

## THE GENRES OF MLK'S "I HAVE A DREAM"

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### ABSTRACT

*In general, official speeches, either political or general speeches, in Indonesia linguistically use more direct-language. That is, the meanings or thoughts in the speeches can be understood simply through—to use Brown et al's terms—the “process of fairly basic linguistic ability” (see: Brown et al., 1994: 13). This kind of speech is in one way or the other quite acceptable when the speech is meant to deliver some simple information. In other words, this way of conveying a thesis is suitable when it is simply to inform. When the purpose of the speech is meant to win the assent of the audience, however, in one way or the other it should be presented differently. That is, although a speech is in a formal and official setting, it should—by the justification of the listeners as the community of minds—be rhetorically acceptable to most (if not all) audience. To meet that purpose, the speaker should present his idea persuasively, argumentatively, intellectually, and cooperatively—that is, in terms of linguistics, rhetorically.*

### I. INTRODUCTION

In his discussion about “The Use of Rhetorical Devices”, Clark (1998: 6) states that the degree and power of pride in the human heart must never be underestimated. Clark clarifies that 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, Clark suggests the use of various rhetorical devices for the purpose of politeness and tact. Clark further reasons 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 we are.

On the basis of the above Clark's view is true, there is a strong belief that when delivering the message or conveying the idea of the speech is done rhetorically—by fitting the speech with the aspect of the times, aspect of the purposes, and aspect of appropriateness—the message of the speech might be considered as “cooperatively preferable”. In other words within the society or—to borrow the term used by Perelman and Burke; the community of minds—a message delivered in rhetorical speech is considered more intellectual, more cooperative, and, therefore, justified more acceptable (see: Blakesley, 1999: 1-3). That is because a rhetorical speech, which in some ways is linguistically different from an ordinary speech, is capable of winning the adherence of the audience minds persuasively and convincingly.

Based on the above discussion, there is also a question why some speeches, although they are not delivered by the president of the United States, are ranked

the best 10 (ten) out of 100-Best American Speeches of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Furthermore, there is also a question why many other speeches, although they are delivered by the US presidents, are ranked number ninety-one to one hundred, and some—although they are broadcasted worldwide—are even not ranked any number of the 100 speeches at all. An example of this is the speech by Martin Luther King Jr. (hereinafter termed MLK), titled "I Have a Dream". This speech, despite the fact that King is neither a president nor the vice president of the United States, is ranked number one among 100-Best American Speeches of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

Applying the theory of the *genres of rhetoric* proposed by Aristotle and some other supporting theories of rhetoric, the discussion in this paper will be focused on the analysis of "I Have a Dream" by MLK on the basis of its genres—its role in public life. The discussion will be focused especially on the contexts of language use. That is, the speech will be analyzed by associating it with each genre of oratory in terms of: the aspects of time (future, past, and present), a set of purposes, and appropriateness or special topics of invention. Discussed and interpreted using some Aristotle's theoretical statements and some rhetoricians, the discussion will finally conclude that it is the implementation of these three genres that might be one very important part of the success of the MLK's "I Have a Dream".

## II. The Genres of Speeches

In Aristotle's view, every message from human to human is laden with the will, emo-

tions or desires of the speaker, and comes to hearer who is full of his own emotions and predispositions. This fact makes the study of how words are made persuasive both legitimate and necessary (Roberts, 2004a: 14). Therefore, although some philosophers dream wishfully of pure rational discourse, in reality it is—in Aristotle's view—a comical pretence. This statement more or less means that every person who is opposed to rhetoric nevertheless participates in his or her very own rhetoric.

One of the ways in which classical Aristotelian rhetoric shows the legitimacy and necessity of rhetoric is by setting forth three divisions. Some rhetoricians call these divisions of rhetoric branches of rhetoric (*see*: Burton, 1996-2004a: 1-2), and some other call them genres of rhetoric (*see*: Cicero in Tinkler, 1995: 2-3), and many also call them categories. To maintain one single term, this discussion in this paper uses the term *genres* wherever possible. Each genre demonstrates its role in public life. In Aristotle's categorization of speeches (Book I, chapter 3), there are three genres of speeches that illustrates a system to the situation of rhetoric. They are (a) political or deliberative, (b) forensic or legal, and (c) epideictic or ceremonial oratory (Roberts, 2004a: 41).

