

Original Paper

Persuasions in United Nations Climate Change Speeches

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Abstract

This paper examines the persuasive rhetoric used in political speeches at United Nations Climate Change Conferences. It addresses the significant global challenge of climate change and the pivotal role of the United Nations Climate Change Conference (UNCCC) and related events like the United Nations Climate Action Summit and World Earth Day in formulating policies and action plans through international cooperation. The study focuses on the rhetorical techniques employed in these speeches which not only enhance the persuasive impact of the speeches but also contribute to their artistic and expressive quality. Despite extensive research on political speeches within the UN context, there's a noticeable research gap in examining persuasive rhetoric beyond the UN platform. This paper seeks to bridge this gap by providing a comprehensive analysis of persuasive rhetoric and discourse analysis in political speeches on climate change in various international and national contexts. The methodology includes a thorough review of related literature on rhetoric, communication, discourse analysis, and writing strategies. The study employs qualitative research methods, focusing on discourse and rhetorical analysis of speeches by world leaders from the seven continents at the United Nations Climate Change Conference. The research aims to understand the structures, key elements, and dominant rhetorical appeals used in these speeches. It also seeks to develop an instructional plan to enhance skills in writing persuasive texts, with significant implications for policymakers, communication specialists, and researchers in the field of climate change. In summary, this paper provides valuable insights into the persuasive strategies used in climate change speeches, offering guidance for effective communication and policy-making in addressing the challenges of climate change.

Keywords

climate change speeches, discourse analysis, persuasion, rhetorical analysis, writing strategies

1. Introduction

Climate change poses significant challenges globally, impacting societies and ecosystems through extreme weather events, rising sea levels, and biodiversity loss. The annual United Nations Climate Change Conference addresses these issues by seeking international cooperation to formulate effective

policies and action plans. The conference brings together representatives from governments, intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other stakeholders to discuss and address climate change challenges. Key issues include mitigation, adaptation, finance, technology transfer, and capacity building. The conference aims to reach global agreements on reducing greenhouse gas emissions and enhancing resilience to climate impacts through political persuasion and rhetorical strategies.

Rhetoric, defined as the art of using language effectively and persuasively, plays a crucial role in shaping public discourse and influencing opinions. Aristotle described rhetoric as discovering the available means of persuasion in any given situation, focusing on ethos (credibility), pathos (emotion), and logos (logic). Cicero emphasized the combination of wisdom and eloquence in rhetorical practice (Leen, 1991). Augustine (2001) saw rhetoric as the art of teaching biblical truth, while Bacon believed it harmonized reason, imagination, and will (Van, 2014). The Enlightenment period shifted rhetoric's focus to style, with Campbell linking rhetoric to psychology and human understanding. Key rhetorical techniques include alliteration, anaphora, antithesis, hyperbole, irony, metaphor, parallelism, personification, simile, and understatement, each serving to enhance the persuasive power of communication (Cialdini, 1984).

Persuasion, a core aspect of rhetoric, involves influencing beliefs, attitudes, or behaviors through symbolic interaction. Aristotle's ethos, pathos, and logos remain foundational in understanding persuasive communication. Burke (1950) defined persuasion as a symbolic activity that changes attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors, emphasizing the role of identification and consubstantiality. Weaver (1995) viewed persuasion as a cultural behavior integral to human communication and the co-creation of reality. Booth (1983) and Chen et al. (2021) highlighted the interactive nature of persuasion, where speaker and audience engage in a process of achieving shared understanding and agreement.

Communication, the exchange of information through speech, writing, or nonverbal cues, is essential for conveying meaning and achieving understanding (Jones & Peterson, 2017). Effective communication involves clear language, active listening, and appropriate interpretation of messages. Discourse analysis, a method for studying language use in social contexts, examines how language creates meaning, constructs social identities, and influences power dynamics. Comparative analysis involves identifying similarities and differences between objects, phenomena, or concepts to gain deeper understanding and insights (Pickvance, 2001). Qualitative analysis interprets nonnumerical data, such as interviews, observations, and texts, to understand human behavior, attitudes, and experiences, often generating insights and developing theory (Onwuegbuzie, 2012). This study employs these analytical frameworks to explore the rhetorical strategies used in the United Nations Climate Change Conference, aiming to uncover how language and persuasion shape global climate policy and action.

