

Right Timing and Proper Measure of the Application of Pathos in Barack Obama Inaugural Address

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Abstract: Most studies highlight the specific elements of pathos, few focus on how to make the most of pathos by giving its restrictions in the persuasive discourse. This paper takes advantage of Kairos to find right timing and proper measure cooperate to make pathos in president Obama inaugural address.

Keywords: Pathos; Right Timing; Proper Measure; Speech Address

1. Introduction

Pathos definitely has strong effects on the persuasiveness of discourse. Lanham defines pathos as “putting the audience in an appropriate mood, by playing on its feelings” (1991, p.166). Previous studies on pathos mainly focus on the specific elements (Crowley & Hawhee, 2012; Smith, 2013), application strategies (Higgins & Walker, 2012; Cockcroft et al, 2014) and persuasion effects of pathos (Bruland, 2009; Condit, 2013) in discourse analysis, but the principle of its application has not received enough attention. Without the restrictions to the application of pathos, its persuasive effects are impossible to be achieved to the uttermost. Therefore, in order to explore the specific principles, this paper uses Kairos “the right or opportune time to do something, or right measure in doing something” (Kinneavy, 2002) to construct pathos application principle framework.

President Obama makes best of his remarkable achievements and rhetorical skills to evoke particular emotions in the audience so as to win their identification in delivering his speeches. Most of related researches on his speeches are conducted based on the theory of interpersonal function or conceptual metaphor, but how pathos employed within the kairos principles has rarely been applied to the discourse analysis of Obama’s speeches. Therefore, this paper will delve into his inaugural address based on pathos application principle framework.

2. Right timing of the application of pathos

Kairos refers to right timing and proper measure. As for the former one, three principles-observation, prediction and action-are crucial in achieving timeliness. These three principles can be drawn from the exposition of Isocrates “Since in all activities, these opportune moments elude exact knowledge, but in general those who are particularly attentive and can understand the consequences most often apprehend them” (2000). “Who are particular attentive” requires speakers focus their attention on observation and “understand the consequences” asks speakers to predict the future situations (prediction). Action can be equated as moderation (Yuan, 2016) which “lies in falling short rather than in going too far” (Isocrates, 2000) for making use of perfect opportunities.

For the pathos in the proper time, “the favour will be great if the recipient is in pressing need, or if the times and circumstances [kairos] are important or difficult”(Aristotle). “If the recipient is in pressing need, or if the times and circumstances [kairos] are important or difficult” proves that speakers need to observe and understand the audience desire and master the opportune opportunity (observation); “the favour (emotion) will be great...” reveals that predicting the positive consequence paves ways for achieving pathos (prediction); after mastering the overall situation, speakers resort to the pathos is a demonstration of action.

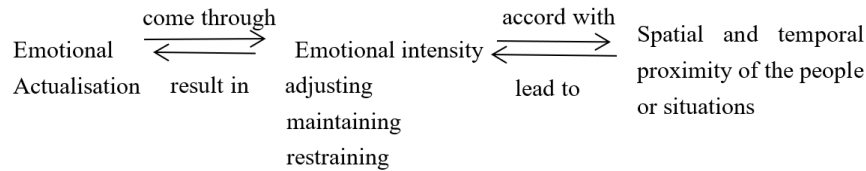
Crowley and Hawhee (2012) explicitly explain that “Aristotle’s first criterion is that rhetors must know the emotional states of mind of their hearers or readers (observation). An audience may bring a certain emotional state to a rhetorical situation, and if so, the rhetor needs to decide whether this statement is conducive to their acceptance of her proposition (prediction). If it is not, she needs to change their states of mind (action)”(p.176).

In short, observation of audience emotion is the premise of applying to pathos; prediction of audience inclination is the guarantee of acquiring correct emotional orientation; taking actions to achieve pathos is the final purpose. These three principles under fitness for occasion

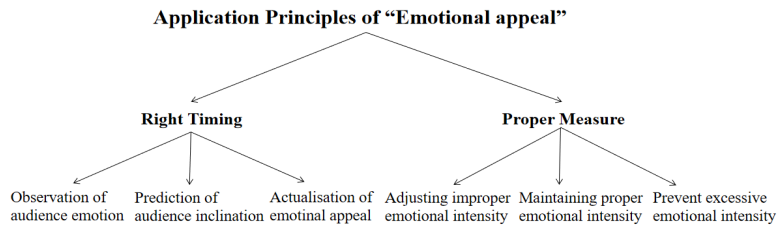
are interconnected and self-contained, forming indispensable requirement for achieving pathos.

3. Proper measure of the application of pathos

Proper measure is to be achieved by moderation for the occasion in the right way (Sipiora & Baumlin, 2002). When considering the proper measure in pathos, the moderation is mainly in reference to emotional intensity. As for Aristotle, “emotional change came about through changes in the level of intensity with which emotions are felt” (Rhetoric II). Emotional intensity alters in accordance with the spatial and temporal proximity of the people or situations that arouse them (Crowley & Hawhee, 2012). And thus, in order to achieve pathos, speakers are in need of adjusting, maintaining and restraining emotional intensity in accordance with the specific situation.



