

Rhetorical Devices Used by Mark Zuckerberg in His 2007 Harvard Commencement Speech

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ABSTRACT

This research analyzed the rhetorical devices used by Mark Zuckerberg in his 2007 Harvard commencement speech. The findings show Mark Zuckerberg's speech used six out of eleven rhetorical devices in figurative language such as *simile*, *catachresis*, *synecdoche*, *personification*, *allusion*, and *transferred epithet*. The most frequent rhetorical device he used is *catachresis*. The other frequent rhetorical device he used is the *transferred epithet*. The least used of rhetorical devices in his speech *simile*, *personification* and *synecdoche*. From the findings, the writer concludes the rhetorical devices as the language method to improve the speaker's ability in delivering speech. Rhetorical devices affect in a positive way to improve the speaker's communication skill. The present research has some limited scope, which was based on a Mark Zuckerberg speech, further research would need to improve the knowledge about function and the use of rhetorical devices in a speech. The other research using different types of speech would also be recommended.

Keywords: *Communication, Figurative language, Rhetorical Devices, Speech*

INTRODUCTION

Communication is a way to deliver messages to audiences. There are several purposes in communication, which is divided into five major purposes such as to inform, express feelings, to imagine, to influence, and to meet social expectations. Delivering messages by communication needs some skills that could improve the capability of communication to engage audiences. A speech is one type of communication which is a form of utterance to share opinion about significant issues to influence people. Speaker's skills affect the capability in delivering messages to audiences.

Rhetorical devices are a set of tools for enhancing communication and help to become a better communicator. It is possible to use rhetoric to deceive or persuade an audience, to make good seem bad and bad seem good (Harris, 2018). As an important device to improve communication skill, rhetorical devices are a persuasive art in language (King, 2010). Rhetorical devices help to improve speakers to build the audience's understanding for implicit meaning. Recently, rhetorical devices have been a significant concern which emphasizes the use of words to attract audiences. According to Harris (2018) there are 10 categories of rhetorical devices including figurative language and there are 11 rhetorical devices in figurative language, namely: simile, analogy, metaphor, catachresis, metonymy, synecdoche, personification, allusion, eponym, apostrophe and transferred epithet.

The writer will focus on rhetorical devices used by Mark Zuckerberg, since rhetorical devices can make speech more powerful, interesting, clearer and funnier and that means speech

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requires rhetorical devices to make the speech effective and interesting (Harris, 2018). Mark Zuckerberg is a successful speaker who succeeded at his young age. He became the world's youngest self-made billionaire. Mark Zuckerberg is the founder of a social media application called *Facebook* and co-founder of *Meta platform*. The video titled *Facebook Founder Mark Zuckerberg Commencement Address | Harvard Commencement 2017* (Harvard University, 2017) which lasts for 32 minutes 35 seconds was uploaded on *YouTube* May 26, 2017 and on May 16, 2023 the video has reached 5.8 million views. The aim of the writer's study is to analyze how the rhetorical devices in the *Facebook Founder Mark Zuckerberg Commencement Address Harvard Commencement 2017* (Harvard University, 2017) could give inspiration to the audience. To be more specific, the writer wants to analyze rhetorical devices used by Mark Zuckerberg to know what rhetorical devices he used in the speech to attract effectively and give inspiration to the audience. The speaker's ability to engage the audience will show rhetorical devices he used and the meaning of each device. Therefore, choosing *Facebook Founder Mark Zuckerberg Commencement Address Harvard Commencement 2017* (Harvard University, 2017) is a suitable choice for the writer's study.

Correlating to the previous statement, the writer wants to analyze rhetorical devices used by Mark Zuckerberg. In analyzing the rhetorical devices, the writer used the theory of rhetorical devices proposed by Harris (2018). Study will focus on studying rhetorical devices to motivate the audience in some ways such as to encourage, highlight, and to underscore the intended messages in the speech.

METHOD

This study used qualitative content analysis methods from Drisko and Maschi (2016). This study explained qualitative as a research method which describes, summarizes the key themes, and examines the content found in text. Qualitative method in this study focused on examining content which is Mark Zuckerberg's inspirational speech. Analysis content seeks rhetorical devices used and the purpose of each component. Writer examined and sought to develop conceptualization of the content. Focus of qualitative research is identifying and summarizing the meaning of content which is found in a full data set by describing and explaining each detail. The information was collected from Mark Zuckerberg utterances in *Youtube* video of *Facebook Founder Mark Zuckerberg Commencement Address | Harvard Commencement 2017*.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis used Harris (2018) theory of rhetorical devices. This chapter consists of 2 main sections. First section discussed rhetorical devices used by Mark Zuckerberg for his inspirational speech and analyzed how Mark Zuckerberg's rhetorical devices engage and influence audiences. The second section analyzed the meaning of each underscored rhetorical device which are used in *Facebook Founder Mark Zuckerberg Commencement Address | Harvard Commencement 2017*.

