



The Making of 'Rhetoric'.

An Empirical Case in the *New York Times* and a Model of Text Types in the Mass Media for Contents and Typological Analyses of Switching Meanings

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Abstract

Even though two persons communicating use the same word, they can mean different things. Sometimes social groups use a word with one or more meaning differently employed compared to contemporary standard definitions and historical meanings. Rhetoric is such a word enigmatically used in texts of the mass media. This study is divided into two specific areas, a 'text type analysis' and a 'contents text analysis', regarding the topic rhetoric in the text corpus *New York Times* (text internal study). The contrastive analysis discusses the findings compared to the contemporary set of definitions and the historical understanding of rhetoric as a concept. Based on a contrastive study of findings and external sources from outside the mass media, this article argues also that the U.S. *First Amendment* category 'free speech' is not identical with the term 'rhetoric' employed in the mass media language. Here the mass media show a rudimental watchdog position when using the term with a negative connotation switching from a descriptive text type (hard news) to an argumentative text type. This simplified media language causes a break with the traditional and the complex system of rhetorical theory, even though the text type analysis shows that the correlation between rhetoric and journalistic text types corresponds with the classical understanding of rhetoric and its categories of speech.

1. Empirical Content Analyses of News Coverage

Data Evaluation and Findings: Rhetoric Across the Mass Media Text Types

Traditionally, rhetoric is as the art of speaking closely related to other arts and as a persuasive concept it can be traced back to the political speech. This situation will show our sample evaluation of *New York Times* articles from the first quarter of the year 2008. Negative connotations of rhetoric are not new in the history of rhetoric since the 19th century and the prevailing esteem of logic and rational approaches considered as opposed to rhetoric. What is interesting in this case is the linguistic setting of meanings of rhetoric that establish a very homogeneous image of rhetoric as a part of politics in the mass media. Rhetoric here is not understood as a common tool of communication. On the contrary, rhetoric appears as an individualized speech of an individual speaker. The First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution guarantees the practice of 'free speech'. Is the rhetorical speech with its negative associations in the journal here considered a contrast to free speech established as a general value of the country?

Surprisingly, Hickman and Bartlett (2002) wrote that the language of the journalists is as contents not suitable for an empirical content analysis: "Empirical content analyses of news coverage tend not to result in straightforward findings

because they are the products of an investigation of the language employed by reporters and editors whose primary task in the commercial news business is to make news entertaining. Achieving objectivity and neutrality in news coverage are secondary tasks of commercial news journalism. And achieving consistency and precision in the use of descriptive language are clearly not tasks that command the attention of reporters and editors."

We cannot subscribe to this statement of resignation regarding empirical approaches towards the language of mass media. Our method is 1. a diachronic survey analyzing the preference of text types associated with rhetoric and 2. a linguistic contrastive analysis regarding the findings compared to common definitions of rhetoric. Finally, we will discuss the historical heritage of the ancient rhetorical system and the changes in the mass media texts. For the approach in a diachronic study across different text types in the *New York Times* we can separate between hard news covered in sections of topics such as *U.S.*, *World*, and *Arts*, soft news, and opinion writing. Hard news is descriptive covering the basic elements of the event (the W-questions), soft news is narrative, and opinion writing is an argumentative text type.

2. Differences between the Values of the System and the Contemporary Estimation of Rhetoric

Within the rhetorical system, the speech itself is considered an action as performance of the speaker. Obviously, the action of speaking is considered not an action or an action performed towards the audience, while a lack of other actions exist. Rhetoric as subject of political speech was part of the Greek democracy. Aristotle in his *Rhetoric* (Book 1., chapter 1.) wrote: "I. Rhetoric is a counterpart of dialectic; for both have to do with matters that are in a manner within the cognizance of all men and not confined to any special science. Hence all men in a manner have a share of both; for all, up to a certain point, endeavor to criticize or uphold an argument, to defend themselves or to accuse. Now, the majority of people do this either at random or with a familiarity arising from habit. But since both these ways are possible, it is clear that matters can be reduced to a system, for it is possible to examine the reason why some attain their end by familiarity and others by chance; and such an examination all would at once admit to be the function of an art." In other words: Rhetoric is according to Aristotle ubiquitously employed even when the speaker is not aware of it. In the *Merriam-Websters Online Dictionary* rhetoric has the main definitions *art of speaking or writing effectively* either as the 'study of principles and rules of composition formulated by critics of ancient times or' as the study of writing or 'speaking as a means of communication or persuasion. The second definition is a skill in the effective use of speech or a type or mode of language or speech (insincere or grandiloquent language). The last definition equalizes rhetoric with verbal communication and discourse. Logan and Fischer-Wright (2006) suggested a new definition for rhetoric: "The means through which one creates and populates worlds of meaning (language-based realities." This definition focusing on the pragmatic dimension of rhetoric would better fit for the findings than traditional definitions. Steven Mailloux in *Rhetorical Power* (1989: 12) defined rhetoric as "the political effectiveness of trope and argument in culture." In 1789 *The Declaration of the Rights of Man* of the French Revolution provided freedom of speech. In 1791 *The First Amendment of the U.S. Bill of Rights* guaranteed freedoms of religion, speech, the press, and the right to assemble. Declaring a position or a personal speech as 'mere rhetoric' in the mass media also has the effect that it is eliminated from its impact on reality in accordance with the simplified understanding of rhetoric. Balkin (2004) argued that digital technologies "alter the social conditions of speech and therefore should change the focus of free speech theory from a