And in the past 20 years, there has been extensive research on rhetoric and writing techniques. Stephen and Rosenwasser (2009) guided students to improve their analytical writing skills, including how to

analyze texts, how to present powerful viewpoints, how to organize arguments. Harris et al. (2013) compared the rhetoric and writing techniques employed in political speeches.

The significance of this research is to gain a better understanding of the writing strategies and rhetorical techniques used in persuasion speeches. Additionally, understanding the use of rhetorical appeals such as ethos, logos, and pathos can help individuals analyze and evaluate persuasion speeches more critically.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

This study aims to analyze and describe the climate change persuasive speeches of the world leaders as a basis for an instructional plan in enhancing skills in writing persuasive texts. It sought to answer the following questions.

1. What types of structures do the leaders utilize?
2. What are the key elements used in the persuasive speeches of world leaders?
3. What dominant rhetorical appeals were used in the artifacts?
4. What instructional plan could be developed to enhance students' skills in writing persuasive speech?

2. Methodology

This study used qualitative research methods, employing discourse and rhetorical analysis to obtain data. Qualitative research consists of non-quantifiable data, such as texts, words, images, and so on.

2.1 Research Design

Discourse and rhetorical analysis can be utilized to analyze world leaders' speeches on climate change in several ways. Firstly, discourse analysis is concerned with examining the language, structure, and context of the speeches to understand how meaning is constructed and conveyed. It focuses on identifying patterns, themes, and power dynamics within the discourse (Eubanks, 2015). Rhetorical analysis, on the other hand, examines the persuasive strategies and techniques employed by the speakers to influence their audience. It involves analyzing the use of rhetorical devices, such as ethos, logos, and pathos, as well as the overall organization and delivery of the speeches (Wróbel, 2015).

By applying discourse and rhetorical analysis to these dimensions, a comprehensive understanding of the world leaders' speeches on climate change can be gained, revealing the strategies, ideologies, and effects embedded within their communication.

2.2 Corpus of the Study

The research subjects were speeches made by leaders of seven continents in the United Nations Climate Change Conference. Each leader's speech had different content and emphasis, but all stressed the importance and necessity of tackling climate change. They called on countries around the world to act to reduce carbon emissions, protect the environment and protect the earth. Table 1 shows the information on the corpus of the study as selected.

Table 1. Overview of the Speeches' Speakers, Continent, Occasion and Time

Speech No.	Speaker	Continent	Occasion and Time
1	President Xi Jinping	Asia	United Nations Climate Action Summit, 2015
2	President Barack Obama	North America	United Nations Climate Change Conference, 2009
3	Queen Elizabeth II	Europe	COP26 Global Climate Summit in Glasgow UK, 2021
4	Brazil's President Bolsonaro	South America	COP25, 2019
5	President Faustin Archange Touadé	Africa	United Nations Climate Change Conference, 2022
6	Mr. Bruce Bilimon	Oceania	United Nations Climate Change Conference, 2022
7	Karolin Eichle	Antartica	Interview on WMO's Global Climate Report, 2023

2.3 Instrumentation

2.3.1 Discourse Analysis Guide

The Discourse Analysis Guide serves as a framework for the proponent to systematically analyze the speeches collected for the study. It provides a structured approach to examine the language, structure, and context of the speeches in relation to climate change. The guide includes instructions on identifying key themes, analyzing discourse markers, identifying power dynamics, and examining the overall discursive strategies employed by the speakers. By following this guide, the proponent can ensure consistency and rigor in the analysis process.

2.3.2 Rhetorical Analysis Guide

The Rhetorical Analysis Guide assists the proponent in analyzing the persuasive techniques and rhetorical devices used in the speeches. It provides a framework to identify and analyze elements such as ethos, logos, pathos, logical reasoning, narrative structures, emotional appeals, and counterarguments. The guide offers specific instructions on identifying and assessing the effectiveness of these rhetorical strategies in persuading the audience and achieving the speaker's objectives. By utilizing this guide, the researcher can gain insights into the rhetorical choices made by the speakers and their impact on audience perception and action.