In short, for taking the pathos into the right direction, speakers are required to fix their eyes on the opportune time and proper measure in the course of stimulating audience emotion and engendering identity between speaker and audience. Opportune time (right timing) consists of three principles in resorting to pathos-observation of audience emotion, prediction of audience inclination and actualisation of pathos; proper measure lies in adjusting improper emotional intensity, maintaining proper emotional intensity and preventing excessive emotional intensity with the safety of guaranteeing audience in a favorable state towards speakers. The specific theoretical framework of application principles of pathos are as follows:



4. Right timing of the application of pathos

To explore how pathos is used timely and properly in the real discourse, this paper will analyze Obama’s inaugural address from a macro-perspective. Right timing of the application of pathos refers to using proper pathos at the beginning, body and ending part of Obama inaugural address. Right timing consists of three principles in resorting to pathos-observation of audience emotion, prediction of audience inclination and actualisation of pathos. Barack Obama took these three principles into consideration and arranged his whole discourse in accordance with the audience aspiration.

At the beginning, instead of going straight to the point, Obama expressed his respect for the task, ancestors and Bush.

1. I stand here today humbled by the task before us, grateful for the trust you have bestowed, mindful of the sacrifices borne by our ancestors.

This simple sentence explicitly reveals three principles Obama has utilized in resorting to pathos. He was at first conscious of people’s profound emotion towards the ancestors and president (observation of audience emotional state), realizing by conveying his grateful for these specific people (action), a kind of emotional identity is formed between the American public and himself which is helpful for the further delivery (prediction of audience inclination).

For further shortening the distance between each other, he regarded himself as a member of the whole community and delivered the following sentence:

2. America has carried on not simply because of the skill or vision of those in high office, but because We the People have remained faithful to the ideals of our forbearers...

Obama did not contribute totally the great achievement of America to the government but to the American people revealing his consideration of the audience, knowing this kind of expression is indispensably enhancing public responsibility as a owner of the country (prediction). Only do citizens are full of responsibility, government are more possible to carry out their programs smoothly. What is more, via a simple phrase “We the people” (action), Obama has predicted that pathos is able to be achieved (prediction) because he never regards himself solely as a officer but as a citizen, which leads audience to ponder that the president stand with them and support them.

And then, presidents came to the body part which majorly includes three aspects-main crisis, main tasks and expectation towards Americans. Varieties of pathos are achieved in different kinds of contents.

With regard to main crisis, president tended to make audience more serious of the present critical situation, and thus conveyed his views in the following forms:

3. Our nation is at war, against a far-reaching network of violence and hatred. Our economy is badly weakened, but also our collective failure to make hard choices ...Our health care is too costly...

By example^[3], after shortening the distance between Obama and citizens by acknowledgement and emphasis of public responsibility, Obama grasped the opportunity to unveil the crisis Americans have faced via a list of parallelism, which demonstrates the observation of audience emotion state. That means Obama not only comprehended audience anxiety towards these crises but also made sure that audience is credible for him to uncover the crises at that moment. Similarly, prediction and action are revealed in president’s employment of parallelism which bring audience into a serious circumstance, awaken their attention to the national status qua and pave the way for the generation of government policy.

Since being trapped in such crises, main policies concerning public economy, politics, military and the same taken by government are indispensable and crucial to be explicated for intensifying the audience confidence and credibility towards the new Party.

4.The state of the economy calls for action, bold and swift, and we will act - not only to create new jobs, but to lay a new foundation for growth.

5.What the cynics fail to understand is that the ground has shifted beneath them... The question we ask today is not whether our government is too big or too small, but whether it works...

6.To the people of poor nations, we pledge to work alongside you to make your farms flourish and let clean waters flow; to nourish starved bodies and feed hungry minds. And to those nations like ours that enjoy relative plenty...

Obama (example^[4]) at first concerned about the economy problems and appealed audience to the fact (actualization) that specific strategies lie in both creating new job as well as setting up new foundation for development. Example^[5] displays that president came to realize cynics’ perception and emotion (observation of audience emotion) and managed to resolve their confuses in virtue of comparison “not whether...but whether...whether...”(action) in that he was clear cynics misunderstanding and racial behaviour are equally vital to be noticed and patiently convinced, if not, government policies may be impeded in the course of enforcement. The prediction of the negative consequences on account of the offensive emotion of cynics reflects Obama’s capacity in forecasting the negative audience inclination, explicitly demonstrates Obama takes the whole Americans into consideration, whether for or against his opinion. Apart from taking Americans as the targeted audience, Obama as well cares about other nations’ affair and other countries citizens (example^[6]). For those poor nations, parallelism “to make...to nourish...” was utilized to attract international people’s attention and propaganda its heroism spirit with the safety of acquiring international respect and esteem (prediction).

