

On Rhetorical Functions of Narratives in Hillary Clinton's Speeches

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Abstract: Hillary Clinton is generally considered as a competent female politician and an excellent orator. She has impressed the world with her elegant words, storytelling styles and unique personal charm. Scholars have probed into her speeches from different angles and found that kinds of discourse strategies have been applied to enhance the appeal of her speeches, which to a great extent reflect her identities as a female and a politician. Taking Hillary Clinton's speeches in different contexts for example, this paper makes a study on the features and rhetorical functions of narratives in her speeches. It attempts to point out the way narratives work to enhance the persuasive power of her speeches. Based mainly on theories about persuasive appeals of speech, identification between speaker and listeners, and rhetorical functions of narratives in speech discourses respectively proposed by Aristotle, Burke and Yang, the present research forms its own theoretical basis and seeks out how narratives work to provide factual evidences for her arguments, to stir the emotions of the audience through appealing to her authority and identifying with them emotionally, and to help organize the discourse. 14 speeches by Hillary have been collected to make data analysis and sample illustration. The research yields two major findings as follows: 1. Narratives are frequently applied by Hillary Clinton in each of the 14 speeches as an effective speech strategy and also a rhetorical device. She tends to narrate relevant events to promote the achievement of the speech purpose by highlighting the theme, supporting the viewpoints and stimulating emotions; 2. Comparatively, most of the narratives, altogether 96% of them, are employed to provide factual evidences for her viewpoints, emphasizing more on the post-narrative effect, and to stir the empathy of the listeners by presenting her ethos and identifying emotions. The current research is of practical significance for language learners and researchers to evaluate more effectively and investigate more deeply into language of female politicians.

Keywords: Narratives, Rhetorical Functions, Hillary Clinton's Speeches

1. Introduction

Speech is an act of strong utility in which the speaker presents clearly his views and assertions about a certain event, expounds principles and expresses emotions, aiming to convince the listeners to accept a view, a proposal or to conduct an act. To maximize the effects of his speech, the speaker will undoubtedly apply appropriate rhetorical devices and adopt appropriate speech strategies, in which narrative is a very important one [1].

Different from narrative in literary works, narrative in speech discourses refers to the reiteration of events occurred for the sake of effectively achieving the purpose of persuasion instead of delivering messages. This is also where the rhetorical functions of narrative lie in speeches. The study

of narrative in speech discourses dated from 2000 years ago, when Aristotle [2] claimed that speech narrative should be brief and concise. While the academic study of rhetorical narrative has long been focusing on literary works [3-6], speech discourses ignored. Considering the increasing social status of female politicians and the significant impact of their speeches, the present study probes into the features and rhetorical functions of narratives in their speeches by taking Hillary Clinton's speeches for example.

2. Theoretical Basis

In *Rhetoric*, Aristotle [7] mentions that rhetoric speech aims to convince the audience, making them form a certain judgment, identify with the speaker and then take some

action. He assumes that there are three forms of persuasive appeals: to the speaker's authority (ethos), to emotion (pathos) and to reason (logos). In his view, ethos is the most effective means of persuasion and acts as the dominating factor. It refers to the speaker's moral traits and personal charisma, which implies that the speaker should be of qualities like good sense, good moral character and goodwill to convince the audience. While pathos depends on putting the audience into a certain frame of mind and logos, on the proof or apparent proof provided by the words of the speech itself. As the most famous representatives of New rhetoric, Burke [8] develops Aristotle's theory and deems that to convince the listeners, it is necessary for the speaker to build up a common ground with them, such as the common or similar experience. Burke's identification theory has been frequently applied to the study of speech persuasion.

In the view of these famous rhetoricians, persuasive appeals of speech and identification between speaker and listeners can be realized by narrative since it has extremely strong realistic persuasion power, just as American narratologist Toolan [9] says narrative is about gaining a power.

