Rhetorical Strategy and Intuitive Perceptions in a Political Speech

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Abstract: The purpose of this study is to find Donald Trump's rhetorical strategy in his inaugural address in light of Aristotelian rhetorical elements of ethos, pathos, and logos as well as selected coders' intuitive perceptions of those rhetorical elements in his address. This study consists of three parts: (1) reviewing the Aristotelian rhetoric in political speeches; (2) describing the intuitive recognition of rhetorical elements on the part of educated, but non-trained coders; and (3) discovering and describing the features of an inaugural address by Donald Trump on January 20, 2017 from the perspective of how the speaker employs these rhetorical elements.

Findings consist of two aspects: the features of coders' perceptions and the effectiveness and weakness of Trump's rhetorical strategy. The findings regarding the features of coders' perceptions are as follows: (1) the speaker's use of simple steps such as showing a principle, presenting examples, and making a conclusion can sound logical or reasonable to the coders, even when there are no apparently logical connections between these steps; (2) when the speaker describes scenes which many people can easily visualize or imagine, the speaker's depiction can play the role of logos, which presents examples that seem realistic or reasonable to the coders; (3) the coders tend to miss ethos and identify pathos when they are moved by the speaker's words. The findings relevant to the effectiveness and weakness of Trump's rhetorical strategy are as follows: (1) one of Trump's effective strategies lies in the fact that Trump's remarks can evoke the emotions of the coders without any apparent element of pathos; (2) some weak points of Trump's rhetorical strategies come from his straight but rough words and expressions.

Keywords: *Aristotelian rhetoric, ethos, pathos, logos, political speech, intuitive perception*

1. Introduction

The purpose of this study is to find Donald Trump's rhetorical strategy in his inaugural address in light of Aristotelian rhetorical elements of ethos, pathos, and logos as well as selected coders' intuitive perceptions of those rhetorical elements in his address. This study consists of three parts: (1) reviewing the Aristotelian rhetoric in political speeches; (2) describing the intuitive recognition of rhetorical elements on the part of educated, but non-trained coders; and (3) discovering and describing the features of an inaugural address by Donald Trump on January 20, 2017 from the perspective of how the speaker employs these rhetorical elements.

Ethos, pathos, and logos

In the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle [1] describes three modes of persuasion: "the character of the speaker (*ethos*)", "putting the audience into a certain frame of mind (*pathos*)", and "the apparent proof provided by the words of speech itself (*logos*)" (1356a1-4). Aristotle adds the explanation that the person who can utilize the three modes of persuasion must be able to do the following: "(1) to reason logically, (2) to understand human character and goodness in their various forms, and (3) to understand the emotions; that is, to know their causes and the way in which they are excited" (1356a).

Ethos: the most effective means of persuasion

While Aristotle describes three modes of persuasion, ethos, pathos, and logos, he also singles out ethos, the character of the speaker as the most effective of the three. Aristotle says, "his character may almost be called the most effective means of persuasion" (1356a). In particular, this is absolutely true where "exact certainty is impossible and opinions are divided" (1356a). Garver [2] claims that "The more indeterminate the situation, and the more necessary rhetoric is, the more fundamental the need for ethos and trust. Because the audience has to trust the speaker, the speaker has to display ethos" (p.174). Likewise, Fontana, Nederman, and Remer [3] claim that "when divisions are so intense that grounds for agreement seem unavailable, the moral quality of a speaker becomes a significant factor in our

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evaluation of the views he defends" (p.121). To sum up, when there is no certainty and consensus about a suitable resolution to problems or issues, the trust based on the character of the speaker can be a last resort for people to make a judgement.

Trust production by ethos, the speaker's character

Aristotle [1] also elaborates on three things which inspire confidence in the speaker's own character: good sense, good moral character, and goodwill (1378a). Jamie [4] explains about these three things, "If they [speakers] were perceived as lacking one of them, they would not be treated as trustworthy" (2015, p.97).