Meiklejohnian or republican concern with protecting democratic process and democratic deliberation to a larger concern with protecting and promoting a democratic culture. A democratic culture is a culture in which individuals have a fair opportunity to participate in the forms of meaning - making that constitute them as individuals. Democratic culture is about individual liberty as well as collective self-governance; it concerns each individual's ability to participate in the production and distribution of culture." Kairys (1998) mentioned that "in the last few decades, the Supreme Court has narrowed and restricted the speech rights available to people of ordinary means, enlarged the speech rights available to wealthy people and corporations, and erected a free-speech barrier to public access to the media and to important electoral, economic and social reforms."

3. Theory: A Text Type Model for Journalism

White in his thesis *Telling Media Tales: The News Story as Rhetoric* (1998) explored the rhetorical properties of the modern news report presenting the argument that "linear, syntagmatic models of text structure of the type developed previously for analysis of, for example, the narrative are unable to account for the functionality of these news reports. An alternative 'orbital' model of textuality is presented by which relationships of specification are seen to operate between a central textual nucleus and dependent satellites." Journalism has many features similar to rhetoric. In the job skills of the journalist we find similarities to the *officia* of the rhetor: Researching and documentation (*inventio*, invention), organizing and planning (*dispositio*, disposition), style and editing (*elocutio*, elocution), and presentation of the speech (*actio*, performance). Our text type model relies on the compability of rhetorical topology with text types and journalistic applied text production. Text types are used as means to differentiate between basic functions of texts. Genres are related to a specific medium' for example literary or visual genres exist. Text types can be differentiated and attributed to news as follows:

Text Type	Relation	Question	Function	News
Descriptive text type	Object	Who? What?	Reporting	Hard News
Narrative text type	Event	What?	Reporting	Soft News
Argumentative text type	Audience	To Whom?	Persuasion	Opinion
Expositional text type	Procedure	How?	Instruction	

Text Types and Categories of Journalism

A comprehensive review of concepts and discussion about text types and genres was made by Lee (2001). The questions used in journalism to describe the event are:

Who?
 What?
 Where?
 When?
 Why? How?

This set of questions can be traced back to the doctrine of stasis and the topoi used to find arguments in the ancient rhetorical system.

Who? What? How? (in which channel?) To Whom?

Lasswell-Formula

This set of questions can be traced back to the doctrine of stasis in the ancient rhetorical system. Also the Lasswell-formula derived from it. In journalism the questions are the smallest descriptive units for the news. A journalistic text can contain descriptive, narrative, and argumentative parts. Traditionally, text type studies make correlations between functions of text types and the literary form like in the following selection for journalism:

Essay /Opinion	Argumentative /Narrative	
Commentary /Opinion	Argumentative	<i>Argumentatio</i>
Critique / Opinion	Argumentative	<i>Argumentatio</i>
Story / Soft News	Narrative	<i>Narratio</i>
Hard News	Descriptive	<i>Initium</i>
Journalism	Text Typology	Rhetoric

Forms of Journalism and Functions

Besides this classical schema of exclusive text type structures we must assume that descriptive, narrative, argumentative, and in some cases even expository. The following study will demonstrate the correlation between text types and their function.

4. Empirical Preferences of Text Types: Correlation between Text Type and Rhetoric

Data of this study come from a survey taken in the time between March 16 and January 16 2008 from the *New York Times Archive*. The *New York Times* as a daily newspaper with internet presence covers all classical sections of a newspaper. The dominance of the term rhetoric in specific sections can be explained historically with the fields rhetoric covered. The highest density of news using rhetoric we find in the opinion writings (argumentative text type), the political news of the U.S. and international news and the section of arts. Texts of these sections we can classify either as narrative or argumentative text types). We will later on demonstrate that the line between these text types in journalism is thin and take the example of the term rhetoric in order to demonstrate how narrative and descriptive text types become argumentative text types. Purely descriptive text types (e.g. weather forecast) have no or a minimal number of sentences using rhetoric.

