

RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF BUSINESS STUDENTS WRITING: A RESEARCH PAPER

By:

Ahmad Idris Asmaradhani
Dosen FKIP UMSurabaya

ABSTRAC

It has always been recognized that when a speaker wishes to persuade, he or she must analyze the speech situation and adapt his or her speech to it. In numerous discussions about rhetoric, Aristotle is recognized as an expert in rhetoric who devoted more than a third of his Art of Rhetoric to study of the audience. Ever since, rhetoricians have taught that a speaker who would persuade others to believe and to act must understand how the listeners feel, what they want, and what they need. In short, the speaker must begin where his or her listeners are. A persuasive writing or speaking is often aimed at the heart or the stomach instead of the head. This can mean that there are some things or reasons more acceptable to the readers or listeners' feeling, which is in the stomach, than to their logic, which is in the head. Consequently, instead of being logical only, a persuasive writer or a speaker might add some strategies in order to win the readers or listeners' assent.

Key words: logos, pathos, ethos, rhetorical

Introduction

In any form of communication, the degree and power of pride in the human heart must never be underestimated. Many people are unwilling to hear objections of any kind, and view disagreement as a sign of contempt for their intellect. To avoid this kind of thing, it is suggested the use of various rhetorical devices for the purpose of politeness and tact. It is further argued that once the opponent, objector, or disbeliever is insulted, he will never be persuaded of anything, no matter how obviously wrong he is or how clearly right what we suggest are.

When a speaker wishes to persuade, he or she must analyze the speech situation and adapt his or her speech to it. In numerous discussions about rhetoric, Aristotle is recognized as an expert in rhetoric who devoted most of his discussion in studying about the audience. Ever since, rhetoricians have concluded that a speaker who would persuade others to believe and to act must understand how the listeners feel, what they want, and what they need. In short, the speaker must begin where his or her listeners are.

Similarly, in the discussion about *Persuasive Writing and Speaking*, Kneffel states that persuasive writing and speaking are often aimed at the heart or the stomach instead of the head (1991: 270). When saying this, Kneffel might mean that there are some things or reasons more acceptable to the readers or listeners' feeling, which is in the stomach, than to their logic, which is in the head. Consequently, instead of being logical only, one may add some strategies in order to win the readers or listeners' assent.

In an argumentative writing—at least in Kneffel's view—the writer tries to win the readers' assent by

proving a logical case (1991: 271). In a persuasive writing, however, Kneffel continues, the writer tries to win the assent by moving the readers towards emotional or ethical agreement with the writer's position. From this view, one can draw an analogical conclusion that in persuasive speaking, the speaker (in this paper termed the seller) also tries to win the assent by moving the listeners (in this paper termed future customer) towards the emotional or ethical agreement with the speaker's position.

When discussing about ethics in business negotiation, Lewicki, *et al* (1999: 229), states that the very nature of human existence leads to individuals to develop a personal conscience, an internal sense of what is right and what one ought to do. This Lewicki, *et al*'s statement more or less means that the decision one makes about something is basically based his or her own personal judgment. In terms of persuasive speaking, therefore, it is this conscience that the listener or the audience will make that must be directed by the speaker in one way or the other.

Being persuasive in business negotiation is often one of the most crucial parts of the business. That is to say that in business it is very important for the seller to speak persuasively in order to move the future customer towards the seller's position. In other words, the success of directing the future customer towards such position seems to depend on how effective a seller moves the future customer. Based on this argument, business communication or negotiation can be defined as "the process of developing an understanding in order to arrive at an agreement or compromise on a matter of importance" (*see also*: Andersen, 2001: 167-183; Moor and Weigand, 2004: 3). Since the means of proving or moving the future cus-

tomers in business communication or negotiation is language, it can be argued that the success depends on how effective the seller uses the language in that negotiation.

For business students whose English is a second or foreign language (ESL/EFL), however, being persuasive in business communication is not a simple thing and can even be problematic. Furthermore, the success may depend not only on how effective the students—as the future business people—use English as the second or foreign language, but also on how tactful they write or speak to the future customers. For business students whose English is an ESL or an EFL, therefore, only being effective in using English seems to be insufficient. Other than that, they still need to be tactful in using English, especially during business negotiation.