From the above description of the three genres, it can be seen that genres are the system to the situation of rhetoric. More clearly as well as in relation to speeches, therefore, one can conclude genres are "how a speech suits to the situation of the speech". In relation to linguistics, in particular, this kind of situation can be called the contexts of language use. Aristotle associates with each genre of oratory an aspect of time (future,

past, and present), a set of purposes, and appropriateness or special topics of invention. In this discussion, the three associations are termed aspects. Thus, there are three aspects: aspect of the times, aspect of the

purposes, and aspect of appropriateness or special topics of invention. When put into a table, this combination of the three aspects can be represented with the following figure:

<b>Genres of Oratory</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Purposes</b>	<b>Special Topics of Invention</b>
<b>Political/deliberative</b>	<b>Future</b>	<b>Exhort/ Dissuade</b>	<b>Good /unworthy, advantageous/disadvantageous</b>
<b>Forensic/Judicial</b>	<b>Past</b>	<b>Accuse/ Defend</b>	<b>Justice/injustice</b>
<b>Epidectic/Ceremonial</b>	<b>Present</b>	<b>Praise or blame</b>	<b>Virtue / vice, honor / dishonor</b>

Table 1: The assumed table of combination of the aspects of the three genres, oriented around the times, purposes, and appropriateness or special topics of invention.

In the above figure 1, we can see that political or deliberative (also called legislative) oratory is associated with future time, the purpose is to exhort or dissuade, and its special topics of invention are good or unworthy, advantageous or disadvantageous. Forensic or legal (also called judicial) oratory is associated with the past time, the purpose is to accuse or to defend, and its special topics of invention are justice or injustice. Epidectic or ceremonial (sometimes is also called demonstrative) oratory is associated with present time, the purpose is to praise or to blame, and its special topics of invention is the virtue or the vice, honor or dishonor. Further details about each of the genres are given hereunder.

### **2.1 Political or Deliberative Speech**

In classical Aristotelian rhetoric, political or deliberative oratory is concerned with the future and with persuading someone to take

a certain course of action. This genre of oratory originally had to do exclusively with that sort of speaking typical of political legislatures. That is, this genre of oratory was oriented towards policy and thus considered the future and whether given laws would benefit or harm society (*see*: Roberts, 2004a: 8-9). Furthermore, Aristotle states that a deliberative orator's aim is utility. That is, deliberation seeks to determine not ends but the means to ends, i.e. what it is most useful to do in relation to the future of a society (2004a: 14).

Aristotle states that the subjects of political speech (Book I, chapter 4) fall under five heads or five matters: ways and means, war and peace, national defense, imports and exports, legislation (Roberts, 2004a: 10). In urging the hearers to take the course of action, an orator must have an eye of their happiness and its constituents (chapter 5). The political orator must also appeal to the inter-

est of his hearers (the audience), and this involves what is good for the audience (Book I, chapter 6). In terms of topics of invention, however, Aristotle considers four special topics of invention, group in pairs, to pertain to deliberative oratory. They are the good and the unworthy, the advantageous and the disadvantageous (Burton, 1996-2004a: 4). A political speaker, in Aristotle's view, must also have the knowledge of four sorts of government: democracy, oligarchy, aristocracy, monarchy, and their characteristic customs, institutions, and interests, definitions and ends of each (Book I, chapter 8).

Today rhetoricians see that there is still this use in legislative assemblies all the way from the town council to the U.S. Senate. Still similar to the ones proposed by Aristotle, today's political speaking urges us either to do or not to do something: one of these two courses is always taken by private counselors, as well as by men who address public assemblies (*see*: Eidenmuller, 2001-2006: 5). In the sense that advertising seeks to persuade people to take an action in the future for their future benefit, it is also a genre of deliberative rhetoric.

