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Aristotelian Persuasion in Political Speech: The Linguistic Realization of Logos, Ethos, and Pathos in Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" and Winston Churchill's "We Shall Fight on the Beaches"

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Abstract

Persuasion is a fundamental dimension of political discourse, particularly in speeches delivered at moments of profound social and historical significance. Although Aristotle's distinction among *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos* remains central to rhetorical theory, the linguistic realization of these appeals and the ways in which they interact continue to offer productive grounds for discourse analysis. This article examines the rhetorical strategies employed in Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" (1963) and Winston Churchill's "We Shall Fight on the Beaches" (1940). It focuses on the linguistic resources through which rational argument, speaker credibility, and emotional engagement are constructed and combined.

Drawing on Aristotelian rhetorical theory and approaches to political discourse, the study employs qualitative rhetorical and discourse analysis. It examines pronoun choice, modality, evaluative vocabulary, metaphor, repetition, anaphora, parallelism, historical and cultural allusion, and syntactic patterning. The analysis argues that Aristotelian appeals do not operate as isolated persuasive techniques. Rather, they frequently overlap: an individual linguistic construction may contribute simultaneously to an argument, establish the speaker's credibility, and engage the audience emotionally. King's speech constructs persuasion through the interaction of moral argument, collective identity, historical legitimacy, and a vision of racial equality expressed through imagery. Churchill's speech combines strategic reasoning, institutional authority, collective identity, and increasingly emphatic patterns of resistance. The comparison suggests that, although the three Aristotelian appeals provide relatively stable dimensions for analysing persuasion, their linguistic realization is shaped by rhetorical situation, communicative purpose, audience, and historical context. The article therefore advances an interactional, rather than strictly categorical, approach to Aristotelian rhetorical analysis.

Keywords: rhetoric; political discourse; persuasion; *logos*; *ethos*; *pathos*; political speech; Martin Luther King Jr.; Winston Churchill; discourse analysis



Introduction

Political speech is one of the most consequential forms of persuasive discourse. Unlike communication concerned primarily with conveying information, political oratory often seeks to influence how audiences interpret events, evaluate political circumstances, understand their place within a collective, and decide which courses of action are appropriate. Persuasion is therefore closely connected to the linguistic organization of political discourse. A speaker's choices of vocabulary, grammatical structures, metaphors, pronouns, forms of address, patterns of repetition, and modes of argumentation contribute to a particular representation of reality. These choices also shape how audiences are invited to interpret that reality and respond to it.

The systematic study of persuasion has a foundational point of reference in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. Aristotle understands rhetoric in relation to the means of persuasion available in a particular situation. He distinguishes three forms of persuasive appeal: one grounded in the character of the speaker, another concerned with the disposition of the audience, and a third arising from the argument or apparent proof offered in the speech itself. Conventionally identified as *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*, these appeals remain influential in contemporary studies of rhetoric, political communication, and discourse. They provide a framework for examining how speakers establish credibility, engage audiences emotionally, and present reasons in support of a position.

Nevertheless, an analysis that merely identifies separate examples of *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos* risks reducing Aristotle's framework to a classificatory exercise. In political speech, a linguistic expression can perform several persuasive functions at once. Repetition, for example, may intensify emotional involvement while reinforcing a line of argument and projecting the speaker's authority. Similarly, collective pronouns may foster solidarity with an audience while presenting the speaker as a representative of a wider community. The present study therefore approaches Aristotelian persuasion as an **interactional phenomenon**. Rather than assigning every expression to a single appeal, it examines how linguistic choices can construct rational argument, credibility, and emotional identification simultaneously.

The article focuses on two influential twentieth-century political speeches: Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream," delivered on 28 August 1963 during the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, and Winston Churchill's "We Shall Fight on the Beaches," delivered in the House of Commons on 4 June 1940. More than two decades separate the speeches, and they emerged from markedly different historical circumstances. Yet both respond to a situation perceived as a collective crisis. Each speaker interprets the immediate circumstances for an audience and seeks to transform an understanding of the present into commitment to a particular future.

King's speech addresses racial injustice and articulates a vision of social equality grounded in American democratic ideals. Its persuasive force depends in part on the relationship it establishes between the nation's professed principles and the unequal treatment experienced by African Americans. As the Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute notes, the speech drew on material from King's earlier sermons and addresses. The celebrated "I have a dream" sequence also developed during its delivery, as King moved beyond his prepared manuscript. These circumstances are relevant to the analysis because the speech combines a structured moral argument with a compelling vision of social change.

