

Rhetorical Discourse Analysis of State of the Nation Address of Select Philippine Presidents

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ABSTRACT

The art of public speaking has been one of the commonly feared tasks for some people because they are not prepared and equipped with knowledge in rhetoric. The study was conducted to analyze the State of the Nation Address (SONA) delivered by the three presidents of the Philippines. Speech videos and speech manuscripts were analyzed using validated rubrics. A survey was also conducted to gather information on students' perception on the study of rhetoric. Frequency, standard deviation, and weighted mean were used to analyze the rhetorical devices and canons of rhetoric employed in the speeches. It was found out that metaphor is a common rhetorical device used by the Presidents. The results show that the canons of rhetoric: invention, arrangement, style, memory and delivery were utilized in the speeches. Majority of the students of Rhetoric and Public Discourse, self-reported (or agreed) that the rhetorical discourse analysis of the SONA is beneficial to them as Rhetoric and Public Discourse students. The study concludes that the

Presidents used the rhetorical elements and techniques to convince and influence the audience. It is recommended that the presidents (or their speech writers) should consider optimum use of the rhetorical elements and techniques to evoke the desired response from the audience.

Keywords – Language and Communication, rhetoric, SONA, discourse analysis, descriptive survey research design, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

Rhetoric is a technique of using language effectively and persuasively in spoken or written form. It is an art of discourse which employs various methods to convince, influence or please an audience. The State of the Nation Address (SONA) as a form of political discourse seeks to deliver a powerful and convincing speech to the audience that leaves an impingement on their mind. Dunmire (2005) stated that the important ideological component of political discourse derives from its representation of the future and the rhetorical functions those representations serve in implicating more immediate and discursive actions.

It is through SONA that the president will change and influence the mindset and attitude of the people. That is why the presidents' speeches need to be persuasive in such a way that people ought to believe and accept what they are reporting.

Dunmire (2005) in his study stated that, "the President's speech plays a significant role in facilitating the conceptual, linguistic, and political change articulated through the preemption policy. The presidents' SONA primarily aimed to gain the audience trust and confidence for their administration thus employing all the available means of persuasion. According to Ong (2010) "The state of the nation is also the state of the citizens".

Tenore (2012) in her study of Bill Clinton's Democratic National Convention (DNC) speech said that he has gotten a lot of attention and understandably so, there is something about Clinton's speech that made it stand out – good writing. There are several factors that made the writing in the speech so strong some of which are the rhetorical devices like repetition, and the "rule of three" or tri-colon to cite. The impact received only implies that employing rhetorical devices is a big factor for the effectiveness of the speech. It plays an important role to persuade and convince the audience. Another study conducted by Navera (2011) on Gloria Arroyo's SONA implies that presidential speeches are metaphorized and strategically expressed to invoke and influence the interests of the audience.

Considering the SONA of Corazon C. Aquino (1986-1982), Gloria M. Arroyo (2001-2010) and Benigno C. Aquino III (2010 – present), the study determined the rhetorical devices employed in convincing the emotions of the audience in conceptualizing the presidents' speeches, and accounts for common rhetorical devices used. The study also examined the importance of employing rhetorics in the presidents' speeches, and the applications of the five canons of rhetorics, namely: invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery.

FRAMEWORK

Rhetorical theory is the body of thought about human symbol use. According to Rhetorical Theory, communicating and presenting information is not just sending a static message; the process is considerably more dynamic. This study utilized Aristotle's definition of Rhetorical Theory. Aristotle defined rhetoric as *the art of discovering all the available means of persuasion* (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009).

Aristotle was convinced that, for a persuasive speech to be effective, speakers must follow certain guidelines or principles, which he called canons. These are recommendations for making a speech more compelling. Aristotle points to five prescriptions for effective oratory, the canons of rhetoric, namely: *invention* (finding ways to persuade), *arrangement* (putting together the structure of a coherent argument), *style* (presenting the argument to stir the emotions), *delivery* (making effective use of voice, gesture, etc.), and *memory* (speaking without having to prepare or memorize a speech) [(Littlejohn & Foss, 2009)].