Business Communication and Rhetoric

In order that communication becomes persuasive enough to change the future customer's minds, a speech must have some criteria. When discussing about "Definitions of Rhetoric: Archipelago Rhetorica" (2005: 9), Cramer states that there are three aims which the orator must always have in view—he must instruct, move and charm his hearers. Granted that negotiation is a business communication, these are also the three things that a seller must have in becoming a persuasive negotiator: he must have the ability to (1) instruct the hearer, (2) move the hearer, and (3) charm the hearer. The term persuasion in business communication, therefore, can be defined as the art of negotiation in which the seller adapts his or her statements to the future customers so that the statements have the effects on the feelings, thoughts, and actions of the audience. From

the eyes of a seller, it can be stated that negotiation is a business communication where the seller seeks to change the future customer's minds.

These three aims can be met by using various rhetorical means (or often called modes) of persuasion. One of the most famous classical rhetorical modes of persuasion—as proposed by Aristotle—is the Tripartite or the Three Appeals. They are *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos* (Roberts, 2004a, 2004b, and 2004c). These tripartite or the three appeals are often employed to create a convincing argument in speeches. In more details, *logos* is the logical and rational argument; *pathos* is the creation of an emotional reaction in the audience; and *ethos* is the projecting of a trustworthy, authoritative, or charismatic image through the speaker's character (*see also*: Burton, 2004b: 1; Daniel, 2006: 1; Eidenmuller, 2006: 3; Newall, 2001: 2-3; Stein, 2002: 2; Wheeler, 1998-2005: 3).

Research Method and the Data Collection

This research paper is conducted on the data obtained from the 2nd semester students of Business English during their Communication Strategy, a speaking 2 class for business students. The data are in the forms of 2 (two) business exchange and 1 (one) business written exchange. The research is intended to see both linguistic errors and rhetorical errors the students make. Since it is the time and space is very limited, the linguistic errors are not analyzed here in this research paper. Instead, this research is focused on the rhetorical errors the business students make.

In turn, this research paper is also intended to propose how some certain statements in business communication—the negotiation—should be reconstructed rhetorically so that

they are not only effective but also tactful enough to change the future customer's minds and move them towards the seller's direction. Thus, some “less rhetorical business statements” from the 2 (two) business (oral) exchange and 1 (one) business (written) exchange are analyzed in order to propose some “more” rhetorical statements that are reconstructed from those statements. That is, the brief discussion in this research paper will analyze some business statements and analyze them in terms of how they fit into the above mentioned Aristotelian Tripartite. Once the “more rhetorical statements” can be proposed over the “ordinary business statements”, they can both be taken into account for materializing the students of business whose English is an ESL or EFL.

The linguistic data of this research paper were taken on the spot when the business students were conducting some role-playing in Communication Strategy, another name for Speaking 2 class. During the class, the students were strictly required to use English for any (role-play) business activities. The activities are in the forms of conversations (business oral exchanges) and writing (letter exchanges). During the class, therefore, some students might act as the Sellers or Customer Service, and some other act as the Buyer or the Future Customer.

Three data were picked up for linguistic analysis as well as rhetorical analysis. It was found that the errors the students made could basically be classified into two categories. They are linguistic errors and rhetorical errors. The linguistic errors can further be classified into three categories. They are, grammatical errors, lexical (word choice) errors, and phonological errors. The rhetorical errors can be seen as basically socio-cultural and this is the focus of this research paper.

The details of the data obtained are as follows:

Oral exchange (datum) 1:

Future customer: I would like to place an order of 75 cartons of FREZZY, and we expect them delivered by today.

Customer service: Excuse us. We cannot deliver in lots of less than one hundred cartons.

Oral exchange (datum) 2:

Future customer: We need to have 300 chairs for the wedding party on August 16.

Customer service: We are sorry. We cannot furnish the chairs by August 16.

Written exchange (datum 3):

Dear Sir,

We regret to inform you that we experienced difficulty in handling your order. Your order is now being shipped in the most efficient and fastest way.