Regarding the aspect of speaker's ethical character, Garver [2] claims that virtue or speaking "ethically" is important. Allen [5] also advances this point and gives us her own interpretation of Aristotle's rhetoric. She names the substance of Aristotelian rhetoric "the art of trust production" (p.141). She argues that "competence at practical reason is a character virtue" and that only practical policy proposals without general principle are not persuasive enough (pp.145-146). She argues that "the principles one espouses express character" (p.146). That is, the argument including general principles clarifies the speaker's "ethical commitments concerning the treatment of others." Therefore, according to Allen, the audience easily finds whether or not the speaker is reliable through his arguments (p.146).

Two types of methods regarding how to utilize coders to identify rhetorical elements in previous studies

There are various approaches and themes of previous studies dealing with the rhetorical analysis of political speeches, but they can be categorized into two main types in light of the method of who codes and analyzes the text of political speeches: the researcher by himself, or the researcher together with trained assistants ("coders"). The first type of previous study dealing with the rhetorical analysis of political speeches employs analysis conducted solely by the researcher himself (e.g., Teten [6]; Wu [7]; Ko [8]).

One of the advantages of this first type of study is that the researcher can not only deepen the analysis of the target texts based on his/her knowledge and intensive analysis but also consistently describe the features or meanings of the target texts. On the other hand, a weakness of this type of study is that all the contents of the analysis depend on the researcher's cognitive facility so that it lacks the strength provided by the perceptions of others who listen to/ read through such political speeches.

The second type of previous studies employs analysis by both the researcher and trained coders (e.g., Erisen, C., & Villalobos, J. [9]; Samuel-Azran, T., Yarchi, M., &Wolfsfeld, G. [10]; Amos, C., Spears, N., & Pentina, I. [11]). Erisen, et al. [9] examined three types of emotions, fear, anger, and hope in four types of

American presidential speeches: Inaugural addresses, SOTU addresses, addresses on the nation, and addresses to Congress from Franklin D. Roosevelt to Barack Obama through the analysis by four trained coders (pp.475-476).

One of the advantages of this second type of study is that the researcher/s can analyze the target rhetorical elements on the basis of analysis by trained coders, which increases the objectivity of the process of identifying the rhetorical elements in the speeches. As is the case with the first type of study, this second type of study has clarity and precision, but it does not reflect a more intuitive reaction of the untrained, general public as they listen to/ read through such political speeches.

2. Method

Collecting data in which the non-trained coders identify the target rhetorical elements

In my attempt to put together a "bottom-up" analysis of political speeches, which reflects the intuitive reaction of the general public, this study employs a descriptive and qualitative analysis of the target rhetorical elements based on the data in which educated but non-trained coders "intuitively" identified these elements based on generalized definitions provided to them of the Aristotelean elements. The approach in this study has two aspects: one aspect is a bottom-up approach which identifies the target rhetorical elements relying on the "intuitive perceptions" of educated but non-trained coders; the other is a top-down approach similar to conventional approaches in which a researcher steeped in rhetorical theory analyzes and interprets the rhetorical elements.

However, using the data by non-trained coders involves not only advantages but also disadvantages. One of the expected advantages of using the data of non-trained coders' "intuitive perceptions" of target rhetorical elements is that their perceptions are closer to the "intuitive reactions" of the general public. On the other hand, it can be assumed that the results identified by non-trained coders might have huge differences and lack coherence. Moreover, because non-trained coders "intuitively" identify the target rhetorical elements, the researcher cannot clearly identify their reasons for such identification.

In order to address these expected disadvantages relevant to the data by non-trained coders, this study sets four guidelines for this researcher to analyze the data: (1) mainly focus on rhetorical elements in which more than a half of six coders identified the same rhetorical elements in the paragraph; (2) scrutinize the contents of target texts with the knowledge of background situation of the speech; (3) analyze conceivable reasons that could have led coders to such coding; and (4) discuss the rhetorical elements which were not identified by the coders despite an objective presence of such elements.

Coders in this study

Six coders participated in the survey in this study. Five of them are native English speakers from the US, the UK, and Canada, and one of them is a Bulgarian with native fluency in English. All six coders have a bachelor's degree or higher, but they are neither specialists in rhetoric nor trained to code the target texts such as those in this survey. They coded the target texts based on the criteria for coders described in the following section.