Obama proceeded to conveying his expectation towards Americans and aspired to make audience feel confident towards the America, towards the government and toward themselves, stimulating to possess courage and good moral when facing with the plight.

7. Let it be told to the future world...that in the depth of winter, when nothing but hope and virtue could survive...

When it comes to the ending part, president tried his best to grasp audience attention by utilizing pathos.

8. Let it be said by our children’s children that when we were tested we refused to let this journey end, that we did not turn back nor did we falter.

One simple sentence totally reveal that Obama has achieved pathos in a simple and clever way. At first, “our children’s children” trig-

gered the inner weakness towards the family, the audience will be aware of the significance of moving forward in the face of difficulties. Mr Obama not only understands peoples inner desire (for the family) (obsesrvation), but also uses repetitive “children” to lead the audience to his expected frame of mind (prediction & action). What is more, President Obama again and again used “we” and “our” to shorten the distance with the audience and generate an affective identification in the audience heart (prediction & action).

5. Proper measure of the application of pathos

Apart from the great attention is attached to the usage of pathos at the proper time, President Obama as well shed light on how to adjust, maintain audience emotion to the proper intensity. It can be said the adjustment, maintenance and prevention of certain emotional intensity sometimes come into effect correspondence to the specific time, which demonstrates its intimate relationship with the right timing. In view of the great-length passages have given to the right timing, there only provides a simple introduction of how Obama endeavored to control the emotion intensity step by step.

As the example^[1] and example^[2] demonstrated, Obama at first took advantage of the first person “we” “our” “us” to adjust and maintain the audience intensity between the speaker and audience, only by which, he was confident to further point out the national crises^[3]. Foreseeing this kind of crises expression may lower the audience spirit, president turns to use a list of parallelism and contrast^[9] stir up their confidence for coming forth government policies in the following statements.

9. the time has come to set aside childish things. The time has come to reaffirm our enduring spirit; to choose our better history; to carry forward that precious gift, that noble idea...

Appearing in the same sentence pattern, “childish things” and “enduring spirit”, as a contrast pair, unveiled Obama and citizens generate prospect towards the future. In order to progressive concretization of this prospect, president utilized parallelism “to choose our better history; to carry forward that precious gift” to show what kind of wonderful, hopeful, prosperous future waiting for them. In this process, audience confidence are gradually established, intensified and maintained.

When it comes to the government policies, president always presented the wrong policy to the audience firstly and then guided the audience to considerate what correct and efficient policies are in dealing with the great problems in the USA.

10. The success of our economy has always depended not just on the size of our Gross Domestic Product, but on the reach of our prosperity; on our ability to extend opportunity to every willing heart - not out of charity, but because it is the surest route to our common good.

“Not...but...” are used twice to warn civilians of what the right or wrong standards of the success of the economy, stimulating people to reflect on their own understanding towards the economy for changing their minds and preventing excessive emotional dependence towards perception.

After making sure national citizens holding good willingness towards the government, Obama continued to pursue for the identification and respect from the world citizens. Friendly emotion are maintained between USA and those intimate-relation nations who possess similar values while passive or even more opposed feelings from other countries citizens are aimed to be mitigated by the president.

11. To the Muslim world, we seek a new way forward...To those leaders around the globe who seek to sow conflict... To those who cling to power through corruption and deceit and the silencing of dissent, know that you are on the wrong side of history...

Example^[11] is evidently a display of what kind of attitude president maintained to those value-conflicting countries and how president Obama endeavored to plant a friendly seed in those countries’ civics. In a simple word, president directly disclose the seamy side of the countries with different values and benefits in order to search for those countries’ ‘civilians’ esteem and acknowledgement in that these civilians may be lead to contemplate American president comprehend their aspiration and stand by them instead of by eroded country. Taking the hostile nations’ people into consideration not only alleviates their radical emotion towards USA government but also manifest the prestige of America.

Given the significance of constructing a correct, powerful and influencing values, president Obama made his best to stress that American spirit and American hope should be deeply engraved in the Americans hearts and bones at the end of the speech.

12. hard work and honesty, courage and fair play, tolerance and curiosity, loyalty and patriotism - these things are old. These things are

true...

Example^[12] has enumerated a range of spirits “hard work and honesty, courage and fair play”. American citizens are required to be formed in the course of constructing mighty America, which has mirrored president’s aspiration in strengthening audience emotional intensity in virtue of showing these consensus values.

6. Conclusion

To sum up, this paper firstly sheds lights on two great principles in resorting to the pathos - right timing and proper measure. These two principles simultaneously act on the pathos in the course of delivering the speech which maximize the persuasion effect and make the audience feel more comfortable and convinced. As is demonstrated, President Obama successfully took advantage of pathos in right timing and with proper measure in delivering his inaugural speech, and thus leave a good impression on the audience mind. Nevertheless, due to the fact that these two principles are solely based on some theoretical western references, the comprehensive understanding and systematic research and summary is called upon in the further study.

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