## 2.2 Forensic or Judicial Oratory

Forensic (or is sometimes called judicial) oratory originally had to do exclusively with the law courts and was oriented around the purposes of defending or accusing. In Aristotle's classical view, an epideictic oratory, a speaker's concerns are virtue and vice, praising one and censuring the other (chapter 9). The device, in the form of figures of speech that is often used by epideictic speaker is amplification. Judicial or forensic oratory, therefore, deals with events that

happened in the past—whether a certain man or institution did or did not do something and what the people ought to do consequently. In classical Aristotle's description of judicial oratory, an orator made arguments about past events, and did so with respect to the two special topics of invention for this branch, the just and the unjust or the right or the wrong (Roberts, 2004b: 23). The main purpose of a forensic or judicial speech is to accuse or defend someone or an institution (*see*: Burton, 1996-2004a: 3).

In forensic oratory, a speaker should know about the subjects of wrongdoing, its motives, its perpetrators, and its victims. Definitions of wrongdoing as injury voluntary inflicted contrary to law. Law is either special or general, which regulates the life of a particular community or general, and even all those unwritten that are supposed to be acknowledged everywhere. He must also know about enumeration and elucidation of the seven causes of human action: 1) chance, 2) nature, 3) compulsion and voluntary, 4) habit, 5) reasoning, 6) anger, 7) appetite (Book I, chapter 10). Another subject of forensic oratory is the characters and circumstances that lead men to commit wrong, or make them the victims of wrong (Book I, chapter 12).

Today's proper sphere of forensic or judicial oratory is generally considered to be the judicial court. Although there are other disciplines (history, for example) that fit the specific criteria given above in some ways, judicial or forensic causes are almost always courtroom situations. Eidenmuller (2001-2006: 5), for example, describes that forensic speaking either attacks or defends somebody: one or other of these two things must

always be done by the parties in a case. Today's judicial speeches or oratorical addresses, therefore, can be said as not much different from the original status as proposed by Aristotle above.

### 2.3 Epideictic or Ceremonial Oratory

In Greek, the term epideictic means "fit for display". Thus, this genre of oratory is also sometimes called *ceremonial* or *demonstrative* oratory. It is a genre of oratory that is oriented to public occasions calling for speech or writing in the here and now. Burton states that funeral orations are typical example of epideictic oratory (1996-2004a: 5). In classical Aristotelian rhetoric, epideictic or ceremonial oratory is concerned with *the present time* and the purpose of the speech is mostly for praising or blaming someone or an institution, which may translate Aristotle's term amplification (Roberts, 2004b: 23). In classical rhetoric, Aristotle assigns *the noble and the base* as the special topics of invention that pertains to epideictic or ceremonial oratory.

The ends of epideictic oratory that include praise or blame, and thus its long history in their manifestations can be understood in the tradition of epideictic oratory. Now days, in many rhetoricians' view, epideictic is still employed in many public orations. Modern examples of demonstrative orations include inaugural and keynote addresses (*see*: Tinkler, 1995: 2). Such kind of speeches, in Tinkler's view, may be said to define and celebrate the values of the community. Quoting the work of Cicero, Tinkler also states that in giving examples of the kinds of questions when giving a speech, the demonstrative orator needs to ask and answer in regard to the

external circumstances of money: how the subject has used his money; he has been generous or miserly; he has been modest or arrogant. While in funeral or other similar kind of events epideictic manifests in praising somebody, especially during a campaign period, epideictic oratory manifests in either praising or censuring somebody.

### III. "I Have a Dream": #1 of 100 Best Speeches of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

By the end of the twentieth century, In December 1999 to be precise, an American speech community called The American Rhetoric tried to select 100 (one hundred) best American speeches of the twentieth century. This board has assigned 137 leading scholars to rank thousands of popular American speeches delivered during the twentieth century. The ranking is made under the criteria of social and political impacts and rhetorical artistry (*see*: Eidenmuller, 2001-2006: 2). As the result of this ranking American Speech Bank has set up the list of one hundred most significant speeches, which is then called Top-100 American Speeches of the Twentieth Century. Out of these 100 speeches, the number one best speech is "I Have a Dream" delivered by Martin Luther King, Jr. on 28<sup>th</sup> of August 1963, at the Lincoln Memorial, Washington D.C.