4.1 Rhetorical Devices Used by Mark Zuckerberg in His Inspirational Speech

In this first section, the writer discussed the rhetorical devices that appeared in Mark Zuckerberg's commencement speech. The writer has analyzed that there are six rhetorical devices used in Zuckerberg's speeches, such as simile, catachresis, synecdoche, personification, allusion and transferred epithet.

4.1.1 Simile

Simile is the one of rhetorical devices formed by a comparison of two dissimilar objects which share at least one characteristic (Harris, 2018). The writer discusses simile as rhetorical devices used by Mark Zuckerberg in his speech. Discussion of the usage of simile by Mark Zuckerberg would be discussed below. The usage of simile as a rhetorical device can be seen in 43.1 utterance 2, “... *I'd really **just like a book** on social justice.*”

This sentence shows the word “just like a book” to give an image that he is a book that has a lot of knowledge. Simile is used when the writer wants to emphasize on the message which was delivered in his motivational speech. This simile gives an extra strong feeling received by audiences. The word “like” is used in similar rhetorical devices to give an example to emphasize the message. By giving an example on implementation, will help the audience easier understand the message.

4.1.2 Catachresis

Catachresis becomes a rhetorical device with dramatic effect. Catachresis is usually used as a metaphor and distinctive language which has a powerful effect (Harris, 2018). The writer discovers several catachresis used by Mark Zuckerberg in engaging the audience to hear and understand his motivational speech. In this section, the writer would write some catachresis that appear in his speech which have a powerful effect.

Catachresis can be seen in sentence 10.2 utterance 1, “*Mr. President, I'm helping **put a man** on the moon*”

The words in bold show incorrect use of words, because in essence, you could not actually “put” a man on the moon. The grammatically correct ones would be “helping to send someone to go to the moon” or “helping someone to get on the moon”. The word “*put a man on the moon*” gives an extra attractive point to help the speaker engage the audience.

4.1.3 Synecdoche

The sixth rhetorical device discussed in this section is synecdoche. Synecdoche is a replacement metaphor of substitution like metonymy. Synecdoche usually appears by using something to refer to the whole (Harris, 2018). Synecdoche is usually used to make the sentence to be more interesting for audiences. The writer discovers a few synecdoche in Mark Zuckerberg which would be discussed below.

Synecdoche can be seen in sentence 16.1 utterance 3, “*Some **big companies** wanted to buy **us.***”

In the sentence above, the meaning of “us” is not exactly talking only about Mark Zuckerberg himself nor a few other people, but it is used to substitute the Facebook company as a whole. This sentence becomes more distinctive and more dramatic by changing the word “company of Facebook” into “us”. This makes his inspirational speech more successful.

4.1.4 Personification

The seventh rhetorical device which will be discussed in this section is personification. The writer discovered personification in Mark Zuckerberg’s inspirational speech. Personification is a combination of something inhuman with personal nature characteristic (Harris, 2018).

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Personification is usually used to add a deeper meaning to the audiences. Several sentences containing personification would be discussed below.

In sentence 35.2 utterance 2 shows personification, *“We understand **the great arc of human history bends** towards people.”*

“Human history” as an inhuman thing is described as a human doing something. This example shows the personification used by Mark Zuckerberg’s speech to give an extra power to attract and help the audiences to interest in his inspirational speech.

4.1.5 Allusion

Allusion is the one of rhetorical devices used by Mark Zuckerberg in his inspirational speech. Allusion is the sentence which mentions the passing of a well-known person or events. Allusion is usually a casual reference to famous historical or literary figures or events (Harris, 2018). Allusion used to develop the character for a sentence. Writer discovers some sentences which contain allusions and would be discussed below.

In the sentence 26.1 utterance 4, *“**JK Rowling** got rejected 12 times before publishing **Harry Potter**. Even **Beyonce** had to make hundreds of songs to get Halo.”*

In this sentence, JK Rowling, Harry Potter and Beyonce are three famous names which people commonly recognize. By using allusion, Mark Zuckerberg can give extra effect to emphasize the meaning and improve his ability in delivering messages to his audience.

4.1.6 Transferred Epithet

The last rhetorical device used in inspirational speeches by Mark Zuckerberg is the transferred epithet. This rhetorical device is used to explain that an ordinary epithet is any adjective or adjective combination that emphasizes a distinctive quality of the noun (Harris, 2018). Transferred epithet will be discussed below.