Both guides were used in collecting the data by guiding the proponent through a systematic analysis of the speeches.

2.4 Data Gathering Procedure

In order to gather the data needed in the study, the researcher employed the following procedures.

1. Before the data collection, the researcher set the inclusion-exclusion criteria for the corpus of the study.

2. After setting the inclusion-exclusion criteria, the researcher selected the speech cases. The researcher searched all the speeches. It should be noted that the collected speeches were the original texts to avoid translation errors or editorial modifications.
3. After collecting the speeches, the researcher organized and classified the data, such as by leader, time, nation, etc., for subsequent analysis and comparison.
4. The researcher analyzed the persuasive rhetoric of the collected speeches, including the rhetorical techniques, language style, emotional expression, logical structure, and evidence support used by the speakers.
5. The validity of the research data was established. The researcher sought the help of other researchers to check the data and validate the researcher's analysis and interpretations.

2.5 Data Analysis

This study used qualitative research methods, through the text and rhetorical analysis to analyze data. The practices of Text Analysis Theory and Discourse Analysis in analyzing the 7 speeches, including the analysis of the rhetorical structures, key elements, and rhetorical appeals employed in the speeches were used.

To address the first three research questions, Text and Rhetorical Analysis were applied. To address the fourth research question, this largely depended on the results of the three previous questions.

Through data analysis, this study intends to find out the persuasive rhetoric strategies and language features applied by the leaders of seven continents in their speeches on climate change at the United Nations, and summarizes the writing strategies of such speeches. Finally, the study puts forward the corresponding writing strategy suggestions for the future climate change speech writing to provide writing reference, skills and strategies with students.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Structures that World Leaders Utilized in their Speeches

Table 2. Structures that World Leaders Utilized in their Speeches

Structure Speech	Arg.	Cau. & Eff.	Descr.	Narra.	Pro. & Solu.	Ques. & Ans.	Sequ.
1	√	√	√		√		√
2	√	√	√		√	√	
3			√	√	√		
4	√		√			√	
5			√		√		√
6		√			√		√
7		√	√	√			
Total	3	4	6	2	5	2	3

Table 2 presents the rhetoric structures that world leaders utilized in their speeches. The analysis reveals that six out of the seven speeches primarily utilized descriptive structures, underscoring the leaders' preference for setting detailed contexts within their discourse. While problem-solution structures were employed in five speeches, indicating a strategic approach to propose actionable solutions; the use of cause-and-effect was noted in four speeches, reflecting a methodical linkage of climate actions and their impacts. Argumentative and sequential structures were evident in three speeches each, demonstrating a balanced mix of persuasion and orderly progression, whereas question-answer and narrative structures were least utilized, appearing in only two speeches.

President Xi Jinping's exclusive use of an argumentative structure underlines a strategic emphasis on urgent, actionable rhetoric in climate governance, which starkly contrasts with the more descriptive or narrative forms typically employed by other world leaders. This method, by focusing on direct calls to action and policy advocacy, aims to mobilize immediate international response and cooperation. Rhetorical approach is effective in instigating policy changes as it often correlates with a higher perceived immediacy and criticality of the issues addressed, which can enhance audience engagement and drive legislative momentum.

President Xi Jinping uses "Cause and Effect" structure to underline the interconnectedness of global efforts against climate change and the resulting progress, while also implying the need for continued and enhanced action.

This descriptive aspect of Obama's speech effectively communicates the U.S.'s proactive measures in renewable energy investment, reinforcing the message of commitment and leadership in the global response to climate change.

In Queen Elizabeth II's speech at COP26, the narrative structure is notably enriched with personal reflections, adding depth and a human dimension to her message. Her statement, "This is a duty I am especially happy to discharge, as the impact of the environment on human progress was a subject close to the heart of my dear late husband," weaves a personal narrative into the broader context of environmental advocacy.

President Jair Bolsonaro effectively utilizes the "Question Answer" rhetorical device and structure, posing probing questions to challenge prevailing narratives and perceptions about environmental responsibilities.