Again, we sincerely apologize for the delay and inconvenience caused by our error. We thank you for your understanding and patience regarding this matter as we look forward to serving you in the future.

Sincerely Yours

EVERPROFIT TRANSPORT Co., Ltd.

Discussion

During their role-playing for purchasing drinking water, one of the students is found negotiating with a future customer about the minimum amount of purchase of FREZZY (not its real name) drinking water. The following (datum 1) conversation of business negotiation takes place at the desk of the customer service:

Future customer: I would like to place an order of 75 cartons of FREZZY, and we expect them delivered by today.

Customer service: Excuse us. We cannot deliver in lots of less than one hundred cartons.

In the above cut, the statement made by the customer service—in view of rhetoric—is unacceptable. That is, although the statement is initiated with the phrase “Excuse us” in order to reduce the rudeness, the statement is still somewhat “insulting”. This is because, when measured in terms of rhetoric, the statement meets only logos—the logical aspect of the business argument. The statement, however, ignores the other two aspects (pathos and ethos) of rhetoric.

Part of the insultion may come from the use of the phrases *we cannot* which means that the customer service, as the seller, cannot meet the customer’s request. Another part of the insultion may come from the use of the phrase *less than one hundred cartons* which means that the customer can place the order only if he or she purchases at least 100 cartons. These phrases are psychologically insulting. That is, in terms of Aristotelian rhetoric, does not meet the pathos.

It would be a lot more rhetorical if the statement is paraphrased as, “Excuse us. To keep down the packaging costs and to help customers save on delivery expenses, we deliver in lots of 100 cartons or more”. This alternative version contains not only the logical and rational argument, but also creates an emotional reaction, the pathos. The rational argument may come from phrase *to keep down the packaging cost and to help customers save on delivery expenses*, which more or less means that the price of the FREZZY includes the costs of packaging and the delivery. This type of statement not only gives the customer an understanding “the seller’s calculation”, but also leaves an impression that the customer service is polite. Ultimately, the statement is also capable of leaving a charismatic image about the seller’s character.

Another statement that also feels “insulting” can be seen in the second datum taken for this research paper. One of the business students is negotiating with a party equipment rental supplier where the student is trying to rent 300 club chairs for the party. The cut of the exchange is as follows:

Future customer: We need to have 300 chairs for the wedding party on August 16.

Customer service: We are sorry. We cannot furnish the chairs by August 16.

In the above cut, the customer service makes a statement that in view of rhetoric is also insulting. The insulting thing about this statement might come from the fact that:

- the statement put WE as the topic.
- the word CANNOT FURNISH may in-

dicate the seller’s disability.

Putting the word WE at the beginning of this sentence, in terms of discourse analysis, is called topicalization or thematization (*see*: Nunan, 1993: 45-47). That is, by putting the word WE at the beginning of the sentence, the user is talking about WE. In this regard, WE who cannot fulfill what WE sell. In terms of discourse, therefore, putting the word WE at the beginning of this sentence can mean that the speaker is talking about WE who is disable to fulfill what WE sell. In terms of rhetoric, this can cause a sense of untrustworthy, which at the same time can mean a failure to meet the ethos.

Instead of putting WE as the topic of the sentence, it would be a lot more rhetorical if the speaker (the customer Service) puts the phrase THE CHAIRS at the beginning of the sentence, as the topic of the sentence. That is because—in terms of syntactic linguistics—it is the CHAIRS that both parties are talking about in the negotiation. Putting the phrase THE CHAIRS as the topic of the sentence, therefore, will leave an impression that it is THE CHAIRS that are not available; it is not the supplier who cannot do the job. In other words, putting the phrase THE CHAIRS will leave a more logical and acceptable sense to the customer, which is logos.