Churchill's speech addresses a different kind of emergency: the military crisis following the evacuation of Allied forces from Dunkirk. Delivered to the House of Commons, it presents an account of the military situation while acknowledging the dangers that remained. At the same time, Churchill insists on Britain's capacity and determination to continue the war. The speech's persuasive effect lies partly in this movement between an assessment of military circumstances and an increasingly forceful expression of collective resistance.

The selection of these speeches enables a comparative examination of Aristotelian persuasion under two distinct rhetorical conditions: **a struggle for social and racial transformation** and **a national military emergency**. Their differences make it possible to consider how historical circumstances, intended audiences, and communicative purposes influence the linguistic expression of *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*. The study is guided by the following research question:

How are *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos* linguistically realized and strategically combined in King's "I Have a Dream" and Churchill's "We Shall Fight on the Beaches," and how does their realization reflect the different rhetorical situations and communicative purposes of the two speeches?

The study argues that the persuasive force of both speeches arises from the **systematic interaction** of the three Aristotelian appeals rather than from their independent operation. It further proposes that rhetorical context strongly conditions the linguistic form this interaction takes. King builds persuasion through moral argument, historical legitimacy, inclusive identity, metaphorical vision, and hope. Churchill combines strategic reasoning, political authority, collective identity, repetition, and increasingly forceful declarations of resistance. Examining these patterns together makes it possible to retain the analytical value of Aristotle's framework while accounting for the complexity of persuasion in political speech.

Literature Review

Rhetoric, persuasion, and political discourse

The study of political persuasion has a long intellectual history extending from classical rhetoric to contemporary discourse analysis. Although political communication has changed substantially with the development of mass media and digital platforms, political speeches remain an important site for examining how language constructs political realities, identities, values, and courses of action. A systematic review by Randour, Perrez, and Reuchamps (2020) shows that linguistic research on political discourse has concentrated heavily on institutional political actors and, particularly, on oral monological forms such as speeches. This prominence reflects the distinctive function of political oratory: speakers seek not only to communicate propositions but also to influence public interpretation and collective action.

The prominence of speeches in the literature also makes it necessary to consider the conditions under which they are delivered. A political speech has an immediate audience, but its wording may circulate far beyond the occasion of delivery. Its persuasive meanings can thus depend both on the speaker's relationship with those present and on the wider political setting in which the speech is heard, reported, or subsequently remembered. Attention to context is especially important when comparing speeches produced in different historical circumstances. Similar

linguistic forms may serve different purposes, while different forms may address a comparable need to establish legitimacy or mobilize collective commitment.

From a discourse-analytic perspective, political language cannot be separated from the social and ideological contexts in which it is produced. Van Dijk (1993) argues that discourse is implicated in the enactment and reproduction of power relations, while his sociocognitive approach emphasizes the contextual models through which participants interpret communicative situations (van Dijk, 2006). Political speeches can therefore be examined at both the micro-level of linguistic form and the macro-level of political and social meaning. This connection is particularly relevant to persuasion: linguistic choices do not simply transmit pre-existing political ideas. They participate in constructing the identities, relationships, evaluations, and representations through which political issues become meaningful to audiences.

Political discourse is also characterized by the strategic construction of legitimacy. Martín Rojo and van Dijk (1997), for example, demonstrate how discourse can legitimate controversial political actions through argumentative, semantic, and sociopolitical strategies. At the linguistic level, political actors may present particular interpretations as factual or self-evident, construct their own positions as legitimate, and represent alternatives as problematic or undesirable. Such processes are relevant to rhetorical persuasion because they show how choices in wording and argument contribute to perceptions of credibility, reasonableness, and emotional alignment. Legitimacy, in this sense, is not merely asserted; it is built through the relationships a speech establishes among the speaker, the audience, the events being described, and the response being proposed.

The present study builds on this broader understanding of political discourse but focuses more specifically on the classical rhetorical dimensions of persuasion. It approaches political speeches as forms of discourse in which **argumentation, speaker credibility, emotional positioning, and linguistic patterning operate simultaneously**. This perspective allows the analysis to move between individual textual features and the larger persuasive purpose they serve, without treating either level as sufficient on its own.

Aristotle and the three modes of persuasion

Aristotle's *Rhetoric* remains a foundational work for the systematic study of persuasion. Aristotle defines rhetoric in relation to the means of persuasion available in a particular situation and distinguishes three principal artistic proofs: *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* (Aristotle, trans. Roberts, 2008). In contemporary terminology, *ethos* refers broadly to the persuasive force associated with the speaker's character or credibility, *pathos* to the emotional disposition of the audience, and *logos* to the reasoning or argument presented in the speech.

