

## RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH STUDENTS' BUSINESS EXPRESSIONS: A RESEARCH PAPER

Supeno  
English Education Department,  
Universitas Wijaya Kusuma Surabaya, East Java, INDONESIA  
e-mail: [bana.supeno@gmail.com](mailto:bana.supeno@gmail.com)

### Abstract

In order to persuade, a speaker must analyze the speech situation and adapt his or her speech to it. In 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 in a certain way must understand how the listeners feel, what they want, and what they need; the speaker must begin where the listeners are. A persuasive writing or speaking is often aimed at the heart or the stomach instead of the head. That is, some things or reasons are more acceptable to the readers or listeners' feeling (in the stomach) than to their logic (in the head). Instead of being logical only, therefore, a persuasive speaker needs to add some strategies to win the listeners' assent. Discussed in terms of tripartite as the core theory of rhetoric, this paper is intended to analyse English students' replies to their customers' requests through WhatsApp business role-playing. The findings show that most of the students' replies need to be rhetorically modified to make them more persuasive.

**Key words:** *logos, pathos, ethos, rhetorical*

### Introduction

In whatever mode of communication, the degree and power of pride in the human heart must never be underestimated. That is because 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 or she is and how clearly right the suggestion is.

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 (see: Corbett in Kogen, 1989, p. 65).

In his 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, p. 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 should tactfully add some strategies in order to win the readers or listeners' assent.

In writing an argument—at least in Kneffel’s view—the writer tries to win the readers’ assent by proving a logical case (1991, p. 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. Based on this view, one can draw an analogical conclusion that in persuasive speaking, the speaker (hereinafter termed the [future] seller) also tries to win the assent by moving the listeners (hereinafter termed the [future] customer) towards the emotional or ethical agreement with the speaker’s position.

In discussing about ethics in business negotiation, Lewicki, et al (1999, p. 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 rhetorically 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, pp. 167-83; Moor and Weigand, 2004, p. 3). Since the means of proving or moving the future customer 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 students in Indonesia whose English is a foreign language (EFL), being rhetorically persuasive in business communication is even more problematic. The success in communication depends not only on how effective the students— playing the role as the future business people—use English as a foreign language, but also on how tactful they should write or speak to the future customers. Therefore, only being able to use English is by all means insufficient. What they also need during the business negotiation is being tactful in using the English.

### **Business Communication And Rhetoric**

To make communication persuasive enough to change the future customers’ minds, a speech must have some criteria. In discussing about “Definitions of Rhetoric: Archipelago Rhetorica”, Cramer (2005, p. 9) states that there are three aims which an orator must always have in view—he must instruct, move and charm his hearers. If 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 instruct, (2) move, and (3) charm the hearer. Persuasion in business communication, therefore, can be defined as the art of negotiation in which the seller adapts his or her statements to the audience so that the statements have the effects on the feelings, thoughts, and actions of the audience as the future customers. As a seller, it can be stated that negotiation is a business communication where he or she seeks to change the future customers’ minds.

These three aims can be met by using various rhetorical means—often called modes—of persuasion. One of the most famous classical rhetorical modes of persuasion is the one proposed by Aristotle called 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*: urton, 2004b, p. 1; Daniel, 2006, p. 1; Eidenmuller, 2006, p. 3; Newall, 2001, pp. 2-3; Stein, 2002, p. 2; heeler, 1998-2005, p. 3). These are the theories that are applied to discuss the data in the form of business expressions made by the 7<sup>th</sup> semester English education department students of Universitas Wijaya Kusuma Surabaya.

### Method

The analysis in this research is made on the data in the form of written expressions as the replies to the three requests by the customers designed to stimulate the replies. Three different classes, ten students each, of the 7<sup>th</sup> semester students are assigned to play the role as the sole distributors of “TRAWAS” drinking water. Clear instruction and the 3 (three) requests were shared to the students via WhatsApp during the Business English class and they had to answer the requests based on their role as the sole distributors (the details of the instructions and the requests can be seen in the appendix).

