

A Rhetorical Analysis of Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah's Independence Speech

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Abstract

The study examines the role of rhetoric in the famous Independence Speech given by the first president of the Republic of Ghana, Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah at Old Polo Grounds, Accra, Ghana on 6th March, 1957 when Ghana won independence from the British rule. Through a rhetorical analysis and specifically using the canons of rhetoric and the means of persuasion, the study finds that; first, the speech adopts the elements of rhetoric to inform, encourage and persuade its audiences.; second, the speech is endowed with the richness that the five canons of rhetoric afford. The study reveals that the powerful diction and expressions embedded in the speech follow a rather careful arrangement meant to achieve the objective of rhetoric; third, the speaker adopted the three means of persuasion, namely: ethos, pathos and logos, to drive home the objective of his argument. The findings agree with Ghanaian Agenda's assertion of the speech as one of the greatest ever written and delivered in Ghanaian geo-politics and rhetorical history. The study concludes that the 1957 Independence Speech by Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah owes its world-wide garnered attention to the power of rhetoric, owing to the fact that it affords the speech the craft of carefully laid out rhetorical constructions and principles and hence making the speech a powerful work of rhetoric.

Keywords: Rhetoric Analysis, Independence speech, Ghana

1.0 Introduction

Kwame Nkrumah, (21 September 1909 – 27 April 1972) was the leader of Ghana and its predecessor state, the Gold Coast from 1951 to 1966. Overseeing the nation's independence from British colonization in 1957, Nkrumah was the first President of Ghana and the first Prime Minister of Ghana, (Hagan, 1992). An influential 20th-century advocate of Pan-Africanism, he was a founding member of the Organization of African Unity and was the winner of the Lenin Peace Prize in 1963, (Arhin, 1992).

Kwame Nkrumah was born in 1909 in Nkroful, Gold Coast. Nkrumah studied to be a teacher at Achimota School in Accra from 1925 to 1935. From 1935 to 1943, he studied to obtain his Bachelor of Arts degree and Bachelor of Sacred Theology from the Lincoln University of Pennsylvania; Master of Science Degree in Education, and Master of Arts in Philosophy from the University of Pennsylvania, (Pinckney, 1972). From 1939 to 1945, Nkrumah combined studies with part-time lectureship in Negro History. During this period, he helped to found the African Studies Association and the African Students Association of America and Canada and in 1945, he was voted "Most Outstanding Professor-Of-The-Year by "The Lincolnian", (The Lincolnian, 1938).

It was while Nkrumah was in London in late 1935 that he heard the news of the invasion of Abyssinia by fascist Italy, an event that outraged the young Nkrumah and prompted him to set his sights on a political career. During his time in the United States, Nkrumah also preached at black Presbyterian churches in Philadelphia and New York City. He read books about Politics and Divinity, and tutored students in Philosophy, (Arhin, 1992). Nkrumah returned to London in May 1945 with the intention of studying at the London School of Economics. After meeting with George Padmore, he helped organize the Fifth Pan-African Congress in Manchester, England. Then he founded the West African National Secretariat to work towards the decolonization of Africa. Nkrumah served as Vice-President of the West African Students' Union (WASU) and in the autumn of 1947, Nkrumah was invited to serve as the General Secretary to the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC) under Joseph Boakye Danquah. This political convention was exploring paths to independence. Nkrumah accepted the position and sailed for the Gold Coast. In 1949, Nkrumah formed the Convention People's Party and fought tirelessly for independence, proclaiming that the Gold Coast needed "Self-government now", (Hagan, 1992).

On 6th March, 1957, Ghana became the first country in sub-Saharan Africa to gain its independence from her former masters, the British and at midnight at the Old Polo Grounds in Accra, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah declared the nation independent, giving one of the most powerful and popular speeches in the history of Ghana. This famous speech which, to this day, is played especially on Independence Day Celebrations, has become one that most Ghanaians, irrespective of age, class or education, is able to recite to some extent; if not completely. The word "independence", I believe, denoted both political and economic freedom.