Recent scholarship continues to regard these three modes as central to Aristotelian rhetorical theory. Bartlett and Behnegar (2023), for example, place *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* at the centre of their discussion of political rhetoric and consider their application to speeches from different historical periods. The continuing relevance of Aristotle's model lies partly in its recognition that persuasion cannot be reduced to logical argument alone. A speaker must also appear credible to an audience and address the emotions through which that audience understands a situation and its possible consequences.

Aristotle's account is particularly significant because the three appeals are not simply stylistic devices. They describe different ways in which a speech can acquire persuasive force. *Logos* operates through argument and apparent proof; *ethos* is developed through the character the speaker presents in the discourse; and *pathos* concerns the emotions and dispositions of those addressed. The model is consequently relational: persuasion depends on the connections among **speaker, argument, audience, and rhetorical situation**. An appeal cannot be fully understood by identifying a word or figure of speech in isolation from the claim it supports and the audience to whom it is addressed.

This relational dimension is central to the present study. Rather than treating *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos* as independent categories to which expressions can be mechanically assigned, the analysis regards them as **overlapping rhetorical functions**. A linguistic construction may contribute to the credibility of the speaker, the rational organization of an argument, and the emotional positioning of an audience at the same time. For example, a speaker's reference to a shared historical experience may function as evidence within an argument, indicate familiarity with the audience's values, and evoke an emotional response. The analytical question is therefore not only *which* appeal is present, but also *how* several appeals are brought together in a particular passage.

This approach is consistent with work on political rhetoric that examines persuasion through combinations of rhetorical, linguistic, cognitive, and contextual resources rather than through isolated devices (Bartlett & Behnegar, 2023; Partington, 2025). It also makes Aristotle's framework more useful for comparative analysis. The three appeals provide common analytical terms, while attention to their interaction makes it possible to account for differences between speeches produced for different audiences and political purposes.

Linguistic approaches to persuasion

Contemporary scholarship on persuasion has increasingly emphasized the importance of examining **language itself** as the medium through which persuasive effects are produced. *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Persuasion*, for example, brings together research on linguistic and rhetorical resources including evaluation, questioning, metaphor, repetition, framing, and argumentation (Fahnestock & Harris, 2023). Such work provides a means of connecting broad rhetorical concepts with features that can be identified and examined in a text.

This linguistic orientation is particularly important for political discourse because persuasion is rarely expressed only through an explicit instruction to accept a speaker's position. It is also embedded in lexical choices, grammatical structures, discourse organization, metaphorical representations, evaluative expressions, and patterns of repetition. These features can direct attention toward some aspects of a situation rather than others, establish relationships between speaker and audience, and make a proposed interpretation appear compelling. Their persuasive function emerges from their use in context, rather than from their mere presence in a speech.

Partington (2025) emphasizes the role of evaluation in political and media persuasion. Evaluative language helps construct what is presented as desirable or undesirable, legitimate or illegitimate, and positive or negative. Evaluation is therefore relevant to all three Aristotelian appeals. It may support *logos* by organizing the grounds on which a judgment is made, *ethos* by expressing the

values through which a speaker presents a credible position, and *pathos* by guiding how an audience responds emotionally. An evaluative expression may perform these functions together, particularly when it links a description of present circumstances to a call for future action.

Metaphor is another significant resource. Research on political communication suggests that metaphor does more than embellish a speech: it can shape how a situation is conceptualized and evaluated (Ferrari, 2018). A metaphor can make an abstract political problem more accessible by presenting it through a more familiar image or relationship. It can also influence which aspects of that problem become prominent. For this reason, metaphor may contribute both to the structure of an argument and to the emotional force with which the argument is received. Its role in persuasion should therefore be assessed in relation to the surrounding claims and the historical situation addressed by the speaker.

Repetition and parallelism likewise have functions extending beyond stylistic ornamentation. Recurrent structures create cohesion, rhythm, emphasis, and memorability, while repeated lexical or syntactic patterns direct attention toward particular concepts. These features are especially significant in oral political discourse, which is designed to be heard and, in many cases, remembered beyond the moment of delivery (Fahnestock & Harris, 2023). Repetition can give a sequence of claims a recognizable shape, allow an audience to anticipate its continuation, and increase the force of a concluding statement. Its persuasive role nevertheless depends on what is repeated, how the pattern develops, and where it occurs within the speech.