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study analyzed the spoken and written discourses of the three Philippine Presidents' State of the Nation Addresses (SONAs).

Specifically, the study sought to answer the following to: 1) describe the common rhetorical devices employed in the President's SONA; 2) determine how the Presidents perform in their respective SONAs in terms of invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery; and 3) describe the perceived benefits of the students in Rhetoric and Public Discourse from the results of the rhetorical discourse analysis.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The proposed research utilized a descriptive research method. The study primarily concerns on how the Presidents' second state of the Nations Address (SONA) employ rhetorical devices through their discourse and the canons of rhetoric to evoke an emotion on the part of the audience, and to influence and persuade the people in their schema.

Unit of Analysis

The study employed the second State of the Nation Addresses (SONAs) of the three Presidents of the Philippines both written (full manuscript) and spoken (canned video) discourses as the unit of analysis. These were considered as basis for scientific analysis.

Instrumentation

The study used two instruments: validated discourse analysis matrices for video recordings and manuscripts, and survey questionnaire in determining the perceptions of the students in rhetoric and public discourse. It considered five-point Likert scale and 15 statements on benefits that students can get from the results of rhetorical discourse analysis. Prior to conducting the survey, the questionnaire was subjected to face and content validity with three experts – two English language professors and a researching professional. The instrument obtained a validity index of .80.

Coding Reliability

A comprehensive analysis of the presidents' SONA done by the researcher and two expert English language instructors as inter-raters obtained a reliability index of .80.

Discourse Analysis Procedure

The analysis employed both written and spoken discourses of the three Philippine Presidents. To obtain both discourses, the researcher downloaded the video recordings and manuscripts of the presidents' SONAs.

The data were collected considering the following phases:

Phase 1: The inputs (video recordings and manuscripts) were checked on completeness of parts and clarity.

Phase 2: The video recordings and manuscripts were then analyzed using a self-made rhetorical discourse analysis matrix. The analyst identified the common rhetorical elements and canons of rhetoric employed in each SONA.

Phase 3: Two inter-raters – English professors who have majored in English, were then invited to rate the SONAs. The outputs of the inter-raters were then compared with the analyst’s own output. This was done to ensure inter-rater reliability or concordance among the raters.

Phase 4: The survey was conducted to all students enrolled in Rhetoric and Public Discourse, one of the courses in BS Technology Communication Management at Mindanao University of Science and Technology, Cagayan de Oro City.

Statistical Treatment

The study used descriptive statistics such as frequency, mean, and standard deviation to describe the rhetorical devices and canons of rhetoric employed in the State of the Nation Addresses (SONAs) of the three Presidents. The data were then processed using a statistical software.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Common rhetorical devices employed in the Presidents’ SONA

Table 1. Frequency distribution of rhetorical devices employed in the SONAs

Rhetorical Devices	Cory C. Aquino f	Gloria M. Arroyo f	Benigno C. Aquino f
Alliteration	12	5	6
Amplification	1	9	7
Anaphora	9	8	12
Anadiplosis	1	4	2
Antistrophe	2	2	5
Antithesis	2	2	5
Asyndeton	7	6	3
Hyperbole	3	7	3
Metaphor	14	12	5
Simile	2	3	1
Tricolon	6	5	6
Understatement	3	1	3

Corazon C. Aquino used **metaphor** 14 times in her speech, while Benigno C. Aquino utilized **anaphora** 12 times in his discourse. Such utilization of the rhetorical devices and techniques implies that the Presidents have employed various

rhetorical techniques in persuading the audience. Dunmire (2005) in his study posited that an important ideological component of political discourse, derives from its representation of the future and the rhetorical functions those representations serve in implicating more immediate and discursive actions.

Metaphor was the most commonly used, while *simile* was the least used by the three presidents. The results of the study suggest that the Presidents are inclined to utilize certain representations or symbols to refer to situations that are not literally applicable. In fact, metaphor is the most commonly used by the Presidents. Clark (n.d.) averred that metaphors allow one to make the complex simple. Similarly, Navera (2012) in his study found that presidential speeches are metaphorized and strategically expressed to invoked and influence the interests of the audience. The Contemporary Rhetorical Theory supports this implication that today, rhetoric is generally defined much more broadly as human symbol use. It is no longer confined to the study of speeches or discourse; it is generally viewed as the study of any kind of symbols.