Further than that, the phrase “CANNOT FURNISH” may leave an impression that the seller is testifying that he is incapable of supplying the “service he or she sells”. Again, in terms of rhetoric, this sentence fails to fulfill the aspect of ethos. It will be a lot more persuasive if the sentence is reconstructed as, “WE ARE SORRY THAT THE CHAIRS ARE AVAILABLE ONLY AFTER AUGUST 17”. Saying this sentence does not only fulfill the aspects of logos and ethos, but might also cause the (future) customer

feels that the customer service has tried to meet what he or she needs. Making the customer feels so, in terms of rhetoric, is part of pathos.

Another cut of an exchange that at a glance seems alright can be seen in the following written message. When asked to report about the problem of failing to ship the goods on the intended vessel, one of the student—acting as the customer service for a transport company—writes to his customer as follows:

Dear Sir,

We regret to inform you that we experienced difficulty in handling your order. Your order is now being shipped in the most efficient and fastest way.

Again, we sincerely apologize for the delay and inconvenience caused by our error. We thank you for your understanding and patience regarding this matter as we look forward to serving you in the future.

Sincerely Yours

EVERPROFIT TRASPORT Co., Ltd.

Again, at a glance the above short message sounds as promising for the customer. When looked deeper, however, this message does not help solve any of the customer's problem caused by the belated shipment and delivery.

This message does contain an aspect of pathos because the seller is apologizing at least twice and thanking at once to the customer what he has caused. However, the phrase "YOUR ORDER IS NOW BEING SHIPPED IN THE MOST EFFICIENT AND FASTEST WAY" does not contain any fixed schedule. That is, the schedule of ship-

ment or the delivery of the goods and its arrival cannot be estimated. In terms of rhetoric, therefore, the seller (the customer service) fails to employ the logic or the logos in his business communication. As a result, the customer does not have any idea when he or she will receive the goods being purchased.

Similarly, apologizing for the delay and the inconvenience caused will only leave an impression that the seller only tries to reduce the disappointment, which might be an effort of applying pathos. Still, the problem remains unsolved because the goods owner does not have any idea when the goods will arrive at his or her hands. This, therefore, also means that the seller cannot meet the customer's requirements, and thus he fails to build a "trustworthy" which means he fails to employ the ethos. In order to avoid those unnecessary disappointments, it would a whole lot better if the phrase "YOUR ORDER IS NOW BEING SHIPPED IN THE MOST EFFICIENT AND FASTEST WAY" is reconstructed into, "YOUR ORDER IS NOW BEING SHIPPED ON MV. ASPIRE-803S, SCHEDULED TO ETA SURABAYA APRIL 20.2008".

This schedule of arrival—tentative, though—will be able to leave an impression that the transport company is behaving in a very logical way in solving the problem. That is, because the transport company's customer service can give a schedule which based on it the customer will be able to estimate and arrange the goods so and so. This at the same time means that the transport company's customer service employs the logos. Further than that, the transport company's customer service can also make an additional statement as, "ALL CHARGES INCURRED IN RELATION TO THE HANDLING OF THE GOOD OUR SIDE WILL BE ON

OUR ACCOUNT.” This statement will leave an impression that the seller does not only apologize for what has happened. Instead, the transport company has also re-arranged the shipment and delivery as well as acted in a business manner. This, by all means, will also mean that the transport company understands how the customer feels about the delay of the shipment and delivery—which is pathos—and leaves an impression that the seller is responsible for the belated consignment—which is part of building the ethos.

In terms of rhetoric, therefore, the above 2 (two) oral exchanges should be reconstructed as follows:

Oral exchange 1:

Future customer : I would like to place an order of 75 cartons of FREZZY, and we expect them delivered by today.

Customer service: Excuse us. To keep down the packaging costs and to help Customers save on delivery expenses, we deliver in lots of 100 cartons or more.

Oral exchange 2:

Future customer: We need to have 300 chairs for the wedding party on August 16 .

Customer service: We are sorry that the chairs are available only after August 17.

Similarly, the written message (from EVERPROFIT TRANSPORT Co., Ltd)

above should be paraphrases and re-written as follows:

Dear Sir,

We regret to inform you that we experienced difficulty in handling your order. Your order is now being shipped in the most efficient and fastest way.

Again, we sincerely apologize for the delay and inconvenience caused by our error. We thank you for your understanding and patience regarding this matter as we look forward to serving you in the future.