U.S. / Washington	37	%
World	16	%
New York and Region	1	%
Opinion	15	%
Opinion (Op-Ed)	3	%
Education	1	%
Sport	3	%
Technology	1	%
Business	3	%
Health	1	%
Arts	13	%
Movies	6	%

1. Distribution of the Topic Rhetoric in Sections of the *New York Times*

Front Page	624	3.62 %
Opinion	2973	17.27 %
Editors' Notes	1	0.00 %
Week in Review	610	3.54 %
Magazine	704	4.09 %
The Public Editor	1	0.00 %
U.S.	1873	10.88 %
Washington	1295	7.52 %
New York and Region	1420	7.02 %
World	1061	8.24 %
Arts	2537	14.73 %
Automobiles	3	0.02 %
Books	1332	7.74 %
Business	760	4.41 %
Corrections	3	0.02 %
Dining and Wine	2	0.01 %
Education	398	2.31 %
Health	293	1.70 %
Home and Garden	35	0.20 %
Job Market	2	0.01 %
Movies	291	1.69 %
Obituaries	68	0.39 %
Real Estate	15	0.09 %
Science	96	0.56 %
Sports	348	2.02 %
Style	78	0.45 %
Technology	148	0.86 %
Theater	214	1.24 %
Travel	33	0.19 %

Time Frame: 16th of March to 16th of January 2008

Source: *New York Times* Archive

2. Distribution of the Topic Rhetoric in Sections of the *New York Times*

Time Frame: March 19, 2008 to 1981.

Source: *New York Times* Archive

5. Findings of the Text Type Analysis

Data in the examined text corpus and common understanding and historical definitions are different in terms of the estimation of rhetoric. The preference of the *New York Times* to use the term rhetoric in text types traditionally associated with rhetoric is obvious. Rhetoric, used in a variety of compounds, is employed as a neologism and this stylistic trope indicates that the text corpus itself contains rhetoricity. None of the texts used a deeper analysis of the rhetoric, which was described or demonstrated any relation between the term employed and the concept of rhetoric.

Meanings and Functions of the Compounds of Rhetoric

General associations with the word rhetoric are:

- Useless Speech
- Negative speech about someone/something, a lie
- Standing in opposition to an action
- replacing action where action should be taken
- Personal speech style, a person has a specific way to speak
- A way to speak that is biased
- Polemic speech

The newspaper separates into different kinds of rhetoric that are ad hoc built compounds with an associated meaning and connotation. The use of ad hoc compounds in newspapers and magazines is a kind of slang in a profession, but also picks up the slang of the object of the news, in our case politicians. These ad hoc compounds are created and not available in contemporary dictionaries. They consist of the noun rhetoric plus an adjective or a noun set in front of the noun rhetoric. Some of them have the prefix anti- followed by adjective or noun making the kind of rhetoric evident.

Compound	Connotation
<i>Anti-immigration rhetoric</i>	Negative speech about someone/something
<i>Obama-esque rhetoric</i>	Personal speech style, a person has a specific way to speak Artificial imitation

Negatively connoted phrases are:

Compound	Connotation
<i>Mere rhetoric</i>	Useless Speech
<i>Empty rhetoric</i>	
<i>Blind rhetoric</i>	

Example for Ad hoc Compounds in the *New York Times*

In the article *Obama, Drawing Criticism On Two Fronts, Fires Back* (NYT. February 21, 2008) ironically *good words* are considered and interpreted as rhetoric equal to *empty rhetoric*: "In a speech on Wednesday at Hunter College in Manhattan, she said Mr. Obama was running on a thin résumé and empty rhetoric. "It's time we moved from good words to good works, from sound bites to sound solutions," Mrs. Clinton said." In *Decoding Lebanese Paranoia* (NYT. February 17, 2008) the term *mere rhetoric* is used: "More than mere rhetoric, they (accusations, F.H.) quickly congeal into conflicting versions of history, often with bloody consequences." The claims resulting from our research in the statistical distribution of this term used in the *New York Times* and its difference from the traditional and contemporary generally accepted meanings for the term can be described as follows: The meanings of a term and the traditional and contemporary generally accepted meaning of this term can vary. The term rhetoric is connoted negatively. A correlation between the text type and the use and meanings of the term exist. In most of the sections of the newspaper the term rhetoric is employed for political news, opinion writing, and arts. On a level of reminiscence, the concept rhetoric conveys itself in a form suitable for the needs of journalistic writing.