The Presidential speeches are likewise constituted by a cluster of conceptual metaphors that underlie metaphorical and lexico-grammatical expressions found in political texts and talk. Through repeated use and deployment, these metaphors that function and work in conjunction with rhetorical strategies such as logical, emotional, and ethical proofs, strategies of self-representation, and political myths can set off, prompt, trigger or disrupt (shared) schemas responsible for our sense making processes.

How the Presidents perform in their respective SONAs

The canons of rhetoric (latent or manifest) commonly applied by the Presidents in their SONAs were analyzed using the canned video as the unit of analysis. Table 2 exhibits the performance of the three presidents according to the canons of rhetoric. It underscores the degree of performance of the Presidents in their respective SONAs.

Table 2. Degree of performance (latent or manifest) of the presidents in their SONAs

Name of President	Invention	Arrangement	Style	Memory	Delivery
Corazon C. Aquino	outstanding	outstanding	outstanding	good	good
Gloria M. Arroyo	outstanding	outstanding	outstanding	good	outstanding
Benigno C. Aquino III	outstanding	outstanding	outstanding	good	outstanding

Scoring guide

	Count			
	Outstanding	Good	Troublesome	Failing
Invention	3	0	0	0
Arrangement	3	0	0	0
Style	3	0	0	0
Memory	0	3	0	0
Delivery	2	1	0	0

*iRubrics

The data in Table 2 show that the three Presidents are all “outstanding” in the three canons of rhetoric: invention, arrangement and style. This means that all were able to narrow targeted topics in their discourses to be relevant and purposeful to audience. They also structured their speeches with coherence, cohesiveness, and organization. As regards style, they crafted their discourses using distinctive language that clearly supports main ideas, consistent and appropriate tone, and superior balance of logic and emotion.

In terms of memory, the three Presidents are “good” in using sources responsibly. They applied documentations such video and statistics that support and illuminate their ideas. They excluded website evaluations; instead, they employed quotations that leave to the imaginations of the audience. According to Aristotle, “most of the topics that are usually discussed in public speeches do not allow exact knowledge, but leave room for doubt” (Aristotle’s Rhetoric, 2010).

However, in terms of delivery, both Gloria M. Arroyo and Benigno C. Aquino were rated outstanding since they utilized commanding use of vocal volume as well as variations of vocal rate, pitch and tone. They also demonstrated consistent eye contact, effective gestures and mannerism. Both also used pauses, no distracting errors which were covered with professional appearance and facial expression, although contemporary SONA speeches are no longer memorized but are just familiarized, since the Presidents already used teleprompters, which gives the audience the notion of memorized speech by giving appearance of good eye contact with the audience. Whereas, Corazon C. Aquino exercised less gestures and mannerism and used monotonous tone and pitch, since Corazon Aquino sometimes browsed through her own copy of speech. This implies that observing and utilizing the five canons of rhetoric in the Presidents’ SONAs inculcates the mind of the people, their accountability, accomplishments, and schema of the government. It means it should be crafted in response to a set of circumstances; to seek persuasion,

rhetorical discourse is usually intended to influence an audience to accept an idea; and to act in a manner consistent with that idea (Citizen Rhetoric,n.d.)

Generally, the persuasion in rhetoric is accomplished by a character whenever the speech is held in such a way as to render the speaker worthy of credence. If the speaker appears to be credible, the audience will form the second-order judgment that propositions put forward by the credible speaker are true or acceptable (Aristotle’s Rhetoric, 2010). Tenore (2012) in her study said that Bill Clinton’s speech has gotten a lot of attention – and understandably so, there is something about Clinton’s speech that made it stand out – good writing.

Perceived Benefits that the students in Rhetoric and Public Discourse gain from the results of the rhetoric discourse analysis

A survey on the students’ perception on the benefits they gain from the results of the rhetorical discourse analysis was conducted and the data were tabulated (Table 4). Some 144 Bachelor of Science in Technology Communication Management (BSTCM) students participated in the survey.

