



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

**PERSUASIVE LANGUAGE IN SELECTED SPEECHES OF TUN DR.  
MAHATHIR MOHAMMAD**

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MAHATHIR MOHAMMAD**

**By**

**ABDULRAHMAN ALKHIRBASH**

**Thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in  
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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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It is clearly observed that the last quarter of the twentieth century has witnessed renewed interest in understanding the nature of persuasion and the study of language as a tool to achieve persuasion. There has been an interest to develop the study of rhetoric to become an appropriate tool peculiar to the changes of modern life. The present study sought to explore language and persuasion in the speeches of a leading Malaysian politician. It conducted a rhetorical analysis of selected speeches of Dr. Mahathir (the fourth Prime Minister of Malaysia) to identify and interpret his language use as a means to persuade and convince his audience to accept or follow a specific course of action.

Of particular concern in this study was the question of what rhetorical devices Dr. Mahathir used and how he utilized them to influence his audience. Specifically, this research attempted to identify and describe the rhetorical devices and speech acts used by Dr. Mahathir to persuade his audience. Based on Fairclough's approach of discourse analysis, Aristotle's understanding of the three appeals of persuasion and Searle's speech act theory, this study explored logos, ethos, pathos and speech acts as a means of



persuasion demonstrating how they were applied to persuade the audience. The study also identified other linguistic devices which were used as supportive strategies such as the use of parallelisms, repetitions, rhetorical questions, metaphors, and enthymemes.

The findings revealed that Dr. Mahathir merged logical, emotional and ethical proofs to address his audience's minds and hearts simultaneously. Logical proofs were used via providing reasons, facts, past events, and statistics. They were consolidated by supportive techniques such as enthymemes, examples, parallelisms and metaphors to add clarity and conciseness. His rhetorical messages were not devoid of emotion. Emotional proofs were utilized to arouse different types of feelings such as anger, sympathy, jealousy, resentment and compassion. Together, logos and pathos worked to project his ethos. The utilization of logos reflected his competence, knowledge and awareness in the addressed issues. His pathos reflected his goodwill and concern for the welfare of others. His argument and messages projected him as competent, sincere, well informed, even-handed, and concern of others' welfare.

Assertives and directives were also used by Dr. Mahathir as persuasive devices. Assertives were used to emphasize and confirm facts or to assert beliefs whereas directives were used to suggest, recommend or command to encourage his listeners to perform actions and influence their attitudes.

The study concluded that various rhetorical devices mainly logos, pathos, directives and assertives worked collaboratively to project Dr. Mahathir's ethos as a strong element of his persuasive discourse.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia bagi memenuhi syarat ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**BAHASA PEMUJUKAN DALAM UCAPAN PILIHAN TUN DR MAHATHIR  
MOHAMMAD**

Oleh

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Jelas diperlihatkan pada suku akhir abad dua puluh satu timbul kembali minat untuk memahami aspek pemujukan serta kajian terhadap bahasa sebagai alat dalam pemujukan. Selain itu timbul juga minat untuk membangunkan kajian retorik sebagai alat yang sesuai khususnya dalam kehidupan moden yang sentiasa berubah. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengenalpasti bahasa dan pemujukan dalam ucapan ahli politik terkemuka Malaysia. Kajian ini menganalisis retorik ucapan-ucapan pilihan Tun Dr. Mahathir (Perdana Menteri Malaysia keempat) bagi mengenalpasti serta menginterpretasi bahasa yang digunakan sebagai alat pemujukan serta meyakinkan audiens bagi menerima atau mengikuti sesuatu tindakan.

Perkara utama kajian ini ialah untuk mengetahui alat retorik yang digunakan oleh Dr. Mahathir dan bagaimana beliau menggunakannya bagi mempengaruhi audiens. Secara khusus kajian ini cuba untuk mengenalpasti dan menerangkan alat-alat retorik dan pengucapan yang digunakan oleh Dr. Mahathir bagi memujuk audiensnya. Berasaskan

kepada pendekatan analisis wacana Fairclough, memahami tiga rayuan pemujukan oleh Aristotle serta teori pengucapan Searle, kajian ini mengenalpasti logos, etos, patos, dan pengucapan sebagai kaedah pemujukan serta menunjukkan bagaimana ia digunakan untuk memujuk audiens. Kajian ini juga mengenalpasti alat-alat linguistik yang lain seperti keselajaran, pengulangan, soalan retorik, metafora dan entemim yang digunakan sebagai sokongan.