Pronouns and modality offer further ways to examine the linguistic construction of persuasion. Choices between *I*, *we*, and *you* can position the speaker in relation to an audience and define who is included in a proposed collective identity. Modal expressions of obligation, possibility, certainty, or commitment can indicate how a speaker evaluates available actions and future outcomes. Neither feature has a fixed rhetorical function: a collective pronoun may express solidarity in one passage and institutional authority in another, just as a modal expression may support a reasoned assessment while also projecting confidence. Their interpretation requires attention to both the immediate wording and the wider rhetorical situation.

The linguistic study of persuasion thus provides a bridge between classical rhetoric and contemporary discourse analysis. Aristotle identifies broad persuasive functions, while linguistic analysis helps reveal **the concrete textual mechanisms through which those functions are realized and combined**. For the present comparison, this means examining how features such as pronouns, modality, evaluation, metaphor, repetition, and parallelism work within each speech, and then considering how their functions differ across the two historical contexts. Such an approach preserves the explanatory value of *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos* while avoiding the assumption that each linguistic feature corresponds to only one appeal.

Political identity and pronouns

One of the most important linguistic resources in political rhetoric is pronoun choice, particularly the use of first-person plural forms. Political speakers frequently construct a relationship between

themselves and their audiences through forms such as *we*, *our*, and *us*. These forms can establish solidarity, construct collective identity, and position the speaker as a representative of a broader community.

From a discourse-analytic perspective, pronouns are therefore not merely grammatical forms but resources for representing social groups and relationships. Van Dijk's work on political discourse emphasizes the relationship between linguistic choices, social representations, group identities, and ideological positioning (van Dijk, 1995, 2006).

The inclusive *we* is particularly significant because its referential boundaries can remain deliberately flexible. Depending on context, *we* may refer to the speaker and immediate audience, a political organization, a nation, an ethnic or social group, or a much broader imagined community. This flexibility allows political speakers to transform individual claims into collective positions.

Such pronoun use is directly relevant to Aristotelian *ethos* and *pathos*. By presenting the speaker and audience as members of a shared community, inclusive pronouns can strengthen the speaker's credibility as a representative of that community while simultaneously generating emotional identification and solidarity. In this respect, pronoun choice demonstrates again that a single linguistic feature may perform several rhetorical functions simultaneously.

Modality and commitment

Modality constitutes another important linguistic resource in persuasive discourse. Modal expressions can indicate possibility, probability, necessity, obligation, certainty, or commitment. In political speeches, these distinctions can significantly influence how proposed actions and future events are represented.

From the perspective of *logos*, modality can contribute to the representation of relationships between possibility, evidence, and consequence. Conditional constructions, for example, can establish relationships between actions and anticipated outcomes. From the perspective of *ethos*, expressions of certainty or responsibility may construct the speaker as confident and authoritative. From the perspective of *pathos*, strong modal commitment can generate confidence, urgency, hope, or determination.

Political rhetoric consequently uses modality not simply to describe the future but to **construct the future as possible, necessary, desirable, or inevitable**. This is particularly relevant to the present comparison because King's speech constructs an anticipated future of racial equality, while Churchill's speech constructs a future of continued resistance.

Metaphor and framing

Metaphor has long been recognized as a central resource in political communication because it allows speakers to represent abstract political relationships through more concrete experiential domains. Ferrari (2018) argues that metaphor should be considered a significant component of persuasion and strategic communication because metaphorical conceptualization can shape political interpretation and action.

Metaphor is especially relevant to the present study because both King and Churchill employ extensive metaphorical systems. King conceptualizes political and social transformation through such domains as dreams, light and darkness, landscape, construction, and music. Churchill, by contrast, draws extensively on the conceptual domains of war, defence, geography, struggle, and resistance.

These metaphors do not merely provide decorative imagery. They organize political experience into intelligible conceptual structures. In this sense, metaphor can contribute to *logos* by making an abstract argument cognitively accessible, to *ethos* by associating the speaker's position with particular values, and to *pathos* by evoking emotional and sensory associations.

The study of metaphor therefore provides an especially productive meeting point between rhetorical and linguistic approaches to persuasion.

The research gap

The literature demonstrates that Aristotelian rhetoric remains highly relevant to contemporary studies of persuasion, while discourse-analytic and linguistic research has identified numerous textual resources through which political persuasion is constructed. Nevertheless, a significant analytical gap remains between **the classical classification of persuasive appeals and the detailed linguistic examination of their realization in individual political speeches**.