In Mr. Faustin Archange Touadera's speech, the sequential approach in addressing climate change provides a clear and structured roadmap. Starting with collective action, setting a specific objective, focusing on emission reduction, and implying further strategic steps, his approach outlines a comprehensive plan to combat climate change. This sequential narrative is essential for understanding the complexity of the issue and the multifaceted response required to effectively address it.

Representing the Pacific Small Island Developing States (SIDS), Mr. Bruce Bilimon articulates a compelling "Problem Solution" narrative in COP 26, 2021, emphasizing the urgent necessity for comprehensive climate action.

In the June 2023 interview with Karolin Eichle of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), significant attention is given to the drastic impacts of climate change, particularly on the polar regions. By focusing on a well-known species like the polar bear, the interview effectively communicates the urgency of climate action. It transforms statistical data about ice melt into a narrative that is more likely to resonate with the public and policymakers.

3.2 Key Elements Used in the Persuasive Speeches

Table 3. Key Elements that World Leaders Used in their Speeches

Elements Speech	Arg.	Call for Act.	Count. arg.	Emo. Pers.	Logi. Rea.	State. of View.
1	√				√	√
2	√	√	√		√	
3	√	√		√		
4	√		√			√
5	√	√				
6	√	√		√	√	
7	√					√
Total	7	4	2	2	3	3

Table 3 presents the key elements that world leaders used in their speeches, revealing a significant reliance on argumentative structures across all seven speeches. This indicates a strategic preference for building strong, rational cases for climate action. Calls to action were prominent in four speeches, emphasizing the urgency of the climate crisis and the need for immediate collective action. However, the use of logical reasoning and statements of viewpoints were less prevalent, found only in two speeches, suggesting that while leaders are keen to argue for change, there may be less emphasis on detailed rational discourse and personal commitments to specific viewpoints. Counterarguments and emotional persuasion were also limited, used in just two speeches, indicating a possible underutilization of these persuasive strategies which could otherwise engage a broader audience emotionally and counteract opposing views more effectively.

It becomes evident from Table 3 that arguments are central components in all speeches analyzed. This prevalence underscores the fundamental role that structured argumentation plays in influencing international policy and public opinion on climate change. Arguments are utilized not only to present data and facts but also to align these with the strategic goals and ethical stances of the speakers. The predominant use of argumentative structures suggests that world leaders are focusing on rational appeals to convey the seriousness of climate issues.

For instance, the consistent use of arguments across all speeches reflects a universal recognition of the need for logical and structured communication to effectively address complex global issues like climate change. The variation in the use of other elements such as calls for action, logical reasoning, and emotional persuasion highlights the different rhetorical strategies tailored to specific audiences and contexts.

Moreover, the absence of elements like counter arguments in some speeches may indicate a strategic choice to focus on building a positive case rather than addressing opposition, possibly due to the perceived strength of the consensus on the urgency of climate action among the audience. This decision might also reflect a rhetorical strategy aimed at reinforcing solidarity and commitment among allies rather than engaging with detractors.

Each of these elements warrants further discussion. For instance, why do some leaders choose to incorporate emotional persuasion or counterarguments? This can be linked to the specific cultural and political contexts of their audiences, where emotional appeals might resonate more deeply or where significant opposition needs to be directly addressed to pave the way for policy changes. Such analysis not only enriches our understanding of the rhetorical choices made but also illuminates the strategic adaptations leaders make in the complex landscape of global diplomacy on climate change.

However, the relative scarcity of emotional persuasion and counterarguments might imply missed opportunities to fully engage the audience's emotions and address skepticism directly. Expanding the use of these underutilized elements could enhance the overall effectiveness of global climate communication by making the messages more relatable and robust in overcoming opposition.

Van (1997) presents that in the realm of political discourse, persuasive speech plays a critical role, employing rhetoric to influence, inform, and motivate audiences on pressing issues. Persuasive speeches, particularly in the political context, are meticulously crafted to convey messages with clarity and conviction, aiming to sway public opinion and encourage action. When examining the persuasive speeches of world leaders from the provided examples, it becomes evident that their effectiveness hinges on several key rhetorical elements. These elements are foundational in shaping the discourse, enabling leaders to articulate their viewpoints compellingly, address complex global challenges, and galvanize collective efforts toward common goals.

