A Conceptual Paper on the Rhetorical Analysis of Tun Mahathir's Speeches

Authors:
Shahrill Ramli, Abdul Muati Ahmad and Hamisah Hasan
Fakulti Bahasa Moden dan Komunikasi, Universiti Putra Malaysia
shahrillramli@yahoo.com

Abstract

This conceptual paper attempts to address Tun Mahathir's Malay dilemma speeches from the perspective of rhetorical analysis. Unlike other rhetorical studies on Tun Mahathir which mainly dwelled on his 23 years of reign as the time frames, this research significantly attempts to fathom his rhetorical strategies. As speech is a persuasive medium that verbalizes one's thoughts, it would be interesting to unearth how he implemented his rhetorical strategies within this period as Tun Mahathir successfully led the then-opposition coalition to an unexpected victory of the 2018 general election.

Keywords: rhetoric; Mahathir; speech; Neo-Aristotelian

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

As of 2018, Tun Dr. Mahathir is the world's oldest Prime Minister (Stubbings, 2018) when he was reappointed as the prime minister of Malaysia for the second time after abdicating the premiership in 2003. The David versus Goliath victory of the then-opposition coalition Pakatan Harapan (PH) led by Tun Mahathir (Abdullah, 2019) against the reigning political coalition, Barisan Nasional (BN) was historical as for the first time since Malaysia's independence in 1957, the government was to be headed by the opposition political coalition. Prior to the 2018 general election, Tun Dr. Mahathir established a new political party called Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (PPBM) in 2016 with the hope that it would able to replace the legendary United Malays National Organization (UMNO) in championing the rights of the Malays and their issues (Jan, 2018). Although his political course deviated from being a staunch UMNO member to the leader of a then-opposition coalition PH, Tun Dr. Mahathir's instrumental views on the Malays remained consistent (Hutchinson, 2018; Musa, 1999; Suryadinata, 1985) throughout his life. Ironically, Mahathir's popularity with the Malays waned at the edge of the first premiership in 2003 (Khattab, 2015; Shukry, 2013) although many scholarly writings hailed him as an 'ultra-Malay' throughout the 23 years of his premiership (Ahmad, 2010; Mauzy and Milne, 1983). He was considered as "un-Malay" (Buang, 2017; Aun, 2000) and a misfit (Khalid, 2007) unworthy to be taken seriously by the conservative Malay Muslim voters. This was also worsened by Tun Dr. Mahathir's constant critiques towards his successors' leaderships (Ufen, 2009).

Nevertheless, the 15 years of Tun Dr. Mahathir's political hiatus is a curious period as it started with him being an unpopular figure among the Malays but at the edge of the political hiatus in 2018, his collaboration in PH managed to swing more than 10% of the Malay support for BN from the previous election (Abdullah, 2019) and that marked as the never-seen-before

avalanche of 'Malay Tsunami' votes (Rahman, 2018; Nadzri, 2018). Mahathir first coined the terminology "The Malay dilemma" in his infamous 1978 book when he addressed the socio-cultural and economic characteristics of the Malays which are holding back them from enjoying the prosperity of the nation (Pakri, 2004). He continued to talk about that and its relation with the Malays survival even during his political hiatus where he did not hold any significant post in the government and despite the undulating support from the Malays. It was validated in a content analysis research conducted by Mazli who examined Tun Mahathir Mohamad's views on the Malays during his post-retirement period from 2003 until 2012 (Mazli, 2014). Hence, it is evident that Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad's interest in regard of the Malay issues remained unscathed even during his political hiatus. However, how did Tun Dr. Mahathir manage to persuade the Malays throughout the 15 years of political hiatus despite initially experiencing the setback support from them at the beginning of his political hiatus? How did he manage to persuade the Malays by the end of his political hiatus in 2018?