Studies of political discourse frequently focus on ideology, power, framing, legitimation, identity, or metaphor (van Dijk, 1993, 1995, 2006; Ferrari, 2018), while rhetorical studies often approach *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos* as broad persuasive categories (Aristotle, trans. Roberts, 2008; Bartlett & Behnegar, 2023). What remains comparatively underexplored is the question of **how concrete linguistic forms simultaneously instantiate and connect these Aristotelian appeals within speeches produced in different rhetorical situations**.

The present study addresses this gap through a comparative qualitative analysis of King's *I Have a Dream* and Churchill's *We Shall Fight on the Beaches*. Its principal contribution lies in treating *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos* not as mutually exclusive categories but as **interacting rhetorical functions realized through specific linguistic resources**, including pronoun choice, modality, evaluative vocabulary, metaphor, repetition, anaphora, parallelism, historical allusion, and syntactic patterning.

The comparison further contributes to the study of political discourse by demonstrating how the same linguistic resources may perform different persuasive functions depending on rhetorical context. King's language constructs a future-oriented discourse of moral transformation and hope, whereas Churchill's constructs a discourse of collective resistance and determination. The analysis therefore seeks to connect Aristotelian rhetorical theory with contemporary linguistic approaches to persuasion and political discourse.

Theoretical Framework

Aristotle's conception of rhetoric provides the principal theoretical framework for the present analysis. In *Rhetoric*, Aristotle defines rhetoric as the capacity to identify the available means of persuasion in a given case and distinguishes among three artistic modes of persuasion: *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* (Aristotle, trans. Roberts, 2008). While the Literature Review established the

broader relationship between Aristotelian rhetoric and contemporary linguistic approaches to persuasion, this section operationalizes the three modes for the analysis of the selected speeches.

The three appeals are understood here as functional categories rather than mutually exclusive linguistic types. *Logos* refers to persuasion achieved through reasoning, argument, evidence, probability, and the organization of propositions; *ethos* concerns the discursive construction of the speaker's credibility and character; and *pathos* concerns the linguistic positioning of the audience's emotional response (Aristotle, trans. Roberts, 2008; Bartlett & Behnegar, 2023).

This distinction provides the analytical basis for examining how specific linguistic forms contribute to different persuasive functions. Importantly, the study does not assume that a linguistic feature belongs exclusively to one category. Instead, it asks how particular features operate within the rhetorical context of each speech and how they may simultaneously contribute to rational argumentation, credibility, and emotional engagement.

In political discourse, *logos* can be linguistically realized through explicit argumentation as well as through less overt forms of reasoning. These may include:

- causal constructions;
- logical connectors;
- conditional clauses;
- contrasts;
- examples;
- historical evidence;
- references to legal or political principles;
- modal expressions indicating necessity or possibility;
- sequences establishing cause and consequence.

The linguistic realization of *logos* is therefore not restricted to numerical data or explicit factual statements. Contemporary research on language and persuasion similarly demonstrates that argumentation may be realized through evaluation, framing, metaphor, contrast, and other linguistic resources rather than through explicit logical propositions alone (Fahnestock & Harris, 2020; Partington, 2024). A speaker may construct a logical argument by establishing a contradiction between an accepted principle and an existing situation, as King does when he places the American ideal of equality against the reality of racial discrimination.

Similarly, Churchill constructs *logos* through his discussion of the military situation, the evacuation from Dunkirk, British defensive capabilities, and the necessity of preparing for further conflict. His speech does not conceal the seriousness of the situation. Rather, it establishes a rational basis upon which his subsequent appeal for resistance rests.

Ethos is traditionally associated with the character of the speaker. In political discourse, however, *ethos* is not simply a pre-existing personal quality. It is also **constructed discursively**. This discursive understanding of credibility is compatible with contemporary approaches to political discourse,

which examine how speakers construct authority, legitimacy, identity, and group membership through linguistic choices (van Dijk, 1993, 2006).

A political speaker may construct ethos through:

- first-person self-positioning;
- references to shared values;
- institutional authority;
- historical references;
- moral vocabulary;
- references to collective experience;
- representations of responsibility and commitment;
- inclusive pronouns.

This distinction is particularly important because Aristotle emphasizes that persuasive character should be produced through the speech itself rather than merely through the audience's prior assumptions about the speaker.