The newspaper text of the hard news is generally a descriptive one referencing the 5 W-questions. We can consider these questions as topoi for the narration and argumentation of the whole text. The use of ad hoc built compounds is an argumentative element in the discursive and/or narrative structure of the text. Instead

of an argumentative discourse, the text has here a judging function. The ad hoc compound contains and presents a judgment about the speaker/person or institution. In the form of the compound presented, it is classified under rhetorical principles a neologism. With the use of the term rhetoric a narrative and argumentative element enters the hard news. The writer can this way implement meanings and opinions about the person. These opinions can be his/her own or as a cliché it references a common estimation. Rhetoric as conduct of speech is in the article *Democratic Candidates Emphasize Need for Unity* (NYT. February 17, 2008) used when stating that "(...) Senators Hillary Rodham Clinton and Barack Obama on Saturday night cooled their rhetoric and reminded Democrats of their fight ahead." In the U.S. news section mainly rhetoric is used to indicate a personal quality and way to speak. The article *Reaching Out, Paterson Offers Different Tone* (NYT. March 14, 2008) uses the term rhetoric as a personal style of a politician: "But in some areas, Mr. Paterson seemed more inclined to revise Mr. Spitzer's rhetoric rather than his policies." In the resort local New York news in the article *Our Towns; The Tightrope of Promising A Genuine Transformation* (NYT. February 10, 2008) is written: Mr. Booker was able to boast that in his first full year in office he had made progress in living up to his Obama-esque rhetoric. Most important was his signature issue, crime." The article *Rhetoric: High; Anxiety: Low* (NYT. March 1, 2008) uses the expression "the heated rhetoric in Washington about the government's wiretapping powers" for a public discourse. Political issues can also be used for the indication of rhetoric. In the article *Counting Heads; The Border And The Ballot Box* (NYT. March 2, 2008) is written: "It's hard, in fact, to see how a single 2008 Republican candidate benefited from anti-immigration rhetoric." In *Issues Start Rush to Citizenship by Hispanics* (NYT. February 5, 2008) a politician is cited using the term with the connotation also used in the *New York Times*: "'The hard-line rhetoric on immigration is turning off all Latinos," said Lionel Sosa, a Republican advertising executive in San Antonio (...)." One finding is that the system of rhetoric even in the minimalized reference system of text types in a newspaper can be re-constructed. If the style of the news is a rhetorical one employing neologisms, the text is not neuter. It has a rhetorical impact. In the World section rhetoric is employed for the characterization of international politicians and groups regarding their intentions in speeches. In *Paisley to Retire From Northern Ireland Posts* (NYT. March 5, 2008) the politician is characterized by "his fire-and-brimstone rhetoric". In *Settling of Crisis Makes Winners of Andes Nations, While Rebels Lose Ground* (NYT. March 9, 2008) FARC is described as a "group resembling a criminal syndicate that dresses up its actions in leftist rhetoric." In *Serbia Is Warned by Europe To Deter Embassy Attacks* (NYT. February 23, 2008) "senior European Union officials said they were increasingly alarmed by the nationalist rhetoric of some Serbian politicians, which they said was helping to incite violence." In *A Fragil Economy Raises Pressure on Iran's Rulers* (NYT. February 3, 2008) the term "anti-Western rhetoric" is employed. One of the functions is directed towards the audience. When an opinion is expressed, the reader can accept it or not. The difficult and problematic state of the use of such compounds results from its character as cliché and its enigmatic or simplified meaning. For our example above we just have to ask some questions to see the lack of sharpness of the term: What is 'anti-Western rhetoric'? Is the West identical with the U.S.? Does it mean that all Western civilization is attacked in such a speech? Here we reach the enigmatic meaning of the compound. If the context is not visible e.g. in an interview, we can hardly discuss the meaning of the phrase. Traditionally, rhetoric is neither classified as good or bad. A deviation from the neuter definition of the word rhetoric we find in the connoted meanings and use of the term. In the Opinion and Op Ed sections the term rhetoric is used for sentences, short meaningful sayings. In the Opinion/Letters section in *Can Democrats Stop Their Squabbling?* (NYT. March 13, 2008) the term *blind rhetoric* is used: "If you substitute "unpatriotic" with "divisive," you get the same blind rhetoric