Rhetoric studies comprises of persuasive techniques used by public orators such as politicians to get engaged with their audiences. With speech as a medium needed to coax the minds of the audience (Gadalla, 2011), politicians incorporate rhetoric in speeches for greater impact towards their respective audiences. Tun Dr. Mahathir has delivered thousands of speeches throughout his life (Wain, 2009) and thus used rhetoric in the speeches. As a renowned public orator, scholars are intrigued by Tun Dr. Mahathir's forceful and didactic style of speech (Funston, 1998) and therefore there are many researches with various methodologies that were conducted to analyse his speeches such as critical discourse analysis (Shukry, 2013; David and Dumanig, 2011; Haque and Khan, 2004; Ghazali, 2004), critical metaphor analysis (Imani and Habil, 2014), content analysis (Mazli, 2014) and Perelman's theory of argumentation (Basri, 1996). As the first rhetorical criticism methodology, Neo-Aristotelian remains as a strong tool of analysis to study speeches as it allows critics to assess speaker's persuasion devices and serves as the foundation to the other newer contemporary rhetorical criticism methods (Foss, 2019). Nevertheless, it is found that Neo-Aristotelian approach of rhetorical criticism is underexplored as methodology to analyse Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad's speeches and no research has adopted this methodology to analyse speeches delivered during his political hiatus from 2003 until 2018. In this vein, it is clear that this scarcity prompts a rhetorical criticism to be conducted to analyse Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad's speeches that were delivered during the 15 years of his political hiatus.

Findings in literature suggest that there are four outstanding local-based Neo-Aristotelian rhetorical criticism studies (Shah et al., 2014; Khor, 2012; Ahmad, 2010; Ahmad, 2007) on speeches catered towards Malaysian audiences. Shah et al. focused on *elocutio* when metaphors used by Aminuddin Baki in his Torch Movement Speech 2 were examined whereas Khor used only two canons of rhetoric namely *inventio* and *dispositio* in the research as the artifacts were written speeches delivered by non-native English speakers and therefore, canons of style and delivery were omitted from analysis. The application these two canons of rhetoric could also be seen in 2011 as Ahmad analysed 26 speeches of Malaysian first Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman. However in the doctoral thesis on Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad's 21 UMNO Speeches from 1982-2003 that he conducted in 2007, Ahmad applied *inventio*, *dispositio* and *elocutio* to support the analysis on the connection between Tun Dr. Mahathir's logical proofs to his thoughts. It is found that all four studies did not apply the whole five canons of rhetoric. In this vein, the scope of this research also will not implement all the five canons of rhetoric for the aims are to see the applications of Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad's evidence and reasoning, rhetorical

structures and rhetorical techniques in his speeches. Therefore, this research will only focus to the Aristotelian *inventio*, *dispositiom*, and *elocutio*. The justifications for such selection are due to canon of memory as somewhat less important in today's world since it is common for public orators to rely on flashcards, notes, and teleprompters while delivering speeches (Reynolds, 1968). On the other hand, canon of delivery is relatively new in terms of being the focus of rhetorical researches in comparison to the other three canons. Due to various interpretations of how canon of delivery should be used for analysis, researcher has opted to exclude it in this research.

The timeline frame of this research is from 2003 to 2018 which is the 15 years of Tun Dr. Mahathir's political hiatus although by 2016, Tun Dr. Mahathir has already established the new political party called Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (BERSATU). The term political hiatus for this research is defined as the interval transition between Tun Dr. Mahathir's first premiership in 2003 into the second premiership in 2018. There will be sixteen speeches, known as the artefacts to be selected from each year during the political hiatus.

THE RHETORICAL CLASSICAL THEORY

What is rhetoric? According to Aristotle, rhetoric is a faculty of discovering means of persuasion (McCroskey, 2015) while contemporary scholars such as Herrick defined it as deliberation in submissive choice-making by audience without external force (Herrick, 1992) and Foss viewed it as the action humans perform when they use symbols for the purpose of communication with one another (Foss, 2019). In short, rhetoric is used by the speaker to change his audiences' minds into his own directions. The Rhetorical Classical Theory comprises of the Five Canons of Rhetoric. It was inspired by the three rhetorical devices coined by Aristotle namely the *ethos* which are the characteristics of the speaker, *pathos* the emotional appeals and *logos* which are the rational appeals. The Roman scholars Cicero and Quintillianus then perfected the theory by assembling five tenets a speaker should adhere in order to maximize the persuasiveness of his speech. The five tenets are *inventio* (canon of invention), *dispositio* (canon of organization), *elocutio* (canon of style), *memoria* (canon of memory) and pronuntiatio (canon of delivery). It was until 1925 that this theory was revived by Wilchelns under the name Neo-Aristotelian as the first formal rhetorical criticism (Foss, 2019).