Sincerely Yours

EVERPROFIT TRANSPORT Co., Ltd.

Conclusions and Suggestions

From the above discussion, one can draw a conclusion that a business communication, more particularly a business negotiation, usually (if not always) involves some aspects of rhetoric. Business communication is not simply how to tell the customers what the seller can or cannot do or provide under certain circumstances. Business communication involves a tactful way saying things, especially by the seller. A tactful rhetorical business communication, therefore, in one way or the other is often stated as a good sales communication.

This might be the reason why, in Gonzales’s view, perception is sometimes everything. It is for the sake of this perception the government changed the name of the War Department to the Department of Defense. That is because the popular perception, right or wrong, war—in Gonzales’s view—is hell and therefore bad. The word defense, how-

ever, (as in self-defense) is good and is rooted in human biology to boot (2002: 2). It might be wise to consider the sayings that once the opponent, objector, or disbeliever is insulted, in this case the future customer, he will never be persuaded of anything, no matter how obviously wrong he is or how clearly right what we suggest are. On the other hand, as Bill Press (2002) says, "If you say something often enough and loud enough, people will believe it—no matter how untrue it is".

References:

- Andersen, Poul Houman. "Relationship Development and Marketing Communication: an Integrative Model" (Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing). MCB University Press, 2001.
- Burton, Gideon O. "Branches of Rhetoric (Silva Rhetoricae)". Brigham: Brigham Young University, 1996-2004a. Retrieved from: <http://humanities.byu.edu/rhetoric/Oratory/BranchesofOratory.htm>.
- Cramer, Andrew. "Definitions of Rhetoric: Archipelago Rhetorica". Retrieved in 2005, at: <http://www.andrew.cmu.edu/user/pcramer/defrhet.html>
- Daniel, Catherine. "Understanding Rhetoric: Persuasion in Action (material)". Australia: University of South Australia. 2006. Retrieved from: <http://www.unisa-net.unisa.edu.au/rhetoric/persuasion.htm>
- Eidenmuller. "Presidential Rhetoric". Texas: Texas A&M University, 2001-2006. Retrieved from: <http://www-bush-school.tamu.edu/cps/prez/rhetoric>
- Gonzales, Sean. "A Remainder of the Power of Words". Seattle: Seattle Post Intelligencer, 2002. Retrieved from: <http://www.commondreams.org/cgi-bin/print.cgi?file=/views02/0611-05.htm>
- Kneffel, Don. 1991. *Aims of the Essay: A Reader and Guide*. Massachusetts: Allyn and Bacon.
- Lewicki, Roy J.; David M. Saunders; John W. Minton. *Negotiation*. New York: The McGraw-Hill Companies, 1999.
- Moor, Aldo de and Hans Weigand. "Business Negotiation Support: Theory and Practice". Tilburg University: Infolab Dept. of Information System and Management, 2004.
- Newall, Paul. "Rhetoric". Retrieved from: <http://www.galilean-library.org/int21.html>
- Nunan, David. *Introducing Discourse Analysis*. England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1993.
- Press, Bill. "The Myth of the Liberal Media Rides Again". Cable News Network (CNN), 2002. Retrieved from: www.cnn.com/2002/ALLPOLITICS/02/21/column.billpress/index.html
- Roberts, W. Rhys (Trans). *Rhetoric by Aristotle 350 BC*. (Book I). Copyright by Lee Honeycutt, 2004a.
- _____. (Trans). *Rhetoric by Aristotle 350 BC*. (Book II). Copyright by Lee Honeycutt, 2004b.
- _____. (Trans). *Rhetoric by Aristotle 350 BC*. (Book III). Copyright by Lee Honeycutt, 2004c.
- Stein, Wayne. "The Basics of Aristotelian Rhetoric: The History of Rhetoric". University of Central Oklahoma, 2002. Retrieved from: <http://www.libarts.ucok.edu/english/rhetoric2/rhetoric.htm>
- Wheeler, Kip. L. "Rhetoric". Copyright 1998-2005. Retrieved from: http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/resource_rhet.html