that's ruled the White House for eight years." In the Op-Ed section in *Grand Old Protectionists* (NYT. March 6, 2008) "President Reagan's open-markets rhetoric" is mentioned. In the Editorial in *Vladimir Putin's Russia* (NYT. February 27, 2008) is written: "Descending back into cold war rhetoric and reflexes will not help anyone." In the Op-Ed section in *Russia's Last Hope* (February 29, 2008) is written: "Now, at least, they limit themselves for the most part to negative rhetoric about the West. So there is progress." The term rhetoric is like an image decoded with associations the reader cannot decode totally. Ruhrmann, Sommer, and Sassenberg (2007) defined the Linguistic Intergroup Bias (LIB) as the "tendency to describe positive ingroup and negative outgroup behaviors in more abstract linguistic categories than negative ingroup and positive outgroup behavior. It leads to a more abstract linguistic representation of undesirable aspects compared to desirable ones in describing outgroups and vice versa for the ingroup." In our case the abstract linguistic concept is a negative connoted attribute. It is applied to both national and international persons. The behavior described as rhetoric is negatively connoted as antithesis of the concept 'action'. It can be interpreted as a general political criticism expecting actions instead of speech. In the second specific case a way of speaking is considered as persuasive and hostile. A similarity of the LIB is that the negative behaviour is described with an abstract concept without a sufficient reference to the concept.

Rhetoric vs. action is a general opposition in the political writings of the *New York Times*. The journalists can even in hard news implement a negatively connoted word in order to make a commentary. While the term is employed as a depicted attribute of persons in the news section, the editorial uses it in sentences and sayings as a commentary of hard news. In the Editorial section in *Still Waiting to Seize the Moment* (NYT. January 12, 2008) this statement appeared: "Rhetoric is, of course, better than nothing -- especially after Mr. Bush spent seven years refusing to get involved." The difference between words (*verba*) and things (*res*) is the main aspect of rhetoric since ancient times. The U.S. American proverb 'Walk the Walk and Talk the Talk' indicates the esteem of a separation between action and speech. Rhetoric as a canon of speaking came to the U.S. from Europe. Rhetoric had a place in the writing programs of the colleges and universities. Here it is only a substitute for the composition of writings in the English language in ancient rhetoric covered by the field of disposition (*dispositio*) and elocution (*elocutio*). Obviously beyond this field the estimation turns to a negatively connoted set of associations.

6. The Perspective of the Mass Media

The Position of the *New York Times* Regarding Rhetoric

Taking the example of the writings in the *New York Times* the use of rhetoric as a connoted word is part of a reference system:

1. Reference to the object (person/institution)
2. Reference to opinion (writer/the medium/the audience)

In *Is Eloquence Overrated?* Theodore C. Sorensen, the speechwriter for President John F. Kennedy, was cited with a definition of political rhetoric as "Speaking from the heart, to the heart, directly, not too complicated, relatively brief sentences, words that are clear to everyone." For the writer of the article, Peter Applebome, "Obama's rise has shown the power of effective political speech, it has also shown how much the form continues to evolve and how tantalizingly imprecise the link remains between a great political speech and a great political career." Applebome mentions

John C. Calhoun, Henry Clay, and Daniel Webster as 'spellbinding orators' versed in classical rhetoric that failed to be elected president. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech in 1963, followed by John F. Kennedy's 1961 inaugural address, Franklin D. Roosevelt's first inaugural address in 1933, and his declaration of war on Dec. 8, 1941 are considered to be among the most important U.S. speeches besides the oratory of Ronald Reagan. Applebome cites that the general level of rhetorical skills has fallen so far, a conclusion from David Zarefsky, a professor of communication studies at Northwestern University' regarding the reactions of Obama's speeches. Sorensen supports Obama's speeches. Kathleen Hall Jamieson, the director of the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania, noted that Obama's best speeches were examples of epideictic or ceremonial rhetoric opposed to the deliberative language of policymaking or the forensic language. Jamieson notes that traditional political rhetoric is a declining art. If the perspective of the mass media in our case, the use of the concept rhetoric in news as a descriptive way to write about an event and a person, shows no congruence with the standard definitions of rhetoric and its historical meanings, we must ask:

Which perspective has the news paper/the writer of the news?
Which aim(s) does the text have?

Actually, the texts described above connote specific meanings about a person and the person's estimation when using the term rhetoric. In some of the cases the meaning reflects the perspective of the person regarding a topic and the perspective of the writer (double-decoded). The function and the perspective of the writer towards the person is also a selective perspective from the news favoring the event as the (hard) news or 'news in nuce'. A speech can be also further analyzed or cited in the news. But when this is not done, it might be presented as 'rhetoric'. The texts employ different aims and the writing of the hard news has also an argumentative impact. The reliance of the New York Times on academic sources for the classification of contemporary political sources shows that the awareness and knowledge of the tradition of rhetorical speech among public writers is rudimentary done at random.

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