Inventio : **The Initiation of Ideas**

Inventio is the first canon in Rhetorical Classical Theory and the most important as it is the initial phase where the speaker is to elicit and gather ideas to form as contents of the speech. It involves strategic planning based on the two types of proofs that are inartistic and artistic. Inartistic proofs are those that speakers use from other sources but do not create whereas artistic proofs comprise *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* which speakers formulate in order to enhance the persuasiveness of their speeches. *Ethos* is the characteristics of the speaker. It encompasses elements such as trustworthiness, moral values or virtues exhibited by the speaker which will act as a magnet to maximize the persuasive effects upon the targeted audience. Scholars differ in terms of categorization of ethos. McCroskey in his book An Introduction to Rhetorical Communication has divided it into three types which are initial *ethos*, derived *ethos* and terminal *ethos* (McCroskey, 2015) whereas Amossy was of opinion that ethos is to be distinguished into two types which are preliminary *ethos* and discourse *ethos* (Amossy, 2000 cited in Mshvenieradze, 2013). *Pathos* is the emotional appeals that are used by speaker to stir the audience's emotions.

And according to Demirdöğen , pathos is essential as psychological anchor to exude the right mood to the audiences (Demirdöğen, 2010). Nonetheless, there are scholars who perceived it as the least appealing rhetorical device. Waddell disagreed with the notion as pathos influences the persuasiveness effect of an enthymeme (Waddell, 1990). Finally, *logos* which is the rational appeal comprises of evidence and reasoning. McCroskey found it as the most sophisticated rhetorical devices among the three as it is deeply connected to psychology and argumentation (McCroskey, 2015).

Evidence and Reasoning under Logos

According to McBurney, *inventio* is the phase where speaker is to build his argumentation and reasoning prior to be used in the speech (McBurney, 1936) while Scott stated that *logos* is the integral part in building rhetorical research as epistemic due to the logical argumentation (Scott, 1967). From both views, it is apparent that logos are rational appeals where speaker is able to use rationalized arguments to persuade his audiences. Moreover, it is also deeply connected to the speaker's thought as logos that are used in speeches reflect the cognitive of the speaker. This is supported by Gottweis in *Handbook of Public Policy Analysis: Theory, Politics, and Methods* where logos is the integral part of rhetoric as both of the deduction and induction reasoning are utilized as medium to persuade the audiences (Gottweis, 2006). This notion was also agreed by Richard Whately who believed that rhetoric is an offshoot of logic and suggested that enthymeme is a form of reasoning (McCroskey, 2015). In this vein, it is clear that logos are the bridges between rhetoric and logic as reasoning is used to make arguments valid. There are two types of reasoning namely inductive and deductive (Letteri, 2002). Inductive reasoning means that a general conclusion is derived from a few specific statements whereas deductive reasoning involves making specified conclusion based on generalized statements usually known as premises. There are four types of inductive reasoning which are the reasoning by example, reasoning by analogy, causal reasoning and sign reasoning whereas there are two types of deductive reasoning which are syllogism and enthymeme. Hitchcock found that audiences are more receptive when speaker applies deductive reasoning in the speech (Hitchcock, 1987) and this notion is agreed by Conley as it is found that deductive is more persuasive in comparison to inductive reasoning (Conley, 1984). Burnyeat also echoed this when he stated that Aristotle hailed enthymeme as the most effective modes of persuasion (Burnyeat, 1996). Why enthymeme which is a form of deductive reasoning is more persuasive than others? Although the premises in an enthymeme may sound illogical, they are much simpler to be digested by the public. And to quote McCroskey's statement, "rhetorical communication is neither logical nor illogical" for it is psychological (McCroskey, 2015).