This paper is not intended to judge the validity of the ranking. Instead, it is intended to see how "I Have a Dream" delivered by MLK (in 1963) fits with the genres proposed by Aristotle who live 24 centuries ahead of MLK. It is the fitting that might be the crucial element that makes the speech is selected the number one best. Besides, it is considered that the criteria of the selection

are not explained in details. It is only noted, though, that there are three criteria in selecting the one hundred out of thousands speeches and ranking them into the top one hundred speeches of the twentieth century. They are (1) social impacts, (2) political impacts, and (3) rhetorical artistry. In Lucas and Medhurst's view, when measured in terms of social and political impacts, the one hundred speeches have been proven effective in social and political developments during the times when the speeches were made (see: Lucas and Medhurst, 1999: 2). The impacts, at least in Lucas and Medhurst's view, are reflected in civil rights movement and the black oral tradition during the period when the speeches are delivered. Lucas and Medhurst, however, do not discuss anything about the speeches in relation to the third criterion, rhetorical artistry. Further than that, as far as the writer concerns, discussion in terms of Aristotelian genres—which is part of the rhetorical artistry—has been quite rare. In fact, it is also very useful to justify the correctness or even the wrongness of the ranking in terms of rhetorical artistry.

In order to make the discussion easier, the analysis is focused on the main points of the speech, which are as here below (the first one digit is the number of the main point, the next one or two digit(s) is the number of the sentences in the speech). Main point 1: 1.2 *Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation.* 1.5 *But one hundred years later, the Negro still is not free.* 1.6 *One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination.*

1.7 *One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity.* 1.8 *One hundred years later, the Negro is still languished in the corners of American society and finds himself an exile in his own land.* Main point 2: 2.10 *In a sense we've come to our nation's capital to cash a check.* Main point 3: 3.18 *We have also come to this hallowed spot to remind America of the fierce urgency of Now.* Main point 4: 4.31 *Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred.*

#### IV. Discussion: The Genres of "I Have a Dream"

The thesis statement of this particular MLK's speech is, "The black American has long been discriminated, and the present government is urgently and nonviolently required to free them as promised by the proclamation signed by President Abraham Lincoln one hundred years before". This thesis statement leaves a sense that this speech is demanding or claiming the implementation of the so-called emancipation proclaimed one hundred years before (the time of the speech). When measured in terms of classical Aristotelian rhetoric (Book I, chapter 3), where the thesis statement of this speech is exhorting or urging (demanding or claiming) the present government to do something (implementing the emancipation), this speech can fit into the genre of political oratory. When seen from each of the main points of the speech, however, it is possible that this speech fits into the other genres.

In the first main point, for example, it is stated that for the last one hundred years,

the Black Americans have been discriminated. The statement is in the sentence, “Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation (1.2)”, and “But one hundred years later, the Negro still is not free (1.5)”. This second sentence is continued with sentences 1.6, 1.7, and 1.8, where all of the sentences are beginning with the phrase *one hundred years later*.

Explicitly, this statement contains the blame to the former and present government for not implementing the emancipation proclamation. When seen in terms of classical Aristotelian rhetoric, where in terms of the time this statement talks about the past time (what happened in five score years) as well as the present (one hundred years later), this statement can fit into partly forensic and partly epideictic. In terms of the purpose of a speech, where it is to blame the former and present government, this statement fits into the slot of the epideictic genre. In terms of the special topics of invention, however, where it is about the injustice that the Negro suffered, this statement fits into the genre of forensic oratory. Thus, this first statement can fit into partly epideictic and partly forensic.

The second main point is in the sentence, “In a sense we’ve come to our nation’s capital to cash a check (1.10)”. This sentence, more or less, means that the black Americans come to Lincoln Memorial Washington to demand the implementation of the emancipation. This means to exhort or to urge the present government to do something. In terms of the purpose of a speech in classical Aristotelian rhetoric, to exhort or to urge is part

of the political oratory (*see*: Roberts, 2004a: 8-14). Hence, this statement fits into the genre of political oratory.