3.3 Dominant Rhetorical Appeals Used in the Speeches

Table 4. Dominant Rhetorical Appeals that World Leaders Used in their Speeches

Speeches	Rhetorical Appeals		
	Ethos	Logos	Pathos
1	√		√
2	√	√	√
3	√		√

4	√		
5		√	
6		√	
7		√	√
Total	4	4	4

Table 4 presents the rhetorical appeals that world leaders used in their speeches. It shows that there are 4 speeches which used ethos; 4 speeches used logos; and 4 speeches used pathos.

Dominant rhetorical appeals refer to the most effective persuasive strategies used in communication, typically encompassing ethos, pathos, and logos, which form the Triangle Theory of rhetorical analysis. These appeals, originating from Aristotle's rhetorical theory, are essential tools in shaping and delivering arguments, influencing audiences through credibility, emotion, and logic (Aristotle, 2019).

Logos centers on the argument's logic, focusing on reason, evidence, and the structure employed by the writer or speaker. It examines the coherence and clarity with which a point is argued. Ethos, on the other hand, pertains to the writer or speaker's character, authority, credibility, style, and correctness. It appeals to the trustworthiness and expertise of the individual presenting the argument, influencing how the audience perceives their role in the discourse. Pathos involves the emotional dimension. It serves as a crucial bridge connecting the writer or speaker with the audience, allowing for a deeper, more empathetic understanding and resonance with the argument presented (Wróbel, 2015).

For this study, the three rhetorical appeals are similarly dominant for the seven speeches and these seven leaders skillfully integrate ethos, logos, and pathos in their speeches. They establish their credibility, provide logical justifications for their arguments, and emotionally engage with their audiences to persuasively communicate their viewpoints on climate change and environmental policies.

3.4 Instructional Plan in Writing Persuasive Speeches

An Instructional Plan (iPlan) is a comprehensive framework designed to guide teachers in delivering structured and standards-aligned instruction. The three iPlans are designed for three lessons in the course of “Art of Public Speech and Writing” for English majors of undergraduate program in their sixth semester at Guangzhou College of Commerce, Guangzhou, Guangdong, China. Each iPlan encompasses seven necessary components. The corresponding introduction to each component is as following:

a. Topic/Subject Matter

This part identifies the specific topic or area of study the plan addresses, ensuring that the instruction is focused and relevant. A well-defined topic or subject matter keeps the educational experience relevant and ensures that the teaching does not stray from the intended learning path.

b. Content Standard

Content standard outlines the educational goals or benchmarks that the instruction aims to achieve, providing a clear target for learning outcomes. It defines what students should understand and be able

to do in a particular subject area at the end of a lesson or course. It is designed to be measurable and achievable.

c. Performance Standard

Performance standards describe the level of achievement students are expected to reach by the end of the instructional period. They represent the practical application of the knowledge and skills acquired through learning activities and assessments. These standards help in gauging student success and proficiency in the subject matter, providing both teachers and students with clear expectations for what constitutes quality performance.

d. Affect Standard

The affect standard includes the emotional and attitudinal goals of education. It aims to cultivate and enhance students' attitudes, values, and feelings towards the subject matter and the learning process itself. These standards recognize that education is not just about intellectual growth but also about developing students' emotional intelligence, work ethic, motivation, and respect for the discipline.

e. Competencies

This section is broken down into knowledge, skills, and attitudes, detailing what students should know, be able to do, and how they should feel about the subject matter upon completion of the instruction.

e.1. Knowledge: This component focuses on the cognitive outcomes of education, detailing the critical information, theories, and concepts that students should grasp.

e.2. Skill: It outlines the practical abilities and techniques students need to acquire, which enable them to perform tasks and solve problems related to the subject matter efficiently.

e.3. Attitude: This part targets the development of students' perspectives, values and feelings towards the topic. It strives to build a mindset conducive to ongoing learning and appreciation of the subject's relevance.

f. Resources Needed

This section lists all the necessary resources, including materials, equipment, information, and any other support required to the instructional plan successfully. It ensures that the classroom environment is prepared to support the teaching and learning processes, providing students and teachers with everything they need to meet the lesson's objectives.