Definitions of ethos, pathos, and logos

Ethos: A speaker is using ethos when he or she tries to persuade the audience based on his or her trustworthiness, and good character or by putting together an image of the self that includes past achievements or future goals.

Pathos: A speaker is using pathos when he or she tries to appeal to the audience's emotions of pity, fear, anger or even humor.

Logos: A speaker is using logos when he or she appeals to logic and reason. This type of approach typically includes facts and figures and tries to overturn popular and possibly unfavorable images of the speaker's country.

Numerical aspects of the data from non-trained coders

Numerical aspects of the data from coders are presented in two types of tables as follows:
1. Table 1 shows the numbers and the percentages of the paragraphs in which each coder identified the rhetorical elements of ethos, pathos, and logos respectively under the condition that coders are allowed to identify multiple elements in a paragraph in a target speech;
2. Table 2 shows the numbers of paragraphs in which more than a half of coders identified the same rhetorical elements of ethos, pathos, and logos respectively under the condition that coders are allowed to identify multiple elements in a paragraph in a target speech.

3. Results and Discussion

Numerical results of coders' perceptions of rhetorical elements in the inaugural address by Donald Trump, January 20, 2017.

Table 1
The numbers and the percentages of ethos, pathos, logos identified by the coders in Trump's address

Coders No.	Ethos		Pathos		Logos	
	n	*Per cent age*	*n*	*Per cent age*	*n*	*Per cent age*
1	13	44.4	10	37.0	5	18.5
2	2	7.7	22	84.6	2	7.7
3	8	72.7	3	27.3	0	0.0
4	10	22.2	24	53.3	11	24.4
5	9	75.0	3	25.0	0	0.0
6	0	0.0	26	89.7	3	10.3
Total	41	**27.3**	69	**58.7**	21	**14.0**

Table 2
The numbers and the percentages of ethos, pathos, logos identified by a majority of coders in Trump's address

Ethos		Pathos		Logos	
n	*Percentage*	*n*	*Percentage*	*n*	*Percentage*
4	**15.4**	20	**76.9**	2	**7.7**

Theme-based rhetorical analysis of the inaugural address by Donald Trump, January 20, 2017.

Theme 1: Transferring power from Washington, DC, to the people.

After showing his thanks to former president Obama, Trump quickly moves on to a theme that he wants to emphasize. He says:

> …(t)oday we are not merely transferring power from one administration to another or from one party to another, but we are transferring power from Washington, DC, and giving it back to you, the people.

Trump's remarks here might sound radical and exaggerated, but they are in line with a couple of functions of inaugural address identified by Campbell and Jamieson [12]: "unifying" the listeners as "the people" and presenting the "political principles that will guide the new administration."

After declaring his idea of transferring power from Washington, DC to the people, Trump begins to bash away at "politicians" and "the establishment" in the "Nation's Capital." He says:

> Washington flourished, but the people did not share in its wealth. Politicians prospered, but the jobs left, and the factories closed. The establishment protected itself, but not the citizens of our country.

Regarding Trump's remarks that "Washington flourished, but the people did not share in its wealth," Binyamin Appelbaum, *The New York Times'* Economic Policy reporter, in the article "Donald Trump's Inaugural Speech, Annotated (1/20/2017)" says as

follows: "This is literally true. The Washington area has become one of the most prosperous parts of the United States in recent decades, while much of the country has stagnated economically." On the other hand, as for Trump's remarks that "The establishment protected itself, but not the citizens of our country," Julie Hirschfeld Davis [13], *The New York Times'* White House reporter, points out in the same article above that Trump's strategy embedded in his remarks here is "a stark contrast between him and the political establishment, an us-against-them frame pitting ordinary American people against the elites."

Trump continues to compare "politicians" boasting "victories" and "triumphs" in Washington with "struggling families" around the U.S. He says:

> The establishment protected itself, but not the citizens of our country. Their victories have not been your victories; their triumphs have not been your triumphs; and while they celebrated in our Nation's Capital, there was little to celebrate for struggling families all across our land.