King constructs ethos by positioning himself within the moral and historical traditions of the United States and the African American struggle for freedom. Churchill constructs ethos through his position as wartime Prime Minister and through his linguistic representation of himself as a representative of the government, Parliament, and the nation.

Pathos concerns the emotional state of the audience. Political speakers do not merely express their own emotions; they attempt to **construct an emotional orientation in their audiences**.

Linguistically, pathos may be realized through:

- emotive and evaluative vocabulary;
- metaphor;
- imagery;
- repetition;
- rhythm;
- parallelism;
- direct address;
- personal experience;
- references to suffering or sacrifice;
- expressions of hope, fear, courage, injustice, pride, or solidarity.

Such resources are widely recognized within contemporary research on language and persuasion as important mechanisms for directing attention, constructing evaluation, and influencing audience response (Fahnestock & Harris, 2020; Partington, 2024).

This dimension is especially visible in King's use of imagery and in Churchill's escalating sequence of resistance. Yet in both cases emotional persuasion is inseparable from the other rhetorical appeals.

Methodology

The study employs qualitative rhetorical and discourse analysis, combining the Aristotelian analysis of persuasive appeals with a discourse-oriented examination of linguistic form, context, identity, and rhetorical function (van Dijk, 1993, 2006; Randour et al., 2020). Rather than measuring the frequency of rhetorical devices statistically, it examines selected passages in terms of their linguistic form, rhetorical function, and contribution to the overall persuasive structure of each speech.

The corpus consists of two primary texts:

1. Martin Luther King Jr., "**I Have a Dream**," delivered at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom on 28 August 1963. The text and historical documentation are provided by the Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute at Stanford University.
2. Winston Churchill, "**We Shall Fight on the Beaches**," delivered in the House of Commons on 4 June 1940. The speech text and historical context are available through the International Churchill Society.

The analysis concentrates on five principal linguistic dimensions:

1. **lexical choice**, particularly evaluative and emotive vocabulary;
2. **grammatical choice**, including pronouns and modality;
3. **syntactic patterning**, especially parallelism and repetition;
4. **figurative language**, particularly metaphor and imagery;
5. **argumentative organization**, including contrasts, causal relations, examples and appeals to shared principles.

The analysis uses the Aristotelian categories as **functional rather than mutually exclusive analytical categories**. Where a linguistic construction performs more than one persuasive function, it is interpreted as an instance of rhetorical interaction rather than artificially assigned to a single category.

Linguistic Realization of Aristotelian Appeals in *I Have a Dream*

One of the most significant characteristics of King's speech is that its extraordinary emotional power rests upon a carefully constructed argumentative foundation.

King's argument begins with a historical and political contradiction. The United States has proclaimed principles of freedom and equality, yet African Americans continue to experience racial discrimination. The speaker therefore constructs a logical relationship between **national ideals and social reality**.

His reference to the American "creed" is particularly significant. King states:

"I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed."

He immediately specifies that creed through the familiar principle that “all men are created equal.”

The rhetorical importance of this construction lies in the fact that King does not present racial equality as an externally imposed political demand. Instead, he derives his argument from **principles that the nation itself claims to uphold**.

The underlying reasoning can be represented schematically:

Premise 1: American political identity is founded upon equality and freedom.

Premise 2: African Americans are denied full equality and freedom.

Conclusion: American society must transform its practices so that its political ideals correspond to social reality.

Thus, King's logos is realized through a **principle–reality–transformation** structure.

The speech also uses contrast as a means of argumentative organization. The movement between injustice and justice, despair and hope, oppression and freedom creates conceptual oppositions through which the audience is encouraged to evaluate the present.

His metaphorical language also contributes to logos. The famous conceptualization of a national promise as a financial obligation transforms an abstract political principle into something concrete and intelligible. Similarly, the contrast between the “valley of despair” and the “stone of hope” gives conceptual form to a movement from present suffering toward future transformation.

This demonstrates an important feature of rhetorical logos: **logical persuasion need not be linguistically unemotional or literal**. Metaphor can participate in rational persuasion by organizing an abstract political argument into an accessible conceptual structure (Ferrari, 2018).

King's ethos emerges through a complex interaction of personal authority, historical legitimacy, moral positioning, and collective identity.

One of the most important linguistic features is his use of **inclusive pronouns**. The repeated use of *we*, *our*, and *us* reduces the distance between speaker and audience and constructs the struggle for racial equality as a collective undertaking.