Dispositio : The Arrangement of Ideas

Dispositio is the second canon of Classical Rhetorical Theory. It is the phase where speaker organizes or arrange the contents his speeches in the strategic coordination in order to ensure that the speech would be able to persuade the targeted audiences. Classical and contemporary rhetoricians differ in opinions about the functions of *dispositio*. Cicero and Quintillianus believed that it is the phase where a speaker is to place the structure of his speech whereas Whately in his book *Elements of Rhetoric* disagreed as for him, *dispositio* is beyond structural process for it is a "planned adaptation" of the whole oratory discourse. From this view, we can say that Whately viewed *dispositio* as the phase where speaker is to merge with the audiences through strategic placing of the speech contents as opposed to just being technical process about structuring the

speech. Apart from that, Cicero and Quintillianus believed that *inventio* and *dispositio* are two unrelated, distinctive parts. Nevertheless, McCroskey and Knapp disagreed as they believed that both tenets of The Classical Rhetorical Theory must act side-by-side like an inseparable 'siamese twin' to ensure the effectiveness of a speech (Knapp and McCroskey, 1966).

The Rhetorical Structures

There are many types of speech arrangement patterns or rhetorical structures proposed by scholars. Scholars of the olden days believed there are five divisions of speech arrangement namely *exordium* or the introduction, *narratio* or statement of the issue, *partitio* or division of issues into its constituent parts, *confirmatio* which is the main part of the speech and *peroratio* which is the conclusion (Iqbal, 2013). On the other hands, the one of the most popular speech patterns or *dispositio* suggested by the contemporary rhetorical scholar is the Monroe's Motivated Sequence developed by Alan Monroe in 1930s (Ojebuyi and Ojebode, 2012; Micciche et al., 2000; Shelton et al., 1999) and still widely used till these days. It comprises of five steps that is deemed effective for a speaker to introduce new policy or ideas. Other than that, other variations of speech *dispositio* include chronological order, spatial, causal, topical (McCroskey, 2001), ascending or descending order (Amit, 2003), problem-solution, withheld-proposal sequence, open-proposal sequence, reflective and elimination (Letteri, 2002).

Elocutio : Style of the Ideas

Elocutio is the third canon in the Classical Rhetorical Theory and it deals with how the contents of the speech are expressed. Quintilianus regarded elocutio as the most difficult stage as it involves ability to use language to sustain audience's attention to the speeches (Kirchner, 2007) and proposed three levels of style namely the low/plain style which is used to instruct, the middle/forcible style that is used to move and the high/florid style which is used to charm the audiences. On the other hand, it is also found that there are four main characteristics a speaker should emphasize in order to produce speech with good style. Comparatively, both McCroskey's four characteristics of good style and the four virtues proposed by Aristotle's pupil named Theophrastus of Eresus (Kirchner, 2007) have similar functions. The comparison is as per table below:-

McCroskey's Four Characteristics of Good Style	Theophrastus of Eresus's Four Virtues of Diction	Usage
Accuracy	Correctness of Language	Speaker must accurately express ideas with common usage that echoes with the habitual attitude of the audience
Propriety	Appropriateness	Speaker must use suitable level of language to get connected with the audience
Economy	Clarity	Brief message with clear definitions are more effective than wordier version of the same message

Vivacity	Ornament	The usage of 'aesthetically-tailored" words to psychologically impress the audience. Divided into figure of speech and figure of thoughts. Also sometimes known as rhetorical technique (Ahmad, 2018).