Transferred epithet can be seen in the sentence 4.3 utterance 3, *“That could have been a really **sad video**.”*

This sentence used a transferred epithet by using a combination of two adjectives of nouns that are really distinct to explain each other. The example above means that the video could be a sad one and not a sad video as if it is a “sad person”.

This rhetorical device used to emphasize the distinguishing characteristic of the noun. It explains that it could have been a video that gives a sad feeling and not the video who is sad. meaning in delivering messages to the audience. It will help the speaker to give more power and give a highlight.

The writer found out that Mark Zuckerberg used only 6 rhetorical devices out of 11 rhetorical devices in the figurative language rhetorical group. The most frequent rhetorical device used by Mark Zuckerberg is catachresis. Catachresis is frequently used to give dramatical effect of a message. Mark Zuckerberg used catachresis so Mark Zuckerberg can create rhythm to dramatize the speech and express the feelings in the speech. The second most frequent rhetorical device which Mark Zuckerberg used is the transferred epithet. Transferred epithet is frequently used to emphasize

the message in the speech to take the audience's attention and enlighten the speech. This helped him to attract the audiences.

4.2 Function of Rhetorical Devices Used by Mark Zuckerberg in His Motivational Speech

This section showed and described the function of each rhetorical device which Mark Zuckerberg used in his inspirational speech. Functions will be described to give knowledge about the importance of rhetorical devices to attract and help the audience easily understand the speaker's explanation.

4.2.1 Emphasis

Some rhetorical devices have functions to emphasize the message, such as simile, analogy, metaphor, metonymy, allusion, transferred epithet and personification. In Mark Zuckerberg's speech he used only simile, metaphor, allusion, transferred epithet and personification to emphasize the meaning of the speech.

a. Simile

Simile helps the speaker to make the easy description about something more interesting and give emphasis to the two similarities to give an easy understanding. Simile helps the audience to imagine something which the speaker is talking about. Harris (2018) explains the function of simile is to shed light on the subject. Simile has a function to improve the writer's ability to explain and describe something by comparing two things which have similarity. By simile, the speaker can give emphasis to the subject which he wants to describe and help the audience to easily understand the explanation. Simile can be seen in 43.1 utterance 2, "*.....I'd really **just like a book** on social justice.*" The writer emphasized the message which he delivered to all audiences by using "like a book" to give a powerful example to help the audience understand the meaning well and keep focused on the speech.

b. Analogy

Another rhetorical device which helps speakers to emphasize the messages is analogy. Analogy also helps the speaker to emphasize several pieces of evidence to take audiences' trust and can be involved with the speaker's mind. Harris (2018) described analogy used to provide conceptual clarity by explaining an unfamiliar concept by comparing it to a familiar one. The analogy function is to help the speaker to deliver messages by using other explanations and compares several similarities to show the things are alike. The writer found there is no analogy in Mark Zuckerberg's speech.

c. Metaphor

Metaphor used to compare to things that don't immediately spring to mind giving one of those things an added quality (Grace, n.d). A metaphor has a function to help the speaker to describe something in a way that isn't literally true but helps explain an idea by making a comparison. Metaphors contain creativity and clarity to get audience's attention and allow the audience to see things from different angles. The writer found that there is no metaphor in Mark Zuckerberg's speech.

d. Metonymy

Metonymy used by Mark Zuckerberg to give more power to a sentence or phrase. metonymy is to create profound meaning to all audiences. Metonymy usually adds meaning

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and complexity to the ordinary word to give another or more profound meaning. The writer found there is no metonymy in Mark Zuckerberg's speech.

e. Allusion

Allusion is one of rhetorical devices which mention or reference a well-known person, place or event to explain or describe something. Allusions help the speaker to easily deliver his feeling and describe well to the audiences. Allusion that can be seen is "JK **Rowling** got rejected 12 times before publishing **Harry Potter**. Even **Beyonce** had to make hundreds of songs to get **Halo**." In this sentence, the names of someone famous are used by the speaker to highlight the message and give more power which will be memorized easily by audiences.

f. Transferred Epithet

The transferred epithet used to explain any adjective to emphasize a distinctive quality of the noun. Harris (2018) explains an ordinary epithet is any adjective or adjective combination that emphasizes a distinctive quality of the noun. It helps speakers to transfer from the noun it is actually meant to describe another noun. Most probably the noun in the sentences would take the place of the object. Transferred epithet that can be seen is "*That could have been a really **sad video***". The transferred epithet uses an adjective to qualify another noun which can be seen as a "sad video" to explain about the story in the video, not the actual video. This used to give a strong message to audiences.

g. Personification

Personification is the one of rhetorical devices which help the speaker to make inanimate objects relatable to the human character. Speakers usually use personification to add a deeper meaning to things that he described. Personification so frequently used to improve the speaker's ability to deliver his message and to describe something well. Personification that can be seen is "*We understand the great arc of **human history bends towards people***" This sentence shows "human history" which is an inhuman thing, described by the speaker as a human doing something.