On that day, the people of Ghana were the proud celebrants of a very big win in what seemed like a life-long battle with suppression, oppression, and to a large extent, slavery. As a result of this, Dr. Kwame

Nkrumah's speech was one that was expected to be timely and appropriate for the occasion. (Robert, 2005)

2.0 Statement Of The Problem

George Kennedy, a scholar writing on the history of rhetoric has defined rhetoric as "the energy inherent in emotion and thought, transmitted through a system of signs, including language, to others to influence their decisions or actions." Kennedy (1991). According to Herrick (1997), "rhetoric is the study and practice of effective symbolic expression meant to achieve the purposes of the symbol-user, whether that purpose is persuasion, clarity of expression, beauty of expression, or mutual understanding... it is goal-oriented and seeks, by means of the planned use of symbols, to adapt ideas to an audience." To say that rhetoric seeks persuasion is to say that it is intended to bring someone to accept an idea, to act in a certain way, or both. The Hard Talk tract of Myjoyonline's Ghanaian Agenda had described Dr. Kwame Nkrumah's Independence Speech as "the greatest speech ever written and delivered in Ghanaian geo-politics and rhetorical history." During Ghana's Fifty years of independence celebration, this speech was repeatedly jingled on almost all Ghanaian radios, FM stations and televisions; in which most viewers and listeners usually joined to recite. The issue in this piece is that many claim that Nkrumah's speech is a great speech. However, what many do not know is what might be responsible for this claim as far as the making and delivery of this independence speech is concerned. This write-up seeks to find out the role that rhetoric played in the making and delivery of Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah's Independence Speech.

3.0 Objectives of The Study

A better understanding of the theory and principles of rhetoric is vital in assisting us to emphatically claim or disclaim Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah's Independence Speech as "the greatest speech ever written and delivered in Ghanaian geo-politics and rhetorical history." The objective of the study is to:

1. Examine the use of the canons of rhetoric in the famous Independence Speech.
2. Carefully analyze and find the means of persuasion adopted in Dr. Kwame Nkrumah's Independence Speech.
3. Clearly state the role(s) that rhetoric played in the making and delivery of the Nkrumah's famous speech.

4.0 Research Questions

Questions from which the study will be guided are:

1. What are the canons of rhetoric and how are they used in Nkrumah's famous speech?
2. What are the means of persuasion and how are they applied in the delivery of the speech?
3. What role does rhetoric play in the making and delivery of the speech?

5.0 Literature Review

Rhetoric is primarily defined as the art and science of deploying words for the purpose of persuasion (Wilkin, 2003). According to Malmkjaer (2002), rhetoric originates from the theory of how best a speaker or writer can, by application of linguistic devices, achieve persuasion. Similarly, Burke (1954) opines that Aristotle sees rhetoric as the faculty of discovering the persuasive means of using language to produce an effect on the audience.

The interest of rhetorical analysis lies in "studying the internal dynamics of a speech- not summarizing what is said but rather describing how a speech works as a rhetorical appeal", (Williams, Young & Launer, 2012). In so doing, one naturally examines the content of the discourse (its goals and strategies) in order to understand how the speaker seeks to influence an audience and to evaluate both the effectiveness of the speech as a rhetorical appeal and its ethical and socio-political implications. According to Williams et al. (2012), rhetorical approaches to communication focus on the dynamic relationships among speaker, text, audience and situation.

Methodologically, Black (1980) proposes these procedures: first, to engage in close textual reading of the speech coupled with research into the external circumstances and broader socio-political context; second, to follow observations concerning the text toward appropriate critical perspectives that could illuminate and account for what has been observed; and lastly, to analyze the rhetorical act making use of those perspectives or orientations, pursuing the implications toward critical judgment and evaluating the rhetorical act. Several works have analyzed popular essays as well as speeches and among these are political speeches which according to William et al. (2012) have become a major interest of rhetorical scholars in recent years.