Hasil kajian menunjukkan Dr. Mahathir menyatukan logik, emosi, dan pruf etika bagi menarik pemikiran dan hati audiens serentak. Pruf logik digunakan melalui pemberian sebab-sebab, fakta, peristiwa lampau, dan statistik. Ia dikukuhkan dengan penggunaan teknik-teknik sokongan seperti entemim, contoh, keselajaran dan metafora bagi menambah kejelasan dan ketepatan. Mesej retorik beliau juga tidak lari daripada emosi. Pruf emosi digunakan bagi membangkitkan pelbagai jenis perasaan seperti marah, simpati, cemburu, benci dan belas kasihan. Penggunaan kedua-dua logos dan patos menampilkan etos beliau. Penggunaan logos menunjukkan kecekapan, pengetahuan serta kesedaran beliau dalam isu-isu yang diucapkan. Patos Dr. Mahathir tergambar melalui rasa hormat dan mengambil berat tentang kebajikan orang lain. Hujah dan mesejnya menunjukkan bahawa beliau cekap, ikhlas, bermaklumat, adil, serta mengambil berat tentang kebajikan orang lain.

Sikap arsetif dan direktif beliau juga didapati digunakan sebagai alat dalam pemujukan. Arsetif digunakan untuk memberi penekanan dan mengesahkan fakta atau untuk menegaskan kepercayaan manakala direktif digunakan untuk mencadang, mengesyor

atau memerintah bagi menggalakkan pendengarnya melakukan tindakan dan juga untuk mempengaruhi sikap mereka.

Kajian ini membuktikan bahawa pelbagai alat retorik terutamanya logos, patos, arahan dan asertif bersamasama menyertahkan etos Dr Mahathir sebagai satu unsure yang kukuh dalam wacana beliau.

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This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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## **DECLARATION**

I declare that the thesis is my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously, and is not concurrently, submitted for any other degree at Universiti Putra Malaysia or at any other institution.

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**ABDULRAHMAN ALKHIRBASH**

Date: 4 March 2010



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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

Dr. Mahathir is one of those few leaders who capture your mind when he speaks. His outstanding rhetorical abilities have placed him at the forefront of eloquent leaders in the eye of his audiences. He speaks calmly, courageously and with magnanimity in words and thoughts (Somun, 2003). Although Dr. Mahathir has been prominent by his action, words, and thoughts, at home and abroad, Dr Mahathir the politician and leader still remains an enigma for the most part (Zainuddin, 2003). A leading Malaysian politician like Dr. Mahathir with his charismatic character created the impression that his success is not isolated from his persuasive abilities and raised the curiosity to investigate his rhetoric particularly in this age which witnesses an interest among researchers to understand the nature of rhetoric and the application of rhetorical techniques in persuasion and communication.

The notion of rhetoric has been associated with theories established by Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian who view rhetoric as the art of persuasion. Aristotle (translated by Roberts, 2007, p. 60) defines rhetoric as “the ability to see, in any given case, the available means of persuasion”. Cicero (cited in Gill and Whedbee 1997, p. 157) defines rhetoric as “the art of speaking well – that is to say, with knowledge, skill and elegance”. Quintilian (cited in Burke, 1969, p. 49) defines rhetoric as “the science of speaking



well, the education of the Roman gentleman, both useful and a virtue.’’ He stressed the importance of orators to possess eloquence and moral attributes. Aristotle’s rhetoric offers the first account of rhetoric as the power of finding arguments to inform decisions. His rhetoric shows readers how to invent arguments and find evidence. Aristotle locates rhetoric as a counterpart to dialectical argument (Olmsted, 2006). As indicated above, the theories established by Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian concentrate on using rhetoric as an instrument to persuade an audience on one hand, and to become an eloquent speaker on the other hand. The focus of rhetoric was on wisdom and eloquence unconnected to human problems and interests. Based on this understanding of rhetoric, theorists regarded the study of rhetoric pointless since it was perceived as a study of linguistic ornamentation (Perelman cited in Donahue and Prosser, 1997). However, in recent years, there has been renewed interest in the study of rhetoric and its implications for social and natural sciences. Scholars started to call for a new rhetoric which focuses on human problems and interests.