Considering the limitations, the analysis is focused on the rhetorical errors the students make (to make the analysis accurate and avoid unnecessary confusion, the data are put in italics). That is, this research paper is specifically intended to propose how some certain expressions 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. It is not surprising that the most frequent reply to each of the three requests is as follows.

- (a) *You : I am sorry. The minimum order of drinking water in glass is 50 cartons.*
- (b) *You : I am sorry. The minimum order of 500ml bottle of drinking water is 30 cartons.*
- (c) *You: I am sorry. The minimum order of 1,000ml of drinking water is 20 cartons.*

Some students wrote the same expressions but with some slight differences. For example, two students used *We* instead of *I*. Hence, *We are sorry. The minimum order is - - - -*. Three students added the word *very* before *sorry* which may leave a milder expression of apology. Following the instruction distributed, some students constructed a little different expressions from the above a, b, c, and wrote *We are sorry. We can serve you only if you buy/purchase minimum 50 (30, 20) cartons*. Three students wrote *We are sorry. The minimum order is 50 cartons. So we cannot serve you*. Three other students wrote *We are sorry. We cannot accept the order under the minimum order*. There are still some other minor differences as well as additional expressions they made, but basically they are just the same—in terms of rhetoric— disappointing expressions.

### Analysis and Discussion

Using expression *I am sorry* combined with *The minimum order of drinking water in glass is 50 cartons* is structurally acceptable. In terms of rhetoric, however, this expression still feels insulting the customer's feeling. Therefore, the statement made by the customer service—in view of rhetoric—is unacceptable. That is, although the statement is initiated with the phrase *I am sorry* in order to reduce the rudeness the statement is still somewhat insulting. This is because, when measured in terms of Aristotelian rhetoric, the statement meets only the aspect of logos—the logical aspect of the business argument (see also: Docimo and Littlehale, 2018, pp. 1-4). The statement, however, ignores the other two aspects (pathos and ethos) of rhetoric.

The major part of the insult may come from the use of the phrase *The minimum order* which means that the customer service or the seller cannot satisfy the customer's request tactfully. Another part of the insult may come from the use of the phrase *50 cartons* which means that the customer can place the order only if he or she purchases at least 50 cartons. In the eye of the customers the use of these phrases are psychologically insulting. That is, in terms of Aristotelian rhetoric, does not meet the pathos (see also: Peleckis and Peleckiene, 2015, p. 417).

Using the word *we* instead of *I* in constructing an expression in one some way may leave a milder (even more political) impression (see: Steffens and Haslam, 2013, pp. 1-6). In this regard, however, this does not make any difference. That is because the content of the expression is just the same, disappointing the customers. Furthermore, putting the word *we* at the beginning of the expression is inaccurate in terms of discourse analysis. This means the speaker, intentionally or not, is making a kind of topicalization or thematization (see: Nunan, 1993, pp. 45-7). More clearly, by putting the word *we* at the beginning of the sentence, the user is talking about *we*. In this regards *we* as the seller who cannot fulfill what *he* or *she* (as the customer) needs. In terms of discourse, therefore, putting the word *we* at the beginning of this sentence can mean that the speaker is talking about the seller who is unable to fulfill what the seller him/herself sells. In terms of rhetoric, this can cause a sense of untrustworthy, which at the same time can mean a failure to meet the ethos as one of the Tripartite.

Instead of putting *we* as the topic of the sentence, it would be much milder and a lot more rhetorical if the speaker as the seller puts the phrases *the pack for the glass* or *the pack for the bottle* at the beginning of the sentence, as the topic of the sentence. These phrases can then be constructed in more tactful expressions. That will make the replies read, "The pack for the glass is 50 cartons and we deliver to your home free" or "The pack for the bottle is 25 cartons and we deliver to your home free". As it can be seen, these two expressions feel much milder and more rhetorical. That is because—in terms of syntactic linguistics— it is *the packs* that both parties are talking about in the negotiation. Putting the phrase *the pack for the glass* or *the pack for the bottle* as the topic of the sentence will leave an impression that it is *the packs* who set up the rules for minimum orders; it is not the seller who cannot meet the customers' needs. In other words, putting the phrase *the packs* will leave a more logical and acceptable sense of negotiation in the customers' feeling, which in terms of Aristotelian rhetoric is logos (see also: Morin, 2011, pp. 1-3).

