of crawling locusts. (From the "Speech on Hitler's Invasion of the U.S.S.R.")

The three underlined words above all begin with the consonant "d", by which the foolishness and bluntness of the Nazi soldiers are vividly portrayed. For the Nazi soldiers massacred all the people without humanity wherever they get, just like killing machines. It is suggested that these seemingly dull soldiers are actually hiding their intention to kill others. The use of alliteration makes the speech full of musicality and rhythm sensation, in order to set off the atmosphere and let audience feel the danger of the Soviet people. All of these are beneficial to find the solution to Hitler's Invasion of the U.S.S.R. and help them solve the crisis.

Onomatopoeia, in simple words, is the imitation of natural sounds in word form. The use of onomatopoeia makes the language more vivid and let the audience see the image and hear the voice in their minds.

I see advancing upon all this, in hideous onslaught, the Nazi war machine, with its clanking, heel-clicking, dandified Prussian officers ... (From the "Speech on Hitler's Invasion of the U.S.S.R.")

"Clanking" is a metallic sound, which in this speech refers to the clash of vibrant blades, and "heel-clicking" is the sound of a heel hitting the ground, in case that the sound of a soldier's leather boots hitting the ground as they move. The two onomatopoeias are used to describe the scene of beautiful land being mercilessly ravaged by well-armed German soldiers. This transports the audience to a scene full of horror and bloodshed. It can be seen that the people and their land are in serious trouble under the iron heel of the Nazis. The onomatopoeia helps to ignite the audience and help the Soviet people defeat their enemies.

#### **Simile and Metaphor**

Both simile and metaphor are commonly used in our daily lives. Simile is a kind of rhetoric device which compares two or more different things in common to describe them more vividly. That A is like B is the basic format. Metaphor is a figure of speech that makes an implicit, implied, or hidden comparison between two things that are unrelated, which share some common characteristics. Following are some examples using metaphor or simile in Winston Churchill's speeches.

I see also the dull, drilled, docile, brutish masses of the Hun soldiery, plodding on like swarm of crawling locusts. (From the "Speech on Hitler's Invasion of the U.S.S.R.")

In this sentence, Winston Churchill describes German soldiers as “crawling locusts”, which leaves great impression on audience using this vivid simile. “Crawling locusts” reveals German soldiers’ ugliness, by which Winston Churchill expresses his hatred to Nazi and stirs people’s emotion and the audience’s sympathy can be stimulated, all of which are beneficial to reverse the situation—defeating the Nazi.

The Russian danger is therefore our danger, and the danger of the United States, just as the cause of any Russian fighting for his hearth and home is the cause of free men and free peoples in every quarter of the globe. (From the “Speech on Hitler’s Invasion of the U.S.S.R.”)

“Hearth and home” refers to the floor in front of the fireplace, which is usually regarded as the activity center of family. Winston Churchill uses metaphor to describe nation as hearth and home, which is the warm harbor of people. Country is abstract, which home is concrete. The concept of country is embodied by using metaphor to stir citizens’ blood to protect the nation and reverse the situation.

### **Parallelism and Repetition**

Parallelism is one of the most commonly used rhetoric devices in English. A parallel structure is the formation of a whole by arranging two or more words, phrases, or sentences that have the same or similar structure and meaning. The parallel structure not only enhances the expressiveness, attractiveness, and appeal of language, but also makes it easy to recite, sing, remember, and circulate.

We shall go on the end, we shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our island, whether the cost may be, we shall fight in the beaches, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hill... (From “We Shall Fight”)

This paragraph uses parallelism, stringing eight sentences together with the same sentence form, the same meaning, and the same tone. It enhances the expressiveness that they will fight with Hitler to the end. Hearing this, the audience would be encouraged greatly and follow the leader determinedly, so the crisis is easier to be solved.

Repetition is always used in the speech to convey the emotion, to express the feeling of urgency, to stress the sense. As a rhetorical device, repetition appears in the form of intervals; therefore, it can not only show the gradually strengthening emotion, but also give audience a kind of gradually deepening appeal. The reason why Churchill’s speech gives audience a kind of fantastic feeling is that he uses repetition to give a compact form. To be specific, this device makes his speech have cohesion in structure and coherence in meaning.