Scholars became more interested in studying rhetoric as a practical tool for producing texts meant for the public sphere and as a tool to analyze the argumentation of the public critically (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1990; Nelson et al., 1987; Simons, 1990). They reexamined classical rhetoric and Aristotle’s rhetoric and defined their new rhetoric as a theory of argumentation. They explain argumentation as the discursive means by which an audience is led to adhere to a given thesis or by which adherence is reinforced. For them, practical argument is a way of knowing. Richard McKeon (cited in Donahue and Prosser, 1997) argues that there is a need for a new rhetoric or a philosophy that could illuminate human problems of freedom and its absence in life and

“suitable for the discussion and resolution of problems peculiar to the age of international conflict and cooperation, technological innovation, and rapid change” (pp. 171-172). In other words, a new rhetoric is required as an appropriate tool for discussing problems in relation to the changes of modern life.

In modern society, theorists indicated that there is a complementary relationship between rhetoric and discourse since rhetoric is embedded in discourse and because discourse is characterized by the rhetorical tools used and the argumentation implied. Scholars perceive the notion of discourse in different ways, but they all find that language, speech, communication and rhetoric are related to discourse and to the functions of discourse in society. In addition, the relationship between rhetoric and discourse was also asserted by Aristotle since antiquity saying that language or rhetoric influences our behaviour and point of view when used in social relations, i.e. in interaction (Dam, et al., 2008).

In conjunction with the emergence of a new rhetoric, theorists asserted the importance of the inclusion of discourse analytic methods in rhetoric and composition in order to analyze texts with reference to contexts. MacDonald for example, (cited in Johnstone, B. & Eisenhart, C., 2008, p. 5) called for including discourse analysis in rhetoric and he has termed discourse studies “the interconnected fields of rhetoric and composition and applied linguistics”. The new rhetoric led to improvement in rhetorical analysis as well. Gill and Whedbee (1997) claim that rhetorical criticism in the last thirty years introduces explication of the dynamic interaction of a rhetorical text with its context, that is, how a text responds to, reinforces or alters the understanding of the audience or the social

fabric of the community. This understanding of rhetorical criticism agrees for example with Fairclough (1989) who views discourse analysis as an examination of texts in relation to social interactions and contexts.

This similarity between rhetorical criticism and discourse analysis encourages this study to apply principles of the two methods jointly to understand the persuasive devices employed in Dr. Mahathir's speeches. The study uses Norman Fairclough's approach of discourse analysis as a general theoretical framework, and employs Aristotle's understanding of persuasion and Searle's Speech Acts Theory as an analytical framework to analyze the rhetorical devices utilized by Dr. Mahathir in order to influence the audience.

## **1.2 Persuasion: A working Definition**

Persuasion is a process that enables a person to change or reinforce other's behaviors, opinions or attitudes. Harvard Business Essentials (2005, p. 57) states that "persuasion blends art and science. It is an art in that it requires the ability to establish trust. It is a science in that it is based on the disciplined collection and analysis of information, a solid understanding of human behavior, and well-developed communication skills"

The formal study of persuasion traces its roots to the ancient Greeks, who were the first to systematize the use of persuasion, calling it rhetoric. It was studied in their schools, it was applied in their legal proceedings, and it was used in the implementation of the first Greek democracies, in their city-states. Among the early ancient theorists is Aristotle,

who defines rhetoric as “the faculty of observing in any given case, the available means of persuasion” (Larson, 2004, p 10).

Persuasion is defined in various ways. Miller (1980) sees persuasive communication as any message that is intended to shape, reinforce, or change the responses of another, or others. Johnston, (1994, p. 7) defines persuasion as “a transactional process among two or more persons whereby the management of symbolic meaning reconstructs reality, resulting in a voluntary change in beliefs, attitudes, and/or behaviors.”

Larson, (2004) understands persuasion as the establishment of a state of identification between the speaker and the receiver. O’Donnell and Kable (1982) see persuasion as an interactive process between the persuader and the persuadee. They define persuasion (p.9) as “a complex, continuing, interactive process in which a sender and a receiver are linked by symbols, verbal and nonverbal, through which the persuader attempts to influence the persuadee to adopt a change in a given attitude or behavior because the persuadee has had his perceptions enlarged or changed.” O’Keefe, (2002) sees persuasion as an intentional effort at influencing a person’s mind through communication where the receiver has the freedom to take an attitude.

