

Rhetorical elements in i have a dream

Sociology, Communication



How can four simple words change the world? What effect did they have on African-American history? Martin Luther King Jr, an American civil rights activist, spoke out against issues regarding race in the United States, during his famous speech referred to as “ I have a dream”. The mesmerizing speech is so memorable and significant because of the well balanced amount of rhetorical elements King applies.

When King expresses how important equality is, his claim was an example of using diction, to show why he wants a change in his nation. Using this method along with other rhetoric elements is often seen in Luther’s speech, to convey and persuade his listeners. By repeating phrases he clearly demonstrates his most common use of another rhetoric element called syntax. Dr. King uses real life problems and situations to stimulate emotion from all people. This emotion is won through metaphors and storytelling, aka figures of speech. Through the use of rhetorical elements such as diction, syntax, and figures of speech, Dr. King highlights his passionate tone and attitude to make a positive change for America.

Dr. King emphasizes the importance of faith and hope by evoking strong emotion in his listeners through syntax. A repetition of phrases such as “ I have a dream” or “ Free at last”, assist King in highlighting his many wishes of an equal America (King 50). Through the use of anaphora which is a common category under syntax, he stimulates the same beliefs and emotion in his audience, whom can now relate to him. This emotion evokes Pathos and is a way to engage in the audience’s values and needs “ We can never be satisfied as long as our children are... robbed of their dignity by signs stating for whites-only” (50). To end racism issues and encourage

movement, anaphora allowed King to strongly display problems that colored Americans faced during his time. Equality in his eyes is “ justice rolling down like water and righteousness like a mighty stream” (50). This example of a strong pathos was the basis of the incredible reaction from African-Americans. The four simple words that changed history became effective through the right amount of repetition in the speech. King created well-structured and intense sentences through the use of syntax, which stimulated pathos and allowed the people to relate to his perspective and many viewpoints.

The passionate tone that King’s speech displays is a powerful effect of using diction. His message is famous to this day through the simple yet well-developed choice of words. He establishes his point of view very strongly “ Nineteen sixty-three is not an end, but a beginning” (49). King’s objective is to inspire thousands of people and he successfully undertakes this responsibility without violence or judgement. His strong words indicate seriousness as well as compassion “ I am happy to join with you today in what will go down in history as the greatest demonstration for freedom in the history of our nation” (48). At this point he is opening up to the audience and sharing his hope in bettering America. King asks the country to become true to its words “ We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal” (50). Through the use of these words, King is able to demonstrate his “ dream” making diction an important factor in his speech.

King’s common and effective use of metaphors in his “ I have a dream speech” put focus on what it means to accomplish the American dream. A

metaphor is a component of a figure of speech which helps explain to the audience that there must be equality for all races. The comparison of a “lonely island of poverty” to a “vast ocean of prosperity” describe one of the many issues that colored Americans faced (56). This metaphor describes the position of African-Americans, where poverty was commonly found and only whites experienced wealth. The impact of the Emancipation Proclamation is illustrated when King makes a comparison through an impressive metaphor “This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice” (48). He wants his audience to not give up on hope and believe in a change that he could make with their help. To achieve their reaction, King constantly reminds them of the hardships that African-Americans went through “Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check which has come back marked ‘insufficient funds’” (48). He believes that the Bank of Justice failed to keep their promise in giving everyone freedom. King’s metaphors put attention on the many hardships and realities of injustice that the african-american population faced.

Martin Luther makes his listeners feel an immense mass of emotion due to an incredible and organized use of rhetorical elements. He confronts racism issues in the United States with strong and intense words that speak out for a change. His one speech moved millions of people and put an end to segregation and injustice. All rhetoric elements allow King to connect with his audience and bring forth his strong point of view. Diction emphasized King’s passionate tone and his hopeful attitude. Syntax as well as metaphors

heightened the tone of the speech and demonstrate King's final dream. Four simple words changed the lives of millions of people and are inspiring to this day. During a time where segregation was found in effect everywhere, Martin Luther King used rhetoric elements to make the most powerful speech in the history of America.