The passage: “With this faith we will be able...” is especially significant because *faith* is transformed from an individual psychological condition into a shared collective resource. King subsequently uses a sequence of collective constructions involving working, praying, struggling, and standing together.

Ethos is also constructed through **historical and cultural allusion**. King invokes Abraham Lincoln, the Emancipation Proclamation, the American founding tradition, and biblical language. Stanford's King Institute specifically documents the speech's synthesis of these historical, political, religious, and rhetorical traditions.

These references perform an important persuasive function: they situate King's position within established sources of moral and national authority.

Consequently, his ethos can be represented as:

personal speaker → historical tradition → shared moral values → collective authority.

The speaker's authority therefore does not depend solely upon his individual identity. It is constructed through his ability to articulate a vision that appears consistent with the deepest principles of the community he addresses.

Pathos constitutes one of the most immediately recognizable features of King's speech, but its linguistic realization is considerably more complex than the simple presence of emotional vocabulary.

The speech repeatedly converts political abstraction into **concrete human experience**. The reference to: "my four little children" is particularly powerful because it personalizes the abstract question of racial equality.

King then imagines a future in which children are judged not according to racial identity but according to character. The political argument is therefore transformed into an emotionally accessible vision of family, childhood, dignity, and justice.

Metaphor plays an equally important role. King conceptualizes political and moral conditions through spatial and sensory images:

- light and darkness;
- heat;
- valleys and mountains;
- stones;
- music;
- dreams;
- freedom.

These metaphors create a movement from **oppression toward liberation**.

The repeated structure "**I have a dream**" is particularly significant. Grammatically, the construction is simple; rhetorically, however, it produces cumulative force. Each repetition introduces another component of the imagined future. The repetition therefore operates simultaneously at several levels:

syntactic repetition → rhythmic regularity → emotional intensification → accumulation of images → construction of collective hope.

The Stanford King Institute records that King departed from his prepared manuscript at precisely the point at which the "I have a dream" sequence developed, making the performative dimension of this repetition especially significant.

Thus, pathos is produced not simply through emotionally charged words but through **the interaction of syntax, metaphor, rhythm, personal reference and collective imagery**.

Linguistic Realization of Aristotelian Appeals in *We Shall Fight on the Beaches*

Churchill's speech provides a markedly different realization of logos. The speech begins by describing the military circumstances surrounding Dunkirk. Churchill provides information about

the evacuation, the scale of the forces involved, German attacks, British losses, and the role of the Royal Air Force and Royal Navy. The speech consequently establishes a factual and strategic framework before reaching its famous rhetorical climax.

Particularly important is Churchill's refusal to represent the evacuation simply as a military victory. He explicitly distinguishes between evacuation and victory while simultaneously identifying a "victory inside this deliverance."

This is a significant rhetorical operation because it demonstrates **controlled qualification**. Churchill acknowledges an uncomfortable fact before reframing its significance.

His later argument for confidence is explicitly conditional: "if all do their duty, if nothing is neglected, and if the best arrangements are made..." The conditional structure establishes a relationship between **collective action and future security**.

Churchill's logos therefore depends strongly upon:

- factual description;
- qualification;
- conditional reasoning;
- causal relationships;
- strategic assessment;
- contrasts between present danger and future possibility.

This creates the rational foundation for the emotional appeal that follows.

Churchill's ethos is closely connected to his political position, but the speech linguistically constructs his authority rather than merely presupposing it. One particularly important feature is the movement between **first-person singular and collective forms**.

Churchill states: "I have, myself, full confidence..." He then moves toward: "That is the resolve of His Majesty's Government..." and: "That is the will of Parliament and the nation." This progression is rhetorically significant.

The speaker begins with **personal confidence**, but that confidence is subsequently incorporated into a much larger institutional and national framework:

I → Government → Parliament → nation.

Churchill therefore constructs himself simultaneously as an individual leader and as the representative voice of a collective political body.

His ethos also depends upon his willingness to acknowledge military danger. Credibility is enhanced when the speaker does not deny the seriousness of the situation. Rather than offering unrealistic reassurance, Churchill admits losses and the possibility of further danger before presenting resistance as the appropriate response.

Ethos is consequently constructed through a combination of:

authority + realism + responsibility + collective identification.

If King's pathos is characterized primarily by **vision and hope**, Churchill's pathos is characterized by **determination and resistance**.

The climactic passage is constructed around the repeated future construction: "we shall..."

The verb *shall* is particularly significant. It does not merely describe a future event; in this context it functions as a marker of **determination and commitment**.