Narrative is story-telling and also a means of communication, through which people cognize the world, explain the world and reflect on the world. Narrative is closely related with speech. To some extent, speech is also a form of narrative, with the aim to realize the echo between the speaker and the listeners, which means that it is a two-way interaction and selection. Compared with literary narrative and image narrative, speech narrative, a type of voice narrative, seems to be more prompt and accurate in the delivery and expression of meaning and emotions. Moreover, Narrative in speeches is real narration. In other words, no matter what narrative strategy the speaker applies, the story he tells, the material he quotes and the emotion he expresses are all real, owing to which the possibility exists that the audience's feeling be activated. Whereas due to time limit, speech narrative is always simple and brief, leaving enough time and space for the listeners to think more about the speaker and his intention. In this process, the events narrated do not produce meaning, only when they are chosen, refined, interpreted and evaluated in accordance with the anticipation of the speaker will they become meaningful. There is no doubt that speech narrative will be restricted by social identity of the speaker, the rhetorical purpose, the relations between the speaker and the audience, and the audience's emotional and cognitive state, which differentiate it from general narrative.

Narrative in speech serves to realize the theme of the speech and to persuade the audience to accept the speaker's view and then take actions, which is its very rhetorical function. Thus the speaker attaches much importance to how to achieve the desired effect through the ideology, standpoint

and emotion delivered by narrative. Generally, Narrative usually serves three basic rhetorical functions in speech discourses: factual evidence, emotion carrier and discourse organizer [10]. The narrative as factual evidence works through its illocutionary effect and such narrator must highlight the factors favorable for the speech theme while weakening or even neglecting other elements. Subsequently, the narrative discourse may be characterized by simple plot and incomplete structure. The function of carrying emotions enables the narrator to excite the addressees' passions through narrating common experiences which in turn leads to the unexpected stress on the commentary part besides the economic story itself. The narrative serving as the discourse organizer is usually simple with only the skeleton of the story.

3. Rhetorical Functions of Narratives in Hillary Clinton's Speeches

The writer once made related studies on Hillary Clinton's political speeches and found that due to her identities as a daughter, a wife and a mother, her personal experience, her religious beliefs and her role in politics, her speeches are different from those by traditional male politicians. To clearly state her points and give publicity of her propositions, she has applied diversified strategies, such as metadiscourse, intertextual devices and metaphor [11]. Based on the views and theories proposed by former scholars, the present study forms its own theoretical framework and focuses on the rhetorical functions of narrative in Hillary's speeches, aiming to figure out the way narrative works to provide factual evidences for her arguments, to stir the emotions of the audience through appealing to her authority and identifying with them emotionally, and to help organize the discourse.

14 speech texts are analyzed which are collected from the following four books on speeches: *To Address with Grace like Hillary Clinton* [12], *The Most Influential Speeches in the First-class Universities* [13], *Inspirational Speeches of Women Elites* [14] and *The Most Eloquent Speeches of the Successful Females in the World* [15]. The 14 speeches are made by Hillary Clinton in different situations, including her speech at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, her speech at the National Congress of Democratic Party in 2008, her first campaign speech in 2015 and her commencement speech at Yale University in 2018. These speeches are of diversified themes, such as the fight for women's rights, the determination to run for the presidency and the encouragement for the young. It has found that besides the discourse strategies mentioned above, narrative has been frequently used in all the speeches (see Table 1), which become indispensable ingredients of her speeches and make her speeches come across very well.

Table 1. Frequency of narratives in Hillary Clinton’s speeches.