Although there are many definitions presented to persuasion, theorists still disagree about whether persuasion should necessarily be successful or not. Some theorists see persuasion as attempts to persuade the audience to change their attitudes irrespective of the outcome, be it successful or not. Pefloff, (1993, p. 15) for example, defines persuasion as “an activity or process in which a communicator attempts to induce a



change in the belief, attitude, or behavior of another person or group of persons through the transmission of a message in a context in which the persuadee has some degree of free choice.” He views persuasion as attempts done by the communicator seeking a change in the receiver’s behavior. Petty and Cacioppo, (1981, p. 4) state that the term persuasion “refers to any instance in which an active attempt is made to change a person’s mind.”

Other theorists see persuasion not only as an indispensable tool to influence people but also a successful effort which must inevitably cause change in the audience’s attitude and behavior. O’Keefe, (2002) for example, as noted earlier views persuasion as a successful effort while Pfau and Perot (1993) understand persuasion as the shaping, changing or reinforcing receivers’ attitudes, emotions, intentions, and behaviors. This understanding of persuasion suggests that the speaker should not fail to persuade his listeners. It does not take persuasion merely as an attempt to influence people’s attitudes.

Persuasion in this investigation is understood as attempts and endeavors to influence and persuade the audience as it is defined above by Pefloff, (1993), and Petty and Cacioppo, (1981). It is not within the scope of this study to look at persuasion as a successful endeavor. Its ultimate goal is to investigate the rhetorical devices and speech acts as tools employed by the speaker to carry out the process of persuasion in an attempt to persuade and induce change in the attitude of the audience irrespective of whether the change has indeed taken place. In short, this study does not purport to investigate the result of the process of persuasion; it focuses only on the rhetorical devices and speech acts for persuasion regardless of the impacts.

### 1.3 Persuasion and Manipulation

Despite the importance of persuasion in our daily life there is still reservation about the way we judge the value and the content of ideas, that is how we judge if an argument is credible or not, whether a message is good or harmful for us need to be given more consideration. Jacobs quoted in Sheldon (2004, p. 283) notes about persuasion in our modern world:

An accomplished persuader knows how to use the tools of language to achieve his purpose. In particular, these tools include “persuasive words”. Top salespeople, negotiators, and trial lawyers use them regularly. Most of us do not fully understand how or why their words wield such power, but university research shows that certain kinds of language can significantly diminish a listener’s critical thinking.

Jacobs asserts that persuasive words can be used to sway people who are unaware of manipulative strategies. Such manipulative strategies if received by listeners uncritically may cause harm. Thus, it is important for us to become educated about the various kinds of persuasive messages and the techniques used by speakers so that we will be equipped with the knowledge of persuasive techniques which help us interpret the intention of the speaker and to think critically and logically.

Alexander et al. (2001) state that although persuasion has occasionally been used to signify the unjust manipulation of individuals, there is a positive view of persuasion supported by Aristotle and others for example, Buehl, Alexander, Murphy and Sperl (2001), and Kardash and Scholes (1995) who believe that persuasion involves



convincing individuals to look differently or more deeply at some concepts or subject. In addition, Murphy (1998) claims that when we persuade we seek to change others behavior, understanding, judgments or positions by appealing to reason and emotion. In other words, persuasion is neither inherently good nor evil. Rather, the veracity of persuasion depends on the importance of the issue, its strength or credibility of the arguments, evidence or example presented.

Dooly (2006, p. 1) states that persuasion is not always welcomed. There are some negative examples which show the result of dangerous persuasion. Adolf Hitler, during World War II, unleashed an agenda of death using his ability of persuasion and communication while the world watched in horror. Dooly adds, today Islamic extremists use suicidal rhetoric to convince some fellow Muslims to sacrifice their lives in the name of Allah. Although these are types of persuasion many argue that these drift into the realm of manipulation.

To differentiate between persuasion and manipulation, Larson (1989, p. 138) claims that persuasion can be achieved through honesty, transparency, trust, awareness, spontaneity, interest, belief and openness. Manipulation, on the other hand, can be achieved through deception, lack of awareness, tunnel vision, concealment, phoniness, and cynicism.

Dave (2005, p. 2) demonstrates a significant distinction between manipulation and persuasion stating that in manipulation the focus is on the manipulator. The manipulator concentrates on achieving personal outcomes regardless of the consequences on the person manipulated. Dave emphasizes that manipulation if compared with persuasion is