Table 3. Respondents’ perception on the benefits of rhetorical discourse analysis

Benefits	Mean	SD	Description
1. Enhances my ability to persuade others.	4.08	0.857	Agree
2. Equips me with the rhetorical devices.	3.89	0.777	Agree
3. Makes me more persuasive in my dealings with others.	4.17	0.690	Agree
4. Empowers me to win a rigorous and constructive debate.	3.72	0.808	Agree
5. Allows me to know how to give an effective speech.	4.31	0.796	Agree
6. Enables me to know the common rhetorical devices used by the speaker in his/her speech.	4.13	0.801	Agree
7. Allows me to determine the meanings, purposes, and effects of the speech.	4.28	0.773	Agree
8. Permits me to know how arguments are constructed.	4.15	0.787	Agree
9. Allows me to know how to use rhetoric.	4.17	0.802	Agree
10. Enables me to know the specific features of the texts.	3.68	0.842	Agree
11 Enables me to know how thoroughly a text emphasizes the character of the speaker.	3.81	0.844	Agree
12. Allows me to know the speaker’s intention in speaking.	4.16	0.808	Agree
13. Allows me to know the principal lines of reasoning or kinds of arguments used by the speaker.	4.05	0.683	Agree
14. Allows me to know the figures of speech used by the speaker.	3.98	0.848	Agree
15. Permits me to know the kind of style and tone used by the speaker.	4.03	0.877	Agree
Overall	4.04	0.820	Agree

Scoring Guide

Mean	Descriptive Equivalent
1.00 – 1.50	Strongly Disagree
1.51 – 2.50	Disagree
2.51 – 3.50	Undecided
3.51 – 4.50	Agree
4.51 – 5.00	Strongly Agree

Results indicate that the Rhetoric and Public Discourse student-respondents ‘agreed’ to the 15 perceived benefits they obtain in the rhetorical discourse analysis. They all believed that the results of this analysis will allow them to know how to give an effective speech, and also allows them to determine the meanings, purposes and effects of the speech employing different rhetorical devices. The results of the study also allow them to use rhetoric in constructing a persuasive speech that strengthen their arguments. According to Aristotle (“Aristotles Rhetoric”, 2010), Rhetoric is basically the strategic use of communication to accomplish the purposes with target audiences. Even Tenore (2012) n her study of Bill Clinton’s Democratic National Convention (DNC) speech said that there are several factors that made the writing in the speech so strong, some of which are the rhetorical devices.

The results imply that the study of rhetorical devices and the canons of rhetoric on the President’s SONA is beneficial to the students in their study of Rhetoric and Public Discourse. The respondents viewed the benefits as an edge to help them improve their skills and knowledge of rhetoric and become good and expert critics on rhetorical discourse. The students believed that the results of the study would be beneficial on their parts since rhetoric can be found even on day to day communication. Students then will be able to appreciate the arts of persuasion in both written and spoken discourses.

Rhetoric is a technique of using language effectively and persuasively in spoken or written form. It is an art of discourse which studies and employs various methods to convince, influence or please an audience Navera (2011).

CONCLUSIONS

The study concludes that the president’s SONA commonly employed rhetorical devices in which the most prevalent are Anaphora and Metaphor. The presidents also performed well in their performance in terms of invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery on their respective SONAs. The analysis results also imply that the study of rhetorical devices and the canons of rhetoric on the president’s

SONA is beneficial to the students in their study of Rhetoric and Public Discourse. Aristotle's Rhetorical Theory, which assumes that discourse is usually intended to influence an audience to accept an idea, and then to act in a manner consistent with that idea, supports the results of the analysis.

The analysis was limited to the rhetorical devices and canons of rhetoric used in the speeches of three Philippine presidents using speech manuscripts and video recordings as the unit of analysis. Furthermore, only few related literature were reviewed due to the scarcity of the materials.

TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH

Given the need to extend the benefits of the study particularly to the students, the researchers, therefore, are designing a Worktext including application of the findings apart from the rhetorical devices and the canons of rhetoric.

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