Jennings (2009) did an analysis of David Suzuki's "The Right Stuff". Jennings' rhetorical analysis reveals the varying degrees of success with which Suzuki employs logos, pathos and ethos. According to Jennings, while Suzuki's ethos was strong because of the reputation he brings to his writing as well as his use of pathos to appeal to his target audience of parents and educators; his use of logos was weak. Jennings argues that

though Suzuki displays great skill in argumentation, his ethos fails to make up for the lack of support for the point of his message that high school Science courses should begin with sex education.

Again, Lepp (2009) analyzes Habeeb Salloum's "The Other Canadians and Canada's Future", an essay which paints a "vivid picture of Canada's past, present and future states of immigration and multiculturalism" (p. 6). In his analysis, Lepp points out that Salloum utilizes logos well, for the most part, with his use of examples and statistics, though there are few instances where his appeal to logic is somewhat weak. On Salloum's use of pathos, Lepp (2009) states that Salloum integrates pathos excellently due to appropriate placement and arrangement of his facts and wording in order to arouse the emotions of his audience. Salloum's knowledge about the issues he raises also strengthens his ethos. In his work, Lepp adopted the rhetorical analysis procedure as used by Black (1980).

On the analysis of political speeches, Alo (2012) analyzes the political speeches of prominent African leaders with a view to seeing how African leaders persuade the African people on the usefulness of various political and socio-economic policies and plans that are capable of enhancing African economic recovery and development. In achieving this, the study specifically analyses the rhetorical and persuasive strategies employed in their speeches and the ways and means the political leaders seek to achieve their goals. Alo's analysis employs the framework of Aristotelian rhetoric, with an adaptation of Fairclough's socio-semiotic model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Data are drawn from sixteen selected political speeches of prominent contemporary African Presidents from the five major regions of the African continents, namely, Southern Africa (Robert Gabriel Mugabe and Thabo Mbeki of South African), East Africa (Mwai Kibaki of Kenya), West Africa (John Evans Atta Mills of Ghana and Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria), North Africa (Hosni Mubarak of Egypt) and Central Africa (Joseph Kabila of Democratic Republic of Congo and Paul Biya of Cameroon). The findings suggest that African political leaders generally acknowledge the socio-economic problems of Africa and the need for change. Alo (2012) also reveals the recurrence of persuasive strategies including greetings, the use of pronouns, modalities and contrasts employed by these leaders. The study however argues that little attention is paid to the ways and means of achieving the goals of socio-economic independence and recovery. While the present paper does a rhetorical analysis of Dr. Nkrumah's Independence Speech, its focus is not critical discourse analysis but rather the rhetorical appeal employed by Dr. Nkrumah to achieve the goal that the speech intends to.

Last but not least, a rhetorical analysis of Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" done by Wilkinfeld and Moriarty (2011) reveals that King makes use of the three means of persuasion which allows the message to get to the heart of the people and arouse emotions and reactions that have had a long-standing effect on the American people as well as be a source of inspiration and hope, especially to the black race. Wilkinfeld and Moriarty opine that while the style of the speech is very formal, King mixes this with hints of informality that causes a rise and fall in the tone of the speech. They argue that King's use of ornamentation/embellishment is made possible through heavy uses of anaphora.

The present paper is a rhetorical analysis of the independence speech delivered by the first president of the Republic of Ghana, Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah. It focuses on having its basis on Prados' five canons of rhetoric and Aristotle's three means of persuasion as elaborated and employed by Prados (2006) and Kennedy (1991).

