

英语修辞学概论

ENGLISH RHETORIC
AN INTRODUCTION

黄任 编著



上海外语教育出版社

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前 言

1998年5月上海外国语大学汇编了《上海市高等教育自学考试英语专业简章、大纲》(暂用本),其中“英语修辞学”被列为选修课程之一,选用的参考教材有两本:一是我用中文写的《英语修辞与写作》(*English Rhetoric and Writing*)(上海外语教育出版社,1996年),二是这本用英语写的《英语修辞学概论》(*English Rhetoric: An Introduction*)。这两本书可以说是姊妹篇,虽侧重点有所不同,但都是在我为英语专业本科学生开“英语修辞学”课和编写教材的基础上完成的。内容安排上既勾画体系,又突出重点,结合实际需要列出若干专题,分题讲解,文字力求简明通畅,说理尽量深入浅出,并附练习及参考答案,以巩固和加强对专题内容的掌握,因此既可作英语专业本科学生使用的教材,也适合于广大英语修辞学爱好者自学之用。

这本教材分为3个单元。第1单元(I-V)对英语修辞学的研究对象、内容和方法加以扼要介绍,包括写作内容的必要成份、修辞艺术的3要素和修辞活动的3层次。这3个层次概括了从词语选用、句式变化直到组段谋篇的修辞活动全过程。第2单元(VI-XIII)把英语修辞活动中的一些重点问题列出来分别进行讨论,例如“指示意义(Denotation)与隐含意义(Connotation)”,“概括(Generalization)与详述(Specification)”等,共7个专题,每个专题包含两个侧面,它们之间有区别,又有联系,正确把握这些相互关系,对学习和使用修辞至关重要。这个单元是本书的重点和主要内容所在。第3单元(XIV-XVI)属于附录,供读者参考。

英语修辞学是一门古老的学科,具有长期的优秀传统,但同时它又是一门现实的学科,与我们的日常生活关系十分密切。例如我们经常所说的“五讲四美”中的“语言美”就同修辞学有关。又如《科技英语学习》1997年第6期在报道首届全国高校英语辩论赛消息时发表了两位优胜者的体会文章,分别题为“逻辑即力量”和“燃起感情的火炬”,这是应用传统修辞艺术的成功实例,因为“逻辑”和“情感”正是传统修辞艺术3要素中的两个要素。

当前我国的英语修辞研究主要在下述3个方面展开:一是继续对传统修辞学和现代修辞学进行研究,继承和发扬英语修辞学的优良传统,同时吸收现代修辞学的新观念、新语料和新方法,改进和提高我们的研究和教学;二是把英语修辞同汉语修辞加以对比研究,既推动中外文化交流,又利用汉语优势促进英语修辞研究;三是把英语修辞学同其他学科联系起来,如心理学与修辞学,语用学与修辞学,交际策略与修辞学等,从而引出种种跨学科的新课题和新成果。

在本书编写过程中,我有幸参加李观仪教授主编的《新编英语教程》第7册和第8册“修辞”(Rhetoric)部分的编写工作,于是利用这个机会把有关材料请李观仪教授和何兆熊教授等过目,得到不少指点和帮助。本书初稿完成以后,又由美国著名的语言学家和翻译家、上海外国语大学名誉教授奈达博士(Dr. Eugene A. Nida)审阅了全稿。他从内容安排到文字表达都提出很多宝贵的修改意见。我在此谨向他们表示衷心的感谢。

黄 任

1999年6月30日于上海外国语大学

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I Goals for Studying Rhetoric

1.1 What is rhetoric?

A) Origin of modern rhetoric

Rhetoric originated in speaking. Aristotle, in the 4th century BC, first defined rhetoric as the art of persuasion, equivalent to argumentation as people understand today. In Athens, the center of western civilization, great orators, by exercising their rhetoric, gained following and support, and eventually, political power. John Locke, English philosopher of the late 17th century, described rhetoric as “the science of oratory”, or “the art of speaking with propriety, elegance, and force”. All this explains why the word “rhetoric” means “speaking” in such European languages as Greek, Latin, French, Spanish and Italian.

With the development of the modern printing industry in the 19th century, rhetoric came to be understood as the ability to write or speak well in ornate, showy language. Today there are still people who equate rhetoric with the adoption of stylistic

devices or the use of figures of speech in speech or writing.

At present, however, with the quickened tempo of life, the increased stress on efficiency and efficacy, and the ascendance of the idea that languages are means of communication, more and more people have come to regard rhetoric as the art of effective communication. Furthermore, rhetoric tends to be connected more with writing than with speech, and more with prose writing than with verse.