g. Structure

The structure provides a comprehensive framework for the actual delivery of the lesson, broken down into the following seven phases.

g.1. Preliminary Activities: These are initial tasks designed to prepare students for new learning by activating their prior knowledge and setting the context for upcoming instruction.

g.2. Motivation: This section engages techniques and activities aiming to capture students' interest and engagement with the topic, creating an enthusiastic and receptive interest for the new learning.

g.3. Action: This section is where the hands-on learning takes place. Students engage in activities that require the application of concepts and skills, fostering active participation in the learning process.

g.4. Knowledge Deliberation: In this stage, students are given opportunities to delve deeper into the content, through discussions, questioning, and exploratory activities, which promote a thorough understanding of the subject matter.

g.5. Estimation: This section involves assessing and reflecting students' learning and understanding, often through self-reflection or feedback mechanisms, to evaluate progress towards the learning objectives.

g.6. Reflection: Generally, this section allows for self-assessment and contemplation on the learned material. Students are encouraged to think critically about what they have learned, their process of learning, and how it applies to broader contexts or their own lives.

g.7. Concluding Activities: These activities are designed to sum up the instruction, allowing students to consolidate and reinforce their learning, ensuring they grasp the key takeaways before moving on to the next lesson.

Table 5. Subjects of the Three Iplans

Section	Subject
1	Structural Strategies Employed by Leaders
2	The Art and Strategy of Persuasion in World Leaders' Speeches
3	Exploring Rhetorical Appeals: Ethos, Logos, and Pathos in Communication

As shown in Table 5, the first session of the instructional plan delves into the intricacies of speech structures, focusing on various frameworks and organizational patterns commonly employed in persuasive speech writing. Students will explore the problem-solution framework, cause and effect structures, sequential organization, and narrative techniques, among others. By dissecting these structures, students gain a deeper understanding of how to effectively organize their ideas and arguments to maximize impact on the audience. Through analysis and practice, they learn to select the most appropriate structure based on their topic, audience, and purpose, thereby enhancing their ability to tailor their speeches for optimal persuasion (Li, 2021).

Moving forward for Session 2, the instructional plan progresses to a comprehensive study of key elements essential for persuasive speech writing. This section immerses students in a rich array of persuasive elements such as arguments, calls for action, counterarguments, emotional persuasion, logical reasoning, and statements of viewpoint.

Finally, the instructional plan culminates in practical exercises that provide students with opportunities to explore and understand the dominant rhetorical appeals—ethos (credibility), logos (logic), and pathos (emotion)—as utilized in various artifacts, including speeches by world leaders on climate change for Session 3. Through guided instruction and hands-on activities, students learn how to strategically deploy these techniques to appeal to the audience's emotions, logic, and credibility, thus

enhancing the persuasiveness and effectiveness of their speeches. By honing these skills, students develop a nuanced understanding of how language choice and rhetorical devices can influence audience perception and decision-making, empowering them to craft persuasive speeches that resonate deeply with their listeners.

In summary, the iPlan is a strategic and detailed guide designed to deliver education that is not only academically strong but also develops the holistic development of the student. It integrates clear goals, expectations, and a structured process, with the support of necessary resources, to achieve a comprehensive and impactful learning experience.

4. Conclusion

The study on world leaders' persuasive speeches on climate change illustrates an application of rhetorical strategies, where the compelling integration of Aristotle's ethos, pathos, and logos stands out. These leaders skillfully craft their speeches to resonate with global concerns, blending emotional appeal, ethical credibility, and logical reasoning.

This showcases their mastery of political rhetoric and acts as an essential educational resource in persuasive writing. By analyzing these speeches, students acquire practical skills in crafting compelling narratives that effectively blend emotional appeal with factual accuracy and ethical integrity.

The study underscores the necessity for persuasive writing to transcend simple presentation of data; it must resonate with the audience emotionally, ethically, and logically. Incorporating these rhetorical strategies into educational curricula significantly enhances students' abilities to develop content that is not only compelling but also convincing and influential, equipping them with vital skills applicable in diverse professional and personal contexts.

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