The use of the expressions *We cannot serve* or *We cannot accept* followed by the order below the minimum is also even more insulting the customers' feelings. The

expressions will be a lot more rhetorical if, for example, constructed as, *To enable us deliver to your home free, the minimum order is 50 cartons*. 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 enable us deliver to your home free*, which more or less means that the prices of the packs have included 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 seller's polite manners. Ultimately, the statement is also capable of leaving a charismatic image about the seller's character.

Another negative point that a seller or customer service should avoid in business negotiation is saying no, including cannot or could not. In the above students' replies, at least three students replied *We cannot accept . . .* or *We cannot serve . . . (the order under the minimum)*. The use of the phrases *cannot accept* or *cannot serve* may leave an impression that the seller is testifying that he is incapable of supplying the service he or she is selling. 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 packages are available as 50 cartons for the glass (30 cartons for the 500ml bottle, and 20 cartons for the 1,000ml bottle)*. Saying this expression does not only fulfill the aspects of logos and ethos, but might also cause the customers feel that the seller has tried to meet what the customers need. While the best sales and marketing people—in Butler's view—work with the goal of satisfying customers' needs and demands (see: Butler in Thomson, 2000, p. 72). In terms of Aristotelian rhetoric, doing such jobs is part of pathos.

Negative expression by a seller that is initiated with *I am sorry* or *We are sorry* does not always eliminate the customers' disappointment. That is because actually as soon as the customer hears this statement, he or she knows what is to come soon. It is clear that what to come is neither the provision of what the customer's needs nor the solution of his or her problem. Therefore, apologizing for not meeting the customer's need only leaves an impression that the seller only tries to reduce the customer's disappointment. It is indeed an effort of applying pathos. The problem, however, remains unsolved because there is no idea how the customer can have what he or she needs. At this point, it might sound very promising to say *Why not fifty (or thirty, or twenty) cartons with free delivery*. With this expression, customer will soon understand that if he or she has purchase less than fifty (or thirty, or twenty) cartons the customer has to prepare his/her own car to carry the cartons. At this very moment, it is very possible that the customer may change his or her mind to buy a little more in effort of enjoying the free delivery.

On the basis of the above discussion, one can see that a fluent language skill is not enough for educators. That is, learning English (for the students) teaching English (for the teacher/lecturer) is much more than supplying information (see: Triparthi, 2016, pp. 1-4). It is incorrect to say that if one can communicate, in written or spoken English as the (EFL) target language, one is successful. In this paper it has been analyzed and discussed that despite the facts that (Indonesian) students have been successful in communicating in both spoken and written English as their target language, in view of business communication their English lack rhetorical strategies. In relation to the need for Business English as one optional subject (commonly offered in semester six or seven), it is recommended that the teaching should include rhetorical aspects of business

communication. That is, especially for those who program Business English, rhetorical aspects are proven to be very crucial for business success.

Elements which are specific to the present expansion of business communication make specific demands on the knowledge of the cultural traditions of business contacts. This knowledge is especially important in studying English as a foreign language, since the use of foreign languages as a real means of communication is possible only under condition of extensive background knowledge of the involved culture, business. Along with good command in business English, students should be taught to compare social and cultural contexts of using promotional business contacts in both spoken and written forms (Fadeeva & Kalinin, 2012, p. 144). Whereas responding through WhatsApps sent to their lecturer as discussed above is just one example of how students should write their responses to some requests, correspondence is another. Sales letters or other written exchanges should be aware of contemporary business practices between Indonesia and English-speaking countries.