B) Contents of modern rhetoric

1. There are two main rhetorical trends in contemporary western culture:
 - a. Stylistics, which is associated with two aspects of writing: First, the various registers, e. g. : scientific and technical writing, business writing and journalism. Second, the stylistic variants — literary language and style, including personal style, and styles of different times and schools.
 - b. Rhetoric, which is chiefly concerned with techniques of how to influence the audience: the functions and effects of different language symbols in communication activities; measures to promote mutual understanding and to affect the emotions of the audience; skills to handle persuasion and arguments as described in the “three aesthetic criteria” and the “three levels of rhetorical operations.”
2. Specifically speaking, rhetoric consists of two basic aspects:
 - a. Communicative Rhetoric, which emphasizes the choice of words and phrases, and selection of sentence patterns, or-

ganizing paragraphs and whole pieces of writing in such a way that ideas are expressed most clearly, most accurately and most appropriately and the best results are achieved in communication.

- b. Aesthetic rhetoric, which stresses the vividness and gracefulness in expressing one's ideas by artistic approaches like the use of figures of speech so as to increase the emotional appeal of one's speech or writing.

1.2 The three fundamental elements in writing

A) According to Dorothy Margaret Guinn and Daniel Marder, co-authors of *A Spectrum of Rhetoric*, the three fundamental elements in writing are fact, reason, and feeling. Any piece of written discourse contains a combination of these elements. A technical report may be dominated by facts, though reason and feeling will also be found; whereas a letter to a close friend may be charged with feeling, but reason and fact will appear as well. Knowing how these elements combine helps writers to shape, elaborate, and refine their own expression so that they will be able to communicate with desirable effects.

B) In practice, problems may still arise in dealing with these three elements in an appropriate way, because on the one hand, personal viewpoints and experiences may affect the writer's interpretation of the situation and on the other hand, the authorities will always exert their influence over the writers. For example, many people in the west like to talk about

their "freedom" in the case of reporting, but in fact there is no complete freedom to speak of, otherwise the two British war correspondents would not have been blamed by their authorities in the recent Kosovo crisis.

Nevertheless, many journalists in the west, like the two from Britain, still managed to tell people a lot about the crisis. If you open the April 26, 1999 issue of *News Week*, you find the title on the front top page: "THE WAR IN KOSOVO: COLLATERAL DAMAGE", and on page one, what strikes you most is a special report as "top of the week" news accompanied by a large picture entitled "Casualties of war":

Tragically, however, many of the people on the road that day were not military targets. An 80-year-old Albanian refugee, Dibran Asmani, was riding in one of the tractors. "Suddenly there was a big blast, and I started running," he told reporters later. "All I could think was, 'My God, NATO is bombing us.' I ran through the field like a mouse." Two tractors jammed with refugees were blown apart, killing at least 75 people, the Serbs said. It was the second such slaughter, NATO hit a civilian train on April 12. . . .

(*News Week*, April 26, 1999, p. 10)

The special report was written by several correspondents as a narrative interspersed with comments, in which the reader can find a fine combination of the three elements: The whole

piece of reporting demonstrates the stern reality of war which they have witnessed on the battlefield [fact], imbued with sympathy for the suffering local people [feeling], and it is clear that in spite of the NATO officials' deliberate use of the term "collateral damage", "NATO couldn't get its own story straight," and "in the end NATO hurt its credibility far more than Milosevic did." [reason]

1.3 Goals for studying rhetoric

A) To be effective in communication is of primary importance. As American linguists Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren write in their book *Modern Rhetoric*: "Rhetoric is the art of using language effectively." The rhetorical devices for choosing words and phrases, seeking sentence varieties and organizing paragraphs and complete essays are not studied for their own sake but because they contribute to the effective use of language. The basic requirement of being effective is to use fewer words to accomplish the best communicative purpose. Compare the following two sentences:

1. The sports event began its commencement with the fine performance of 1000 children.
2. The sports event started with the splendid group calisthenics of 1000 children.

As the two sentences refer to the same thing, it is obvious that the second sentence is more effective because it is concise

and specific: one word ("started") is used for three ("began its commencement"), and specific reference ("group calisthenics") for the more abstract reference ("performance"). Besides, the adjective "fine" in the first sentence is not so impressive as "splendid" in the second, which can be demonstrated by the example in *Webster's Dictionary of Synonyms*: "a fine — yea, even a splendid room, of great height, and carved grandeur" (Galsworthy).

B) Rhetoric is closely related to grammar and also based on grammar. To be grammatically correct is fundamental to writing, but that is not enough. Basic rhetorical requirements must also be met. Francis Christensen, an American French rhetorician, once said:

Grammar maps out the possible; rhetoric narrows the possible down to the desirable and effective.

Now examine the following sentences:

1. The middle-class American growing up in the United States feels he has a right to have his own room, or at least part of room.
2. The middle-class American growing up in the United States feels he has a right to have his own room, or at least he has a right to have part of a room.
3. The middle-class American growing up in the United States feels it is his right to have his own room, or at

least using part of a room.

4. The middle-class American growing up in the United States feels he has a right to have his own room, or at least part of a room.

Sentence (1) is incorrect in grammar, because the word “room” in the sentence is used as a count noun and it should be preceded by a determiner (as the “a” in the fourth sentence); both (2) and (3) are correct sentences so far as grammar is concerned, but they may not be regarded as good sentences in rhetoric: (2