Cook's Nine Rhetorical Techniques

There are two types of elements that can be used by a speaker to 'stylize' the contents of the speech in order to maximize persuasiveness effect upon the audience namely the figure of speech and the figure of thoughts. Trope and schemes are two categories under figure of speech and often simplified as rhetorical figures (Van Enschot et al., 2006) or rhetorical techniques. In this vein, Cook in his book *The Elements of Speechwriting and Public Speaking* published in 1989 has enlisted nine rhetorical techniques that can be used by speaker as style to attract the audience such as alliteration, tricolon, ellipsis, asyndeton, anaphora, balance, rhetorical question, hyperbole and repetition (Cook, 1989). The functions of the nine rhetorical techniques are as per in the table below:-

Alliteration	words begin with the same consonant sound
Tricolon	three parallel words, phrases, or clauses
Ellipsis	omission of words without changing the meaning.
Asyndeton	conjunctions elimination with grammatical accuracy.
Anaphora	repetition of the same beginning of a sentence
Balance	segments equal in length, grammatical structure and meaning.
Rhetorical Question	question asked without expecting an answer (punchline)
Hyperbole	Exaggeration of statement
Repetition	Repetition of same words or clause

Memoria : Canon of Memory

Memoria is the canon that specializes in analysing the ability of speaker's access to the contents of speeches via memorizing and recalling facts of the speech aptly (Leach, 2000). Nevertheless, *memoria* receives least attention among the all five Canons of Rhetoric from modern scholars. According to Schloemann, device such as teleprompter is created to assist humans in "memorizing" their public speaking text in today's modern world in the sense as to create illusion to the public that the speaker is addressing directly towards them without breaking any eye contact or seemingly reading a manuscript (Schloemann, 2002). Despite that, Amaireh suggested that a speaker should take note prior to delivery in order to sustain the memorability of the speech (Amaireh, 2013).

Pronuntiatio : Canon of Delivery

Pronuntiatio is the last canon of rhetoric. According to Leach, it is usually associated with oral discourses (Leach, 2000) while Buchanan added that vocal elements emphasized in this canon of delivery are pronunciation, accentuation, emphasis, pauses, vocal tone and key,

and management of the voice (Buchanan, 2005). Comparatively to the first three important canons of rhetoric namely *inventio, dispositio* and *elocutio*, researches on canon of delivery is relatively new. Moreover, Nadeau stated that Aristotle did not explicitly stated *pronuntiatio* as a constituent of rhetoric (Nadeau, 1964) but on the contrary, the Roman scholars Cicero and Quintilianus who were responsible in perfecting The Classical Rhetorical Theory highlighted that *pronuntiatio* could evoke emotional persuasion effects if the speaker knows how to integrate it with the three rhetorical devices (Porter, 2009).

STUDIES USING NEO-ARISTOTELIAN RHETORICAL CRITICISM

There are a few researches conducted by scholars using the Neo-Aristotelian rhetorical criticism approach. An analysis entitled *The Rhetoric of Spiro T. Agnew: A Neo-Aristotelian Analysis of Agnew's Views Concerning the Media* was conducted in 1990 on the 39th Vice President of the United States, Spiro Agnew's two speeches that were delivered to attack television network's erroneous reporting and the power monopoly by certain few media companies. The analysis revealed that although Agnew's delivery of the speeches was mundane, his reliance on rhetorical figures and logos proved that speeches can be effective if all the five canons of rhetoric are implemented aptly (Voorhees, 1991). Although the author did make an excellent thorough rhetorical analysis on Agnew, it is found that canon of memory was not included as the Neo-Aristotelian tool of analysis without any justification in the thesis. The decision to implement the canons of rhetoric is the author's prerogative but it should be accompanied with explicit reason for doing such. In *A Neo-Aristotelian Criticism of Barack Obama's Rhetoric in The State of the Union Addresses of 2010-2014*, the authors attempted to uncover Barack Obama's artistic and inartistic proofs from the speeches (Saenla and Rojjanaprapayon, 2015). Therefore, *inventio* was supposed to be the focus of the research. Nevertheless, the authors extensively supplied readers with analysis from the perspective of *dispositio* and *elocutio*. Although the authors did answer the objective of the research but the presence of serendipity data is too overwhelming and it derails the focal direction of the research. Another example of serendipity data in Neo-Aristelian rhetorical criticism is from the research conducted by Giles who assessed Tunisian President Marzouki's speech in which he attempted to reinvent himself with a new persona through a carefully-tailored speech delivery (Giles, 2014) In the research, Giles revealed another rhetorical device that rarely analysed called *kairos* which means right timing. Serendipity data is double-edge information because although at times serendipity data could be a deviation of focus for a research, it could also be a contribution to the body of knowledge. Apart from that, Roberson implemented the classical criticism in acquainting women's liberation rhetoric to LGBT identities in terms of challenging status quo (Roberson, 2007). Despite the thorough analysis conducted, the author supported his criticisms by relating to his own life experience. Hence, it shows that the author fails to bracket himself from bias.