The third main point is in sentence, “We have also come to this hallowed spot to remind America of the fierce urgency of now (1.18)”. This statement seems to reiterate the second main point of the speech, to push, exhort, or urge the present government to implement the emancipation program. In terms of classical Aristotelian rhetoric, where the purpose is to exhort or to urge an institution to do something, this statement also fits into the genre of political (Roberts, 2004a: 10). In terms of the time being talked about, however, where the word *now* is used to indicate the present, this statement fits into epideictic oratory (*see*: Roberts, 2004b: 23). Thus this particular statement in the third main point fits into partly political and partly epideictic.

The fourth main point is stated by saying, “Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred (1.31)”. Implicitly, this sentence contains an invitation to demand the freedom, which also means the justice, without violence. Thus, the topic is the justice, which is one of the special topics of the invention in forensic oratory. This main point, therefore, fits into the genre of forensic oratory.

## V. Conclusion

From the above discussion, a comparison between the genres of the proposed classical Aristotelian rhetoric and the genres of MLK’s speech can be shown as the following comparison:

The proposed Aristotelian table of the genres of an oratory:

<b>Genres of Oratory</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Purposes</b>	<b>Special Topics of Invention</b>
<b>Political/deliberative</b>	<b>Future</b>	<b>Exhort/ Dissuade</b>	<b>Good /unworthy, advantages/disadvantages</b>
<b>Forensic/Judicial</b>	<b>Past</b>	<b>Accuse/ Defend</b>	<b>Justice/Injustice</b>
<b>Epidectic/Ceremonial</b>	<b>Present</b>	<b>Praise/ blame</b>	<b>Virtue/vice,honor/dishonor</b>

MLK's genres of oratory:

<b>Genres of Oratory</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Purposes</b>	<b>Special Topics of Invention</b>
<b>Primarily Political</b>	<b>Primarily about Future</b>	<b>Primarily Exhorting</b>	<b>Primarily about the advantages</b>
<b>Partly Forensic</b>	<b>Partly about Past</b>	<b>----</b>	<b>Partly about justice and injustice</b>
<b>Partly Epidectic</b>	<b>Partly about Present</b>	<b>Partly Praising and blaming</b>	<b>----</b>

Table 2: The table of comparison between the proposed classical Aristotelian slots of genres (upper) and how MLK's speech can fit (lower).

In table 2 above, it can be seen that MLK's genres of oratory, represented by the lower slots, shows that "I Have a Dream" contains all of the three related parts of a political speech proposed in classical Aristotelian rhetoric, (a) the time, (b) the purpose, and (c) the special topics of invention. In terms of the time, though not explicit in any of the four main points, many parts of this speech talks about the future policy and the future law of the US, future life of the people in the US (both white and black American). They are, among others, in sentences 1.54, 1.55, 1.56, 1.57, 1.58, and 1.60. All of these sentences are initiated with the phrase "I have a dream that one day —." Some other parts of the speech (especially the first main

point), however, also discuss about the present and the past.

When seen in its purpose of political or deliberative speech as proposed in classical Aristotelian rhetoric, this speech can be seen as functioning to exhort or to urge the current (1963) government to implement the emancipation proclamation. Some part of the speech, especially the first main point, however, is about the blame to the former and present government for not implementing the emancipation. Thus, this speech fits primarily into political oratory and partly into epidectic oratory.

In terms of the special topics of invention, this speech is mostly oriented towards policy of the government. That is, whether



the given laws (in the future) will benefit or harm society. Based on classical rhetoric (Roberts, 2004a: 8-9), it urges the government to do—to use Aristotle’s term—what is most useful to do for the benefits of the people, which is the special topics of invention of the political oratory (Roberts, 2004a: 14). The advantages of such policy are both explicit and implicit in various sentences in the speech. In some other parts of the speech, however, this contains an invitation to demand the freedom, which also means the justice, which is one of the special topics of the invention in forensic oratory. This main point, therefore, can also make this speech fits partly into the genre of forensic oratory.

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