Speech number	Speech occasions	Number of narratives
1	Speech at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995	11
2	Commencement Speech at Yale University in 2001	5
3	Speech at the Jefferson-Jackson Day Dinner in 2008	6
4	Speech on the Last Day of the Primary Election of the Campaign in Baruch College in 2008	12
5	Speech at the National Congress of the Democratic Party in 2008	4
6	Commencement Speech at Bernard College in 2009	12
7	Speech at the 8 th anniversary of September 11 th attack in 2009	11
8	Speech at the 54 th United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in 2010	15
9	Speech on Water Resources at the National Geographic Society in 2010	5
10	Speech on Human Rights of LTGB at Geneva in 2011	5
11	Speech at the 19 th World Conference on AIDS in 2012	7
12	First Campaign Speech in New York in 2015	7
13	Commencement Speech at Wellesley in 2017	6
14	Commencement Speech at Yale University in 2018	8
Total		114

Further studies reveal that among the 114 cases of narratives, 59 of them are meant to provide factual evidences for Hillary’s views, taking up 52% of the total number, while 51 cases of narratives serve as emotion carrier, among which 18 cases aim to convince the addressees of her ethos and the other 33 are applied to stir their feelings and thus achieve emotional identifications (see Table 2).

Table 2. Rhetorical functions of narratives in Hillary Clinton’s speeches.

Function	Factual evidence	Emotion carrier	Discourse organizer	Total
Number	59	ethos 18	identification 33	114
Percentages	52%	16%	29%	100%

3.1. Narratives as Factual Evidence

To support his arguments in a speech, the speaker usually narrates a past event which occurred in a similar context or circumstance to prove to the audience that the same or similar event may also occur at present, or to express his views about a certain topic. In Hillary’s speeches, most cases of narratives play such a role and examples illustrated below show how narratives work as factual evidence in her speeches.

- (1) For 7 long years we have neither addressed our problems, nor seized our opportunities. We have tried it President Bush’s way—concentrate wealth, hoard power, disregard science, shred the Constitution, smear dissenters, impugn patriots, go it alone in the world wherever you can and cooperate only when you have to. And now with Senator McCain as the likely republic nominee, the Republicans have chosen more of the same. —Speech 3
- (2) There are so many examples that we could mention of service that we saw after the 9/11 attacks. When the Red Cross needed donors, people organized blood banks. When our EMTs and first responders needed blankets and food, people gave from their own closets and kitchens. When those who had lost a loved one needed a kind word to break the silence of loneliness, people went and listened and shared. —Speech 7
- (3) When President Clinton honored the bargain, we had the longest peacetime expansion in history, a balanced budget, and the first time in decades we all grew together, with the bottom 20 percent of workers

increasing their incomes by the same percentage as the top 5 percent. —Speech 12

In Example (1), Hillary reviewed the problems and inadequacies of the country led by Bush’s Government and presented her idea with irony that Senator McCain and Bush were of the same breed, thus the country would definitely go through the same experiences if another republican was elected the president. In Example (2), Hillary narrated with deep feeling the efforts people made to help others when the attack occurred. The parallel sentences “when...people...” depicted vividly people’s friendly behaviour, providing enough evidence for Hillary’s points that their response were not scripted and they instinctively summoned the best within themselves to help others in harm’s way. Moreover, the audience could be deeply affected by the narration as if they had experienced it themselves. In this regard, identification was also achieved based on the common cultural value that these people represented “a collective and uniquely American characteristic: a willingness and a pride in serving others” [12]. Example (3) is from Hillary’s first campaign speech in 2015 in which she narrated the development of the country under the leadership of President Clinton. Her purpose was to support her argument that if a president attaches enough importance to equality of opportunity for all the people, the country will develop rapidly and its people will be more united.

As factual evidence, narratives in a speech emphasize more on its connection with the speech purport and the post-narrative effect. For instance, Hillary’s narration in Example (3) produces a certain post-narrative effect, convincing her audience into thinking that with America’s basic bargain of

equality in mind, she will be completely different from the Republicans and she will lead America to another period of prosperity.