6.0 Methodology

Since this paper is a rhetorical study, it will commit to the use of a rhetorical analysis of the instrument under study. The study will be based on an analysis of the Independence Day Speech delivered by Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah on the 6th of March 1957. The speech was analyzed based on the five canons of rhetoric by Prados (2006) and the three means of persuasion by Prados (2006) and Kennedy (1991). Each canon was discussed based on the features that appeared in the speech. A detailed discussion on the means of persuasion was also done based on Aristotle's means of persuasion. It must be noted that the speech under study was read several times; first, to understand the general meaning of the speech as it was given, as well as to realize the import of the message which might have been subtly spoken, possibly owing to certain political, social and/or personal reasons; second, to familiarize ourselves with the speaker as well as the important names and words used in the speech in order to help us do a constructive analysis and consequently make our educated guesses as possible and concrete meanings and implications of the elements that emerged from the speech. In order to build strong findings from the analysis, we did further readings on the names and places that appeared in the speech under study. This enabled us to find the significance of the speaker's mentioning of such names or places as far as the speech was concerned.

7.0 Analysis And Findings

This section deals with the analysis of the speech under study and the findings discovered in the analysis. It discusses the research questions.

Rhetoric is the art of discourse; an art that aims to improve the capabilities of writers or speakers that attempt to inform, persuade or motivate particular audiences in specific situations. Wenzel (1990).

A closer look at Nkrumah's speech shows that there was the element of rhetoric since it was calculatedly delivered to 'inform' (announce Ghana's independence), 'persuade' Ghanaians that the African is capable of managing his own affairs and 'encourage' all and sundry to come on board in the defense of freedom, justice and independence. This shows that the first president of the republic of Ghana was endowed with the art of rhetoric and he demonstrates his rhetorical skills when he says, "We are prepared to build it up and make it a nation that will be respected by every other nation in the world. This is informing, persuading and motivating; and so Wenzel's definition of rhetoric can be found in this famous independence speech.

On the five canons of rhetoric, they constitute a system and guide on crafting powerful speeches and writing. It's also a template by which to judge effective rhetoric. The five canons are **inventio** (invention), **dispositio** (arrangement), **elocutio** (style), **memoria** (memory) and **actio** (delivery), Prados (2006).

Invention, according to Aristotle, involves "discovering the best available means of persuasion." It is possibly the most difficult phase in crafting a speech or piece of writing as it lays the groundwork for all the other phases. The invention considers your audience, evidence, means of persuasion, and timing.

In Dr. Nkrumah's speech, he makes mention of the country "Ghana" with the possessive pronoun "your", directing us to the fact that the speaker knew his audience well. He says, "Ghana, your beloved country..." and also mentions the names of groups such as "farmers", "ex-servicemen", "chiefs" and also a town like "Saltpond" which can be located in the Central Region of Ghana. He also makes mention of the continent "Africa" and "the world", showing that he meant his speech to be addressed, not only to the Ghanaian people, but also, to Africa and the world at large.

Again, Dr. Nkrumah uses the evidence of a free and independent country to justify that, "At long last, the battle has ended!" He also says that, "We have awakened; we shall no more go back to sleep" to demonstrate the readiness of the "new African in the world...ready to fight his own battles and show that after all, the black man is capable of managing his own affairs."

On the means of persuasion, we shall see a detailed discussion of it in later developments of this analysis. On the timing, however, the independence speech was prepared and delivered at a time when the whole of Ghana was celebrating its independence. From, "At long last, the battle has ended!" to "Ghana is free forever", the speech is filled with issues on the freedom of the nation, the capability of the people and their readiness to rule themselves; which is mostly the kind of message a freed country would like to hear. The shouts of joy and jubilation from the audience show that it was the right message at the right time. Also, the speech lasted exactly six minutes, fifty-six seconds, which makes it a simple and short but meaningful message.

On the second canon which is the arrangement, it is simply the organization of a speech or text to ensure maximum persuasion. Classical rhetoricians divided a speech into six different parts which are; introduction, statements of fact, division, proof, refutation and conclusion. Prados (2006).

Dr. Nkrumah's speech takes off with, "At long last, the battle has ended! And thus, Ghana, your beloved country is free forever!" which satisfies the purpose of the introduction in the arrangement; which is "to announce the subject in a way that grabs your audience's attention." Kennedy (1991). Nkrumah achieves this purpose since his introduction is met with shouts of joy and jubilation.