In light of Trump's emphasis on the difference between flourishing politicians and the people left behind in the U.S, it is quite reasonable that five coders identify pathos in this paragraph.

After depicting and emphasizing the absurdity underlying American society, Trump says:

> That all changes, starting right here and right now, because this moment is your moment: It belongs to you. It belongs to everyone gathered here today and everyone watching all across America. This is your day. This is your celebration. And this, the United States of America, is your country.

The results by coders in this paragraph indicate two other features of Trump's address: (1) the fuzziness of logical connection, and (2) evoking emotions without any apparent element of pathos. First, although Trump uses the word "because" in this part, it is difficult to find an apparently logical connection between two parts *before* and *after* the word "because." These issues are in line with the result that only one coder identifies logos in this paragraph. This indicates that one of the features of his address is the fuzziness of logical connection even if he uses typical conjunctions such as "because."

Second, even though Trump neither describes nor emphasizes the situation which usually plays the role of evoking the emotions of the listeners, pathos is the most identified element among three rhetorical elements, ethos, pathos, and logos. This implies that Trump's simple and energetic remarks here can evoke the emotions of the listeners.

Theme 2: A nation exists to serve its citizens.

Trump presents a principle underlying his policy: "a nation exists to serve its citizens." Then he continues to list a couple of concise examples of people's demands such as "great schools for their children, safe neighborhoods for their families, and good jobs for themselves." Then he concludes by saying these demands are "just and reasonable" and those who demand them are "righteous people" as well as a "righteous public." His remarks here are an assertion rather than a reason, but three coders identify logos in this paragraph. This implies that Trump's use of simple steps such as showing a principle, presenting examples, and making a conclusion sounds logical or reasonable to the coders.

Theme 3: This American carnage stops right here and stops right now.

After actively affirming the people's wants such as "great schools for their children, safe neighborhoods for their families, and good jobs for themselves" as "just and reasonable demands of righteous people and a righteous public," Trump emphasizes that "But for too many of our citizens, a different reality exists." He depicts some typical distressing realities which the listeners can easily visualize such as "rusted-out factories scattered like tombstones across the landscape of our Nation;… the crime and the gangs and the drugs that have stolen too many lives."

In light of the fact that Trump emphasizes such distressing scenes, it is quite natural that five coders identify pathos in this paragraph. In addition, an interesting thing relevant to coders' perceptions is that three coders identify logos in this paragraph. This implies that when the scenes described by the speaker are ones which many people can easily visualize or imagine, the speaker's depiction can play the role of presenting examples that seem realistic or reasonable to the listeners.

After depicting those distressing scenes, Trump emphasizes that "This American carnage stops right here and stops right now." On closer examination of Trump's message delivered from the beginning of address to the words, Trump's use of the word "stops" rather than "will stop" seems to have his messages as follows: (1) his inauguration is a historical turning point, because; (2) his government "is controlled by the people"; (3) his government "serves its citizens"; and (4) he and his government can stop the "American carnage." All of these messages finally focus onto the capability and leadership needed to stop this carnage as the president. From this viewpoint, he effectively utilizes the previous parts as introductory ones to finally highlight ethos, his ability and leadership as a president, in this part. However, only two coders identify ethos in this paragraph. This implies two factors: (1) his remarks

relevant to ethos are too short and concise for the coders to identify the element; and (2) his use of the words of "This American carnage" as a subject rather than "I" or "We" obscures who will actually stop the carnage so that many coders miss identifying ethos here.

Then Trump emphasizes that "We are one Nation, and their pain is our pain, their dreams are our dreams, and their success will be our success. We share one heart, one home, and one glorious destiny." The result by coders shows that pathos is identified most by the coders. This implies that his remarks here play the role of evoking the emotions of the listeners as well as reminding the audience of the perspective of a fellow human being and the sense of being the same citizens of America.

Theme 4: Describing the past examples of absurdity in America and indicating the importance of looking to the future.

Trump describes past and current disadvantages for American industry and the United State of America and emphasizes the absurdity and unfairness they have been faced with. In response to his descriptions, four coders identify pathos in paragraph 12.

After describing the disadvantages for the US and its industry from a national or international point of view in paragraph 12, he emphasizes the disadvantages for American workers and the middle class from the perspective of ordinary people in paragraph 13. This clearly shows that he utilizes the strategy of evoking more emotions of the listeners, which is in line with the fact that four coders identify pathos in paragraph 13 as well.

After fully utilizing pathos by amplifying the emotions of the listeners in paragraphs 12 and 13, Trump declares that "But that is the past. And now we are looking only to the future." The result by coders shows that they identify no rhetorical element except that only one coder identifies pathos here. However, judging from his apparent strategy of fully employing pathos to highlight his declaration, his remarks here can be regarded as ethos coming from his leadership as a president.

Theme 5: America first.

After declaring that "from this day forward, a new vision will govern our land," Trump emphasizes his vision with the slogan "America first" in paragraph 14. Although ethos and pathos are identified by two coders respectively, there is no rhetorical element identified by more than three coders in this paragraph. This implies that his remarks highlighting "America first" are so different from the current and common values shared by many people in particular in the international community that the coders might not be able to understand what he really means by his slogan.

Then Trump moves onto a theme of the unfair trade with other countries. He emphasizes it with direct words and expressions such as "ravages," "stealing," and "destroying," which are effective enough to evoke the emotions of listeners. After amplifying the listeners' emotions, Trump highlights ethos, his leadership to fight against these issues by saying, "I will never, ever let you down." This interpretation is in accordance with the fact that three coders identify both ethos and pathos.

Theme 6: America will start winning again, winning like never before.

After saying that "I will never, ever let you down," Trump presents clearly what he will do in the near future by repeatedly using the words "We will" in paragraphs 18 and 19. At first, he presents his plans with the words having broad meanings such as "jobs….borders….wealth….[and] dreams" in paragraph 18. Next, he lists more detailed examples of his plans with the words such as "roads…highways…bridges…airports… tunnels and railways," which constitute images of construction and rebuilding in America. His remarks in both paragraphs play the role of accentuating ethos, the future goals of his government as well as his leadership to realize these plans as a president. This interpretation is in line with the results that four coders identify ethos in both paragraphs.

Theme 7: We will shine—for everyone to follow.

Trump presents a principle of his foreign policy, which is an extension of his policy of "America first." He says:

> …(i)t is the right of all nations to put their own interests first. We do not seek to impose our way of life on anyone, but rather to let it shine as an example—we will shine—for everyone to follow.

Then Trump indicates his stance to unite the civilized countries to eradicate radical Islamic terrorism in paragraph 22. The fact that three coders identify pathos, which is the most identified element in this paragraph, implies that Trump's outright use of direct expressions such as "eradicate completely from the face of the Earth" might have been interpreted by the coders as an element intended to evoke the emotions of the listeners.

It is interesting that only two coders identify ethos in both paragraphs. Given the fact that Trump presents his principle of foreign policy as well as his specific plan for uprooting "radical Islamic terrorism," his remarks seem to involve the element of ethos. However, the majority of coders miss it. There are three conceivable factors worth being examined relevant to this fact.

One of the conceivable factors is that coders might miss the rhetorical element of ethos, when the speaker

uses "We" rather than "I." However, this factor is weak when it is compared with other similar parts in his speech. That is because, for instance, even when Trump repeatedly uses "We" rather than "I" in paragraphs 18 and 19, in which Trump presents his domestic policies, four coders identify ethos.

The second conceivable factor is that coders might miss ethos, even when the speaker shows the future goal and his determination to realize the goal, on condition that his remarks includes something immoral or cruel for the coders. This explanation seems reasonable in paragraph 22, in which Trump's remarks that "We will…unite the civilized world against radical Islamic terrorism, which we will eradicate completely from the face of the Earth" might sound cruel to some coders. However, it does not fit in paragraph 21, in which Trump's remarks seem very reasonable and morally right, but only two coders identify ethos.

The third conceivable factor is that when the coders are strongly impressed with one of the rhetorical elements, they tend to miss other rhetorical elements. This explanation is in line with the fact that ethos is identified most when other rhetorical elements seem relatively weak in paragraphs 18 and 19, but ethos is missed when pathos is the most frequently identified element in paragraphs 21 and 22. In these respects, it can be said that the coders tend to miss one of the rhetorical elements in particular ethos when they are strongly impressed with other rhetorical elements in the same paragraph.

Theme 8: Our country will thrive and prosper again.

Trump criticizes the "politicians" who mention the issues but do nothing to address them in paragraph 25. He says: "We will no longer accept politicians who are all talk and no action, constantly complaining, but never doing anything about it. The time for empty talk is over. Now arrives the hour of action." The article "Donald Trump's Inaugural Speech, Annotated," which was issued by *The New York Times* on January 20, 2017, provides a comment relevant to this part with astonishment. It says: "the style of his rhetoric seems unique for an inaugural address. There is nothing flowery about this language. It's a simple message, very simply delivered." His straight criticism of politicians sounds effective enough to evoke the emotions of listeners so that it is reasonable that three coders identify pathos in this paragraph.

Then Trump delivers his idea in an assertive manner in paragraph 26. He says:

> Do not allow anyone to tell you that it cannot be done. No challenge can match the heart and fight and spirit of America. We will not fail. Our country will thrive and prosper again.

It is interesting that three coders identify pathos but no one identifies ethos in this part despite his determinative remarks about the future goal of America that "We will not fail. Our country will thrive and prosper again." This implies that coders tend to identify pathos, the element to evoke the emotions of the listeners, rather than ethos, which plays the role of developing the listeners' trust in the speaker.

Theme 9: We will make America great again.

In the closing part, Trump emphasizes his leadership and capability to "make America strong again" while repeating his famous slogan and its variations. Three coders identify pathos and one coder identifies ethos in this part. This implies that Trump's repeating his simple slogan has the power to evoke the emotions of the listeners, which can be regarded as s kind of sense of unity among them.

Findings of the Analysis of Trump's Address

On the basis of the numerical results by coders as well as analysis and discussion by this researcher above, this section presents two types of findings: (1) features of intuitive perceptions of coders when they identify the targeted rhetorical elements in Trump's address; and (2) the effectiveness and weakness of Trump's rhetorical strategy.

Features of coders' perceptions

1. The speaker's use of simple steps such as showing a principle, presenting examples, and making a conclusion can sound logical or reasonable to the coders, even when there are no apparently logical connections between these steps. (Theme 2)
2. When the speaker describes scenes which many people can easily visualize or imagine, the speaker's depiction can play the role of logos, which presents examples that seem realistic or reasonable to the coders. (Theme 3)
3. The coders tend to miss ethos and identify pathos when they are moved by the speaker' words. (Theme 7 and 8)

The effectiveness and weakness of Trump's rhetorical strategy.

One of Trump's effective strategies lies in the fact that Trump's remarks can evoke the emotions of the coders without any apparent element of pathos (Theme 1). For example, Trump's repeating such simple slogans that "Make America great again" has the power to evoke the emotions of the listeners, which can be regarded as creating a sense of unity among them (Theme 9).

On the other hand, some weak points of Trump's rhetorical strategies come from his straight but rough words and expressions. For example, even when Trump tries to use a very basic logical connection such as "because," his logic is sometimes fuzzy (Theme 1).

4.Conclusion

The overall impression I received while conducting this study is as follows: (1) Aristotle's rhetorical elements of ethos, pathos, and logos are still fully utilized in political speech; (2) although the coders were neither specialists in rhetoric nor trained in coding and the results from coders differed from one another, in many parts the total data of their intuitive perceptions were understandable and reasonable; (3) although Aristotle says ethos is "the most effective means of persuasion" (1356a), it seems a little bit challenging for coders to identify ethos intuitively. This study is significant in that it demonstrates some aspects of non-trained coders' intuitive perceptions as well as the positive and negative effects coming from the speakers' use of Aristotle's threefold rhetorical elements. The researcher confined rhetorical analysis to the Aristotle's threefold rhetorical elements in a political speech with the data from six non-trained coders. A future study expanding the target speeches with data coming from more coders would be of value to the field of rhetorical analysis in political speeches.

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