Suddenly, without declaration of war, without even an ultimatum, the German bombs rained down from the sky upon the Russian cities... (From “Their Finest Hour”)

This sentence uses anaphora to point out Hitler’s turpitude and shamelessness that they start the war without declaration, which goes against the international agreement and should be condemned and punished seriously. “Without” is repeated to persuade, inspire, and touch people. And finally, Churchill succeeded.

### **Aristotle’s Three Appeals Applied in Winston Churchill’s Speeches**

Aristotle thought speech is a kind of persuasion to audience, making them agree with you and adopt your view and take actions. To make speech successful, logical appeal, emotional appeal, and credibility appeal are vitally essential (Jensen, 2018).

Logical appeal refers to persuade audience by reasoning. It's the rule of persuading with arguments that appear to be logical. Aristotle divided logical appeal into three parts—rhetorical syllogism, example, and maxim. That is, speaker uses fact, example, figure, and quotation to make his speech convincing. So, logical appeal is the most effective way to persuade.

Emotional appeal is also needed to influence audience's emotion and attitude. Emotional appeal relies on the flexibly mastering of language, including "exposure and eloquence". Exposure always creates a kind scene that stimulates people's moral judgment, while eloquence is to appeal people's nobler emotions by using language powerfully and fluently. It's clear that our attitude towards a pleasant environment is greatly different from that in a miserable environment. Emotional appeal, consisting of moral anger, ambition, excitement, fear, pity, and other feelings, can stimulate people's response and make them feel the feeling of the speaker, motivating them to take actions to achieve the speaker's expectation. By employing this strategy, the listeners will often be easily persuaded.

Credibility appeal is created by the speaker, which is a course of letting the orator seemingly credible. Both the reputation and character of the speaker can affect the speech, as well as the speaker's practical intelligence and good will. We tend to believe the fair and competent speaker rather than the unfair and ordinary speaker.

In order to analyze Winston Churchill's use of Aristotle's three appeals on his speech deeply, this paper chooses Winston Churchill's speech "Blood, Sweat and Tears" as an example.

### **Being Clear: Logical Appeal**

The speech uses rhetorical argumentative relationships, for example, "The appointment of other Ministers usually takes a little longer" is a major premise; "The appointment of the current Minister takes quite short time" is a major premise; "The appointment of the current Minister takes quite short time" is a major premise; "Appointment of the current Minister takes quite short time" is an omitted minor premise. In fact, the minor premise is implied in the major premise by the word "other". Therefore, it is not difficult to conclude that "the appointment of this Minister is quite unusual", and we can further know that "We are in a crisis now". Winston Churchill put forward the major premise and let the audience draw their own conclusions, so that they can realize their crisis more deeply and realize the importance of unity against the enemy, for this strategy is more persuasive than the speaker's direct utterance of the conclusion.

Fact and maxim are also used in this speech. Appealing to facts is one of the most frequent methods used by Winston Churchill to attract audience and then convince them of what he said and finally gain their support and credibility. Example helps to prove the seriousness of the current condition and the necessity to be united. For instance, "the extreme urgency and rigor of events, crisis, a monstrous tyranny" directly describes the necessity and urgency to take actions faced with fierce enemy and serious situation. Furthermore, Winston Churchill also points out a common rule in this speech that "without victory there is no survival". If German succeeded in the war, Britain even the whole Europe would have fallen, so British people should spare no effort to struggle.

Logical appeal is relevant with reason and fact. In Winston Churchill's speech, he applied rhetorical syllogism to be more convinced. What's more, a variety of examples and facts are used to support his views, encouraging the audience to be united and struggling for the success of the war and the solution to the crisis. Therefore, logical appeal must not be ignored for they can show that the speaker has a clear mind on the past and present situation.