With the statement of facts which according to (Kennedy; 1991), "is the background information needed to get your audience up to speed on the history of your issue", Nkrumah mentions those who have been involved in the fight for independence (in the first paragraph) and also inspires in the people the spirit of loyalty and patriotism for the journey ahead; which was the major point in his speech. He, however, does not clearly state his statement of fact, but rather, mentions what has led Ghana to independence and the reason for the need to defend the nation's independence: "...so that we can prove to the world that when the African is given the chance, he can show to the world that he is somebody."

In the division of Nkrumah's speech (a summary of the arguments to be made), he made sure to include each paragraph of his speech with the subjects he deemed most important; which were Ghana's preparedness to rule its own people and the importance of the loyalty and support of the people. This made it easier for listeners and viewers to get the point of the message, irrespective of the part that was heard. However, Nkrumah did not provide a summary of his arguments to his audience. He launched right into his argument and skillfully brought his audience with him as he went on; with other means of persuasion like ethos, logos and pathos. Looking at the proof, the famous speech itself served as the proof of the message he wanted to deliver to the people of Ghana and the world at large. According to Wenzel (1990), "proof constitutes the main body of your speech or essay."

Furthermore, the element of refutation which according to Wenzel (1990), "is a way of highlighting the weaknesses in an argument to the audience in order to answer any counterarguments and resolve any doubts the audience might be harboring", can be seen in Nkrumah's speech. He introduces refutation when he says, "We know we are going to have difficult beginning..." This, he does in order to win the approval and sympathy of his audience so that whatever proposition he has will be accepted and in a way, their concerns are met

On the conclusion of his speech, he reminds his audience that “Ghana is free forever!” and this has been a constant and popular declaration of many Ghanaians up till now, and especially on Independence Day.

Style is the third canon of rhetoric and it involves “how the speaker presents his or her ideas.” Prados (2006). In the Independence Speech, Nkrumah incorporates some of the five virtues of style which are correctness, clarity, evidence, propriety, and ornateness. With correctness, the speech demonstrates correct writing and speaking in accordance with the rules and norms of the English language. An effective communicator uses words correctly and follows the rules of grammar. Here, it can be said that the speaker’s long years in education would have equipped him with those skills.

Also, the speech can be said to be one that demonstrates clarity because the speaker uses very simple words and sentences. One of such sentences is, “...and my last warning to you is that you also stand firm behind us so that we can prove to the world that when the African is given the chance, he can show to the world that he is somebody” Though he uses quite long sentences in his speech, the simplicity of his words made it easier for his audience to understand. Propriety can also be seen in the speech since by propriety, “we simply mean saying the right thing at the right time and at the right place.” Wenzel (1990).

With memory, which is the fourth canon, it can be said that Dr. Nkrumah knew his speech well and delivered it making reference to his note from time to time. Also, in memory, the speaker is able to organize his oration in such a way that the audiences are able to remember it long after the message has been delivered. In Ghana today, and the world at large, many people are able to recite at least a sentence of Nkrumah’s famous speech. In this paper, a number of the quotations are written from memory. This means that the element of memory can be found in the speech.

The last in the canons of rhetoric is delivery, “which focuses on the mechanics of how a speaker imparts his or her message through body language, hand gestures and change in tone of voice.” Kennedy (1991).

Dr. Nkrumah delivered his message with a mixture of hand gestures, change in standing position and change in tone of voice. For instance, in his declaration, “At long last, the battle has ended!”, he raised both his voice and hand, and that resulted in applause and shouts from the crowd.

Also, his stating of the fact that, “Our independence is meaningless unless it is linked up with the total liberation of the African continent.” was so emphatically stated that it has been engraved on the minds of most Africans today.