3.2. Narratives as Emotion Carrier

Since the ancient Rome, people began discussion about emotional appeal and found that narrative is an effective way to stir the addressees' sympathy. And narratives mentioned usually include fables, stories, historical anecdotes, examples and personal experiences. The role of narratives as emotion carrier in speech discourses has attracted attention of many contemporary scholars. Lucas [16] thinks that emotional appeals can naturally be born in the content of the speech with the use of rich and vivid examples. Lehnen [17] claims that narrative changes people's minds and its persuasion and emotional effect has always been paid attention. Yang [10] proposes that emotional function of speech narrative mainly reflects in the characterization of the speaker's personality and the identification between the speaker and the addressees.

3.2.1. Narratives Presenting Ethos

Aristotle [7] thinks that ethos occupies a dominating role in the achievement of the speech purpose. Isocrates [18] claims that ethos is the most powerful source of persuasion. Cicero [19] proposes that ethos is the key to persuasion and Burke [8] says that ethos lays the foundation for all other communication. There are various ways to show the listeners the speaker's moral traits and personal charisma and to gain their trust and admiration, such as his manner, his style of conversation and narration of his personal experience. The manner and way of conversation help to present the speaker's personality image at the speech scene, whereas narrating related or similar personal experience is beneficial for the speaker to display his consistent personality, which is much more convincing. Hillary narrates her personal experience a lot in her speeches.

- (4) Over the past 25 years, I have worked persistently on issues relating to women, children, and families. Over the past two and a half years, I've had the opportunity to learn more about the challenges facing women in my own country and around the world. —Speech 1
- (5) I have been spending the past 35 years in the trenches advocating for children, campaigning for universal health care, helping parents balance work and family, and fighting for women's rights here at home and around the world...to see another Republican in the White House squander our promise of a country that really fulfills the hopes of our people. —Speech 5
- (6) When I went to the United Nations Conference on Women in Beijing back in 1995, I made the point, which seemed to me to be pretty obvious, that women's rights are human rights, and human rights are women's rights. —Speech 6
- (7) My first job out of law school was for the Children's Defense Fund. I walked door-to-door to find out how many children with disabilities couldn't go to school, and to help build the case for a law guaranteeing them

access to education. —Speech 12

Hillary made a very impressive speech at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995. She told the audience in example (4) that she kept working on issues about women, presenting to all that she is not only an advocate of the declaration of women's rights, but also a practitioner. From her narration in Example (5), the audience know clearly what she has done for the country and what kind of person she is. The narration reveals her kindness at the meantime her dissatisfaction with the deeds of the Republicans and her gladness that Obama, who holds the same political values with her, has won the campaign. At the graduation ceremony of Bernard college for Women in 2009, Hillary reviewed her experience of taking part in the United Nations Conference on Women, emphasizing her firm belief that women's right are human rights and encouraging the graduates to fight for females who are still struggling in poverty, diseases and injustice. While in her first campaign speech in 2015, she narrated about the efforts she made to help the disabled children receive education. Thus It is not difficult for the audience to get from the narratives that she is of goodwill and good moral character. Her experiences are convincing enough to persuade the audience to believe that she has the potential to solve problems and she can be a qualified president.

3.2.2. Narratives Identifying Emotion

In her speeches, Hillary also has narrated many events similar to the audience's experiences to gain a sense of empathy from them and thus to lay the emotional foundation for her speeches.

- (8) The audacious women and a few brave men who gathered at Seneca Falls, New York, back in 1848, demanding that their rights including the right to vote. It took more than 70 years of struggle and ridicule, and grinding hard work, and only one of them lived long enough to see women cast their ballots. —Speech 3
- (9) And some of you already, you know Glenn's story of bravery and sacrifice. He was an attorney who had served as a volunteer firefighter for 19 years. When the first plane hit the World Trade Center, Glenn not only helped to evacuate his law firm's building across the street, but he raced over to the Towers with his medic bag in hand to try to save others. He died when the South Tower fell. —Speech 7
- (10) When we saw the enormous the quilt was covering acres of ground, stretching from the Capitol building to the Washington Monument, it was devastating. And in the months and years that followed, the quilt kept growing. In fact, back in 1996 was the last time it could be displayed all at once. It just got too big. Too many people kept dying. —Speech 11