The construction is then repeated across a series of locations:

- France;
- the seas and oceans;
- the air;
- the Island;
- the beaches;
- the landing grounds;
- the fields;
- the streets;
- the hills.

This sequence produces a striking rhetorical effect.

The geographical expansion of the sentence is accompanied by syntactic repetition:

we shall fight + location

The repetition creates rhythm, while the accumulation of locations creates the impression that resistance will occur **everywhere**.

The culmination: "we shall never surrender" functions as the semantic and rhythmic climax of the sequence.

The passage therefore demonstrates how **syntax can become an instrument of emotional persuasion**. Churchill does not need to repeatedly state that the audience should be courageous. Instead, the grammatical structure itself performs determination.

Comparative Discussion

The comparison demonstrates that King and Churchill employ the same Aristotelian modes of persuasion but realize them through substantially different linguistic and rhetorical strategies.

Dimension	King	Churchill
Primary rhetorical situation	Struggle for racial equality	National military crisis
Dominant orientation	Transformation	Resistance

Logos	Moral contradiction between national ideals and racial reality	Strategic assessment and conditional reasoning
Ethos	Moral, historical and collective authority	Political, institutional and national authority
Pathos	Hope, justice, dignity and brotherhood	Courage, determination, sacrifice and resistance
Pronouns	Movement from <i>I</i> toward <i>we</i>	Strong collective <i>we</i>
Central repetition	"I have a dream"	"We shall fight"
Major imagery	Dream, light/darkness, mountains, valleys, music	War, defence, geographical expansion
Emotional trajectory	Injustice → hope → freedom	Danger → resistance → determination
Persuasive endpoint	A transformed and integrated society	Continued national resistance

The comparison also demonstrates why it is problematic to regard logos, ethos, and pathos as mutually exclusive categories.

King's invocation of the American creed, for instance, simultaneously functions as **logos**, because it establishes a principle-based argument; as **ethos**, because it aligns his position with authoritative national values; and as **pathos**, because it exposes the emotional and moral contradiction between national ideals and racial injustice.

Similarly, Churchill's repeated "*we shall fight*" functions as **pathos**, because it creates emotional intensity and solidarity; as **ethos**, because it constructs the speaker and nation as resolute; and indirectly as **logos**, because the repetition establishes resistance as the determined collective response to the military situation.

The findings therefore support an **integrated model of Aristotelian persuasion**.

Rather than:

logos + ethos + pathos

as three independent categories, political persuasion may more productively be conceptualized as:

linguistic form → rhetorical function → interaction of appeals → persuasive effect.

This perspective is particularly important for discourse analysis because the persuasive meaning of a linguistic feature depends upon its position within the broader rhetorical structure of the speech.

Conclusion

The analysis of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" and Winston Churchill's "We Shall Fight on the Beaches" demonstrates the continuing relevance of Aristotle's rhetorical framework to the study of contemporary political discourse. Although the two speeches emerge from radically different historical circumstances, both rely upon the interaction of *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos* to transform their respective audiences' perceptions of political reality.

King constructs *logos* primarily through appeals to shared political principles and through the contrast between American ideals and racial injustice. His *ethos* emerges from his positioning within American historical, religious, and moral traditions and from his construction of a collective identity through inclusive pronouns. *Pathos* is generated through personal references, metaphorical imagery, repetition, rhythm, and an increasingly expansive vision of racial equality and human solidarity.

Churchill, by contrast, constructs *logos* through factual description, strategic reasoning, qualification, and conditional argumentation. His *ethos* derives from political authority, institutional representation, realism, and collective identification. His *pathos* emerges most powerfully through syntactic repetition, modal commitment, geographical accumulation, and the construction of resistance as an uncompromising collective determination.

Despite these differences, the two speeches demonstrate a common rhetorical principle: **persuasion is most effective when rational argument, speaker credibility, and emotional engagement reinforce rather than compete with one another.** The linguistic analysis further demonstrates that individual rhetorical devices cannot always be assigned exclusively to a single Aristotelian category. Repetition, metaphor, pronoun choice, modality, and syntactic parallelism frequently perform several persuasive functions simultaneously.

The findings consequently support an interactional understanding of Aristotelian rhetoric. *Logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos* can be treated as analytically distinguishable modes of persuasion, but their actual realization in discourse is dynamic and interconnected. Their relative prominence and linguistic realization are shaped by the rhetorical situation, communicative purpose, audience, and historical context.

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