6.1 Means Of Persuasion

According to Aristotle (350 BC; cited in (Duke;1982)), “Of the modes of persuasion furnished by the spoken word there are three kinds. The first kind depends on the personal character of the speaker; the second on putting the audience into a certain frame of mind; the third on the proof, or apparent proof, provided by the words of the speech itself.” The three means of persuasion are ethos (appeal to the speaker’s credibility), pathos (appeal to the emotion of the audience) and logos (appeal to reasoning).

Looking at the personality of Dr. Nkrumah, it can be said that the ethos as far as his famous speech was concerned worked for him. This is because his audience considered his education background, which was very commendable since he had obtained several Bachelor and Master’s degrees in various fields of study. Also, given that he was a full Ghanaian who had tirelessly fought for the freedom of his people; it is no shock that his speech has been celebrated to this day. Again, Nkrumah had shown his audience long before his speech that he was capable of leading his nation to a better future.

In the use of pathos, the speaker appeals to the emotions of his audience when he says, “We know we are going to have difficult beginning...” Also, one thing that demonstrates an indirect appeal to his audience’s emotions is the use of “we” and “us”. His use of these pronouns seemed to inspire a sense of belongingness, togetherness and love so that the audience feel a sense of shared experiences in the larger sense of the word. We see some of these uses in all the paragraphs. For instance, “We are no more a colonial but an independent people”, “...we shall no more go back to sleep anymore”, “...give thanks to the Almighty for having led us through obstacles, difficulties, imprisonments, hardships and sufferings, to have brought us to the end of troubles today.”

Lastly is the use of logos which can also be found in the speech under study. Nkrumah appeals to reasoning in order to get his audience to agree with him. For instance, he says, “Our independence is meaningless unless it is linked up with the total liberation of the African continent.” in order to defend the fact that Africa’s freedom is a greater weapon in fighting the oppression of the so-called higher powers of the world. He also appeals to reason saying, “...nothing in the world can be done unless it has the purpose and support of God” to inspire them not to be selfish and also, to seek the will of God.

7.0 The Role Of Rhetoric In Nkrumah’s Speech

As far as speeches go, the famous speech delivered by Dr Kwame Nkrumah on 6th March 1957 has been given world-wide attention. The analysis and findings have revealed that rhetoric played a major role in the making

and delivery of the speech.

First of all, with the canons of rhetoric, the speech was able to go through a series of carefully laid out construction of rhetorical principles. The canons brought out the best in the message that the speaker wanted to carry across and in the end, the audience had the privilege of receiving nothing but the best of a message meant to be inspiring, motivational, passionate and meaningful.

Secondly, with skill in style and delivery, Nkrumah imparted his ideologies into the then listeners and even generations after them. This could only be done with the knowledge and skill of knowing how to make the most important ideas stay with his audiences. With the right body language, gestures and change in tone and voice, this was achieved; and this is the role that rhetoric played in the 1957 Midnight Speech.

Finally, the persuasion appeals helped Nkrumah to hit the nail right on the head. He was able to appeal to his audience through his reputation as a great leader in many respects. Appealing to reason and to logic is also a technique of rhetoric; and so rhetoric was able to accomplish the most important purpose of this speech as with every other speech or work of oratory- persuade.

8.0 Conclusion

The 1957 Independence Speech has been called many names including “famous” (Marc & Evelyn; 2000), “the greatest speech ever written and delivered in Ghanaian geo-politics and rhetorical history” (Myjoyonline; 2013), “The Midnight Speech” (Zuardi; 1996) among others.

With careful examination of the famous speech using the five canons of rhetoric and the three means of persuasion, it was found that these techniques and principles of rhetoric have proved to be largely responsible for being the art behind the widely acclaimed Independence Day Speech delivered by Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah on the 6th of March 1957 at the Old Polo Grounds in Accra. The intention of the president was carried out in the speech and the speech as timely as it was at the time of its delivery, not only won the heart of Ghanaians, but also went into the books of history as a great speech delivered by a great man. A man who fought with the help of others to gain independence for Ghana. It was evident that rhetoric played a very important role in the preparation and delivery of the speech.

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