Methodologies Used to Analyze Tun Dr. Mahathir's Speeches

As a renowned orator, Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad's speeches are attractive to the scholars. There are many studies conducted with different methodologies to analyse his speeches. For example, Imani and Habil used Charteris-Black's critical metaphor analysis and found that Tun Dr. Mahathir has often implement health metaphors in his business speeches (Imani and Habil, 2014) whereas Basri attempted to incorporate Perelman's theory of argumentation as tool of analysis on Tun Dr. Mahathir's Oxford speech against the western patronizing attitudes towards developing countries (Basri, 1996). On one hand, it is also found that many scholars

were inclined to implement critical discourse analysis to study Tun Dr. Mahathir's speeches. Shukry examined Tun Dr. Mahathir's discursive strategies employed in "war on terror" speeches in retaliation against sentiments initiated by President Bush (Shukry, 2013) while Haque and Khan fathomed how Tun Dr. Mahathir integrated Muslim identity in his speeches in response towards Occidentalism (Haque and Khan, 2004). David and Dumanig also used critical discourse analysis when they studied Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad's speeches catered to address national unity (David and Dumanig, 2011). On the other hand, scholars also were keen to analyse Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad's speeches from rhetorical perspectives. By using critical discourse analysis, Ghazali studied the languages used by Mahathir to address social issues (Ghazali, 2004) while Alkhirbash et al. identified the rhetorical devices used to enhance Mahathir's persuasive discourses (Alkhirbash et al., 2014).

Neo-Aristotelian Criticism Based on Malaysian Artifacts

However, it is found that there are not many researches adopting the classical Neo-Aristotelian approach to analyse Tun Dr. Mahathir's speeches. Nonetheless, there are a few that are relevant to this study. For example, Ahmad used Neo-Aristotelian approach to decipher Tun Dr. Mahathir's rational appeals or logos in the annual UMNO speeches delivered throughout his 23 years of premiership (Ahmad, 2005). In order to support the analysis, Ahmad also fathomed Tun Dr. Mahathir's rhetorical structures and techniques that played eminent parts as persuasive devices in engaging with the public. Khor studied speeches delivered by Malaysian financial institution CEOs by using modified version of Neo-Aristotelian approach where only two canons of rhetoric namely inventio and dispositio were used as tools of analysis (Khor, 2012). Both Ahmad and Khor did not implement all the five canons of rhetoric in Neo-Aristotelian approach of their researches.

SUMMARY

In a nutshell, this conceptual paper proposes a rhetorical analysis of Tun Dr. Mahathir's speeches by considering rhetorical criticism of the classic Neo-Aristotelian. By using the three tenets of Classical Rhetorical Theory or The Five Canons of Rhetoric, this paper proposes to analyse Tun Dr. Mahathir's application of evidence and reasoning in his Malay dilemmas speeches based on Aristotelian inventio (invention of ideas in the speeches), the rhetorical structures in his Malay dilemmas speeches based on Aristotelian dispositio (organization or arrangement of speech contents) and the rhetorical techniques in his Malay dilemmas speeches based on Aristotelian elocutio (the style of speech). As previous rhetorical studies on Tun Dr. Mahathir's speeches predominantly focused on the era of his 23 years of premiership, this research is significant for it attempts to unearth the world's oldest prime minister's rhetorical strategies in the speeches he delivered throughout the period when his popularity with his own people that he cared so much grew waned. True to Winston Churchill's famous line in the 1940 "Finest Hour" speech, it was the "darkest hours" of his political prowess.

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