The English sales letter as widespread type of business correspondence has a long history, since the free market economy characterized by competition has been a dominant feature in the western economic structure (see: Hooker, 2008, p. 8). It also leads to the specific interpersonal context or one-to-one reader-writer relationships, in which the writer or the sales managers writes to an individual as a targeted reader. As for Indonesia, the recent changes in different spheres of life, including competitive market economy, lead to the increasing popularity of sales letters and also to the use of sales promotional strategies (see also: Fadeeva & Kalinin, 2012, p. 146). Moreover, English business texts affect the formation of genres of the Indonesian business texts. However, the business text in the sphere of official business Indonesian communications contains important features peculiar to that nation and shows sufficient stability with regard to such influence. Such background information offers an opportunity for students to further their rhetorical world knowledge structures, which may help them understand the letters' purposes and text structure.

Indonesian English students should be encouraged to identify different purposes. Business communication or negotiation should stress an independent positive image as a sales company. By learning the communicative purposes of business negotiation, which is the most important stage in learning Business English, will help students acquire a comprehensive and systematic understanding of a range of purposes. Characterized by overwhelming success in selling certain products, the prevalent strategies employed in business negotiation models involve a series of mental activities like attention, interest, desire, and action which are—as discussed above—covered in Aristotelian Tripartite.

## **Conclusion**

On the basis on the above analysis and discussion, it can be concluded that a business communication, more particularly a business negotiation, usually (if not always) involves tripartite as the core aspect of rhetoric. As a negotiation, 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.

Whether or not a seller can satisfy the customer is matter of how the customer feels. 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, however, (as in self-defense) is good and is rooted in human biology to boot (2002, p. 2). It is much wiser to consider the sayings that once the opponent, objector, or disbeliever is insulted, in this case the customer, he or she will never be persuaded of anything, no matter how obviously wrong he or she is or how clearly right what we suggest are. On the other hand, as Bill Press (2002, p. 2) says, 'If you say something often enough and loud enough, people will believe it—no matter how untrue it is'.

Choosing the right words to avoid insulting a customer is only one out many strategies. Expressions of apologies for not being able to meet what they need is just another. Constructing the linguistically right expressions based on the standards set up might still disappoint customers' feeling. Offering better alternatives tactfully to the customers while keeping the standards might give the solution. That is, offering the free transports of delivery for a little bigger order than what they need might make them choose the alternatives being offered without feeling purchasing more than what they need. In doing so, what the seller has to do is making expressions that in terms of tripartite (logos, pathos, and ethos) as the core of Aristotelian rhetoric acceptable. Once the seller is capable of making expressions containing these three aspects, the expressions he or she makes will instruct, move, and charm the hearer which ultimately makes the customers purchase the packages even they are more than what they need.

## References

- Andersen, P. H. (2001). "Relationship Development and Marketing Communication: an Integrative Model" (Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing). MCB University Press.
- Burton, G. O. (2004). "Branches of Rhetoric (Silva Rhetoricae)". Brigham: Brigham Young University. Retrieved from: <http://humanities.byu.edu/rhetoric/Oratory/BranchesofOratory.htm>.
- Docimo, K. and Littlehale, K. (2018). "The Rhetorical Triangle: Ethos, Pathos, Logos". USA: Storyboard. Retrieved from: <https://www.storyboardthat.com/articles/e/ethos-pathos-logos>
- Kogen, M. (Ed.). (1989). *Writing in the Business Professions*. USA: NCTE and the Association for Business Communication.
- Cramer, A. (2005). "Definitions of Rhetoric: Archipelago Rhetorica". Retrieved from: <http://www.andrew.cmu.edu/user/pcramer/defrhet.html>
- Daniel, C. (2006). "Understanding Rhetoric: Persuasion in Action (material)". Australia: University of South Australia. Retrieved from: <http://www.unisanet.unisa.edu.au/rhetoric/persuasion.htm>
- Eidenmuller. (2006). "Presidential Rhetoric". Texas: Texas A&M University. Retrieved from: <http://www-bushschool.tamu.edu/cps/prez/rhetoric>