4.2.2 Creating Rhythm to Dramatize

Rhetorical devices also have dramatized effects such as catachresis and eponym. Catachresis becomes a rhetorical device with dramatic effect. Catachresis is usually used as a metaphor and distinctive language which has a powerful effect (Harris, 2018). Writers discover several catachresis used by Mark Zuckerberg in engaging the audience to hear and understand his motivational speech. These several catachresis are used by the speaker to create the power rhythm of the sentences. Mark Zuckerberg uses catachresis to give more power to attract his audience to improve the communication ability of his motivational speech. Catachresis that can be seen in the speech is "*Mr. President, I'm helping **put a man on the moon***" The word "*put a man*" gives an extra attractive point to help the speaker engage the audience. This catachresis will help audiences to hear the message and will not be bored to hear the whole speech.

Then, eponym is one of rhetorical devices which has a function to substitute the name of person or place. As explained by Harris (2018), eponym is a specific type of allusion that substitutes the name of a renowned person for the attribute itself. Eponym has a function for speakers to easily refer to a person, a group or place with another name which has a close connection with the true meaning. Eponym gives a powerful word to explain something, which maintains the audiences' attention. The writer found there is no eponym in Mark Zuckerberg's speech.

4.2.3 Adding Humor to Attract

Several rhetorical devices have functions to attract audience attention such as synecdoche and apostrophe. Synecdoche is to help the speaker to deliver interesting sentences. Synecdoche is usually used to elevate language and make the phrase more interesting or poetic. It also can help to create a strong voice and attract the audience to give more attention. Synecdoche that can be seen is “*some big companies wanted to buy us.*” The speaker explained that companies wanted to buy “us” which is impossible because people can't buy. Synecdoche in this sentence just gives more poetic effect to attract all the audience. By using Synecdoche, the speaker can give a more dramatic effect by changing “buy the idea of facebook” to be “buy us”. He explains something in different ways to create a touch of humor and give other energy.

Then, apostrophe is one of rhetorical devices which is used to explain something which addresses an absent person. As explained by Harris (2018) apostrophes use to indicate a direct allusion to a person or absent, actual, imagined or personified. This kind of Apostrophe is used to improve the speaker's ability to attract the audience. Apostrophes give more effect to engage the audience to hear the speech and tend to be excited to hear the content the speaker is saying. The writer found there are no apostrophes in Mark Zuckerberg's speech.

The analysis of Mark Zuckerberg's speech gives some outcomes which show a lot of rhetorical device's function and several implementations which can improve the speaker's communication skills. Each rhetorical device has a special role and has a different characteristic which needs to be applied in suitable conditions or topics. Understanding each characteristic, function and usage of each rhetorical device will help the speaker to handle the audience's attention, help them easily understand the meaning of each message and keep focus on the speech.

CONCLUSION

The findings show that Mark Zuckerberg's speech only used six out of eleven types of rhetorical devices in figurative language. The most frequent rhetorical device he used is catachresis. The other frequent rhetorical device is the transferred epithet. The least used of rhetorical devices in his speech are personification, synecdoche and simile. The rhetorical devices have function to help the speaker engage the audiences by giving an emphasis, creating rhythm to dramatize and adding humor to attract audiences. These functions would help the speaker in explaining something more lively, interesting and make all audiences stay focused and easily understand the meaning of the topic. The rhetorical devices affected the speaker's ability in a positive way. Each rhetorical device has another way to create the speech to be memorable.

From the findings, the writer concludes that rhetorical devices are used as the language method to improve the speaker's ability in delivering speech. Rhetorical devices affect in a positive way to improve the speaker's expression of the main point of his message. Therefore, in Mark Zuckerberg's speech, he used only simile, catachresis, synecdoche, personification, allusion and transferred epithet to keep his speech lively and attract all audiences to stay focused to hear him. Also, to help his audiences to understand his speech easier by underscoring the meaning through rhetorical devices. He created the speech to be more memorable by emphasizing the message. He used catachresis in engaging the audiences. Then he used synecdoche to attract audiences by delivering interesting sentences.

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Since the present research has limited scope, which was based on a Mark Zuckerberg speech, further research would need to improve the knowledge about function and the use of rhetorical devices in a speech. The other research using different types of speech would also be recommended. Despite the limitations, hopefully the research can be used to explain the importance and the function of rhetorical devices in a speech.

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