### **Being Persuasive: Emotional Appeal**

Winston Churchill was a master of evoking emotion in his audience. He tended to use positive emotional appeals, such as national pride, to dispel skepticism and pessimism and to ignite hope and confidence. In the second paragraph of his speech, Winston Churchill demonstrated that it was the responsibility of all parties, including Parliament and the state, to build the broadest possible base. Those who feared war and wanted to avoid it also began to put their feet on the ground, realizing that the only way to survive was by fighting. The fact that “unity” and “united” appear three times shows Winston Churchill’s determination to bring all parties together. In the sixth paragraph, he also shows that fighting the Germans is “in the public interest”, which narrows the distance between him and the citizens and helps him gain their trust.

Furthermore, Winston Churchill utilizes pronouns to bring people closer to the orator. The plural “we” can bring the speaker closer to the audience. In this speech, “we”, “our”, and “us” appear for 16 times, people’s passion for fighting against the enemy is ignited, and they realize that they are a part of the country and should fight to protect their country. They will realize that they are part of the country and should contribute to the protection of their country until the crisis is resolved.

Emotional appeal is related with the emotion of the audience. People tend to be influenced by negative expressions, even the most rational person. Understanding the strong power of emotional appeal, Winston Churchill successfully arouses sympathy and reaches his goal. First, he appeals to the national pride, which can improve the citizen’s confidence, because he knows that all the people take pride in their country. Second, he frequently uses the first pronouns to close the distance with the audience and consider him a trustworthy person. In this way, the audience can be inspired and Winston Churchill achieves his intention.

### **Being Trustworthy: Credibility Appeal**

At present, credibility is influenced by competence, such as intelligence and expertise, and character such as trustworthiness and responsibility. An orator who has bad credibility cannot gain trust and support from people. An orator will not convince people without good credibility, even if he is specialized at logical appeal and emotional appeal.

At that time, the spreading war made people lose their confidence in government. Therefore, in order to change this situation, Winston Churchill had to let people know he had the courage, ability, and quality as a Prime Minister. In his speech “Blood, Sweat and Tears”, he showed to the cabinet and citizens that he was responsible, efficient, and positive. More importantly, he was willing to struggle for the success of fighting with fascist.

Winston Churchill had to show people that he had the courage, ability, and qualities to be Prime Minister. In his speech “Blood, Sweat and Tears”, besides his ability to work efficiently, Winston Churchill also demonstrated his commitment to the war effort. Churchill also showed his positive attitude towards the war and his determination to win.

First and foremost, Winston Churchill has great competence in working. For example, he mentioned in his speech that “I have already completed the most important part of this task”. The perfect tense shows that he has done the most important part of his task. In the seventh and eighth paragraphs of the speech, he repeatedly mentioned “resolution”, “confidence”, and “inflexible resolve”. More importantly, “victory” and “victorious” are repeated six times, indicating that victory is the ultimate goal and can be achieved if people are willing to work hard.

Through such expressions, Winston Churchill gives people the impression that he is a man of honor. Churchill gives people the impression that he is a capable leader who gains people's trust, so they are willing to follow him and work together to solve the crisis.

Credibility appeal is an effective way to influence the attitude of the audience. Winston Churchill succeeds in realizing his goals with the application of credibility appeal. On the one hand, he shows great competence in working to make the audience believe that he is a responsible and efficient leader. On the other hand, faced with difficult situation, he has positive attitude towards the war which gives people hope to go through the crisis. By means of this method, Winston Churchill gives people an impression that he is a competent leader and he gains people's trust, so people are willing to follow him and solve the crisis together.

### Conclusion

Winston Churchill's wartime speeches were a great success during the Second World War. Phonetically, lexically, and syntactically, his memorable speeches contained many rhetorical strategies, such as alliteration and onomatopoeia, simile and metaphor, parallelism and repetition. In addition, in his speeches, Aristotle's three appeals—logical appeal, emotional appeal, and credibility appeal were successfully realized through his clearly logical, persuasive linguistic constructs. Winston Churchill miraculously solved many crises in World War II, more than 330,000 Allied troops were evacuated from Dunkirk in just eight days; people were persuaded to unite with the world's anti-fascist forces to succeed in the World War; Britain won the Battle of Britain in 1940 and succeeded in stopping Nazi Germany from moving westward. These wonderful speeches can be credited with being milestones in public speaking for solving national crises.

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