- Fadeeva, A.A. and Kalinin, V.F. (2012). "The Importance of Cross-Cultural Understanding for ESL Students". Tambov State Technical University, Tambov Recommended for Publication by Doctor of Philology, Professor M.N. Makeyeva. No. 4(42). 2012. DOI: 378:811.111.
- Gonzales, S. (2002). "A Remainder of the Power of Words". Seattle: Seattle Post Intelligencer. Retrieved from: <http://www.commondreams.org/cgi-bin/print.cgi?file=/views02/0611-05.htm>
- Hooker, J. (2008). "Cultural Differences in Business Communication". UK: Tepper School of Business Carnegie Mellon University. Retrieved from: <https://public.tepper.cmu.edu/jnh/businessCommunication.pdf>
- Kneffel, D. (1991). *Aims of the Essay: A Reader and Guide*. Massachusetts: Allyn and Bacon.
- Lewicki, R. J.; David M. Saunders; John W. Minton. (1999). *Negotiation*. New York: The McGraw-Hill Companies.
- Moor, A. de and Hans Weigand. (2004). "Business Negotiation Support: Theory and Practice". Tilburg University: Infolab Dept. of Information System and Management.
- Morin, P. (2011). "Ethos, Pathos, Logos: Three Words to Make You More Persuasive and a Better Marketer". Company Founder Com. Retrieved from: <http://www.companyfounder.com/2011/04/ethos-pathos-logos-three-words-to-make-you-more-persuasive-and-a-better-marketer/#>
- Newall, P. (2012). "Rhetoric". Retrieved from: <http://www.galileanlibrary.org/int21.html>
- Nunan, D. (1993). *Introducing Discourse Analysis*. England: Penguin Books Ltd.
- Peleckis, K. and Peleckiene, V. (2015). "Persuasion in Business Negotiations: Strategic Orientations and Rhetorical Argumentation". *Universal Journal of Management* 3(10): 413-422, 2015. DOI: 10.13189/ujm.2015.031006. Lithuania: Vilnius Gediminas Technical University.
- Press, B. (2002). "The Myth of the Liberal Media Rides Again". Cable News Network (CNN). Retrieved from: [www.cnn.com/2002/ALLPOLITICS/02/21/column.billpress/index.html](http://www.cnn.com/2002/ALLPOLITICS/02/21/column.billpress/index.html)
- Roberts, W. R. (2004a). *Rhetoric by Aristotle 350 BC*. (Book I). Copyright by Lee Honeycutt.
- Roberts, W. R. (2004b). *Rhetoric by Aristotle 350 BC*. (Book II). Copyright by Lee Honeycutt.
- Roberts, W. R. (2004c). *Rhetoric by Aristotle 350 BC*. (Book III). Copyright by Lee Honeycutt.
- Stein, W. (2002). "The Basics of Aristotelian Rhetoric: The History of Rhetoric". University of Central Oklahoma. Retrieved from: <http://www.libarts.ucok.edu/english/rhetoric2/rhetoric.htm>
- Steffens, N.K. and Haslam, S.A. (2013). "Power through 'Us': Leaders' Use of We-Referencing Language Predicts Election Victory". *PLoS One*. 2013; 8(10): e77952. DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0077952. Retrieved from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3806781/>

Thomson, T. (Ed.). (2000). *Writing About Business: The New Columbia Knight-Bagehot Guide to Economics and Business Journalism*. USA: Columbia University Press.

Triparthi, R. (2016). "Professional Ethics in English Language Teaching". *International Journal of English Literature and Culture*. Vol. 4(6), pp. 104-107, July 2016. DOI:10.14662/IJELC2016.054. Allahabad: University of Allahabad.

Wheeler, K. L. (2005). "Rhetoric". Copyright 1998-2005. Retrieved from: [http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/resource\\_rhet.html](http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/resource_rhet.html)