Hillary's fighting for women's rights have been displayed in most of her speeches. In example (8), she narrated about and complimented on the persevering efforts made by the intrepid pioneers who once fought bravely for women's right

for vote. Narration of the past historical event aims to identify the audience with the feeling that perseverance prevails and she, as a woman, is able to win in the campaign only if they are united. Example (9) shared with the audience a story about a hero in the September 11th attack. As Hillary said, his story will inspire others to serve and give, to embody the ethos of citizenship and sacrifice that the nation relies upon, to help people meet the great and grave challenges they face. In example (10), Hillary gave an account of the situation when she first saw the quilt with names of the people who died of AIDS. Obviously her intention was to stir the audience's emotion, help them realize the seriousness of the problem and appeal to them to fight against the disease.

3.3. Narratives as Discourse Organizer

As to the function of narratives as discourse organizer, not many examples have been identified in Hillary's speeches. However, it still deserves attention. This sort of narratives usually lie at the beginning part of a speech to highlight the theme and guide the development of the discourse.

(11) Fifteen years ago, delegates from 189 countries met in Beijing for the Fourth World Conference on women. It was a call to action—a call to the global community to work for the laws, reforms, and social changes necessary to ensure that women and girls everywhere finally have the opportunities they deserve to fulfill their own God-given potentials and contribute fully to the progress and prosperity of their societies.—
Speech 8

(12) At three o'clock in the morning on December 10th, 1948, after nearly two years of drafting and one last long night of debate, the president of the UN General Assembly called for a vote on the final text. Forty-eight nations voted for favor; eight abstained; none dissented. And the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted. It proclaims a simple, powerful idea: All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.—*Speech 10*

At the 54th United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in 2010, Hillary first made a brief review of the theme of the Fourth World Conference on women, which is also the theme of the commission. Narratives here apparently introduce the theme and development of her speech. In example (12), drafting and adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has been historically reviewed at the beginning of her speech on the human rights of LTGB. In her views, the Declaration proclaims a simple and powerful idea that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. Therefore, it is not of difficulty for the audience to infer that in her speech she will talk about human rights or rights of certain group of people.

4. Conclusion

Known as a successful female politician, Hillary Clinton has

impressed the world with her speech talent, intelligence and passion. Her multiple social identities, her personal experiences, her relations with the audience and her speech purpose dynamically interact with each other, bringing into the emergence of her particular speech styles that is worth researching. Based on studies about speech narrative and rhetorical features of narrative by linguists and rhetoricians home and abroad, the present study analyzes the frequency, features and rhetorical functions of narratives in Hillary's most famous speeches ranging from 1995 to 2018. On one hand, it is found that narratives have been frequently used in all the collected speeches, adding a lot of luster to her speeches made in different social situations and greatly facilitate the achievement of her speech purpose. On the other, narratives in her speeches mainly serve as factual evidence and emotion carrier. Serving as factual evidence, narratives provide strong and logical arguments for her viewpoints. Serving as emotion carrier, narratives about her own personal experience help reveal to the audience her personality, her moral traits and her beliefs; while narratives about events experienced by possible members of the audience seem to easily stir their empathy, leading to the emotional identification and thus increasing the persuasive strength. Serving as discourse organizer, narratives, though not many, usually at the beginning part of a speech, attract the attention of the audience, highlight the speech theme and introduce the speech content.

What deserves attention is that Hillary emphasizes her gender identity in most speeches, therefore there is an obvious tendency that she usually narrates past events experienced by women and children, or her own personal experience as a woman, a daughter, a wife and a mother. Since the present study concentrates only on a single representative of female politicians, further researches can be conducted to figure out regularities and rules of narratives in female politicians' speeches and a comparative study might also be made to seek out the similarities and differences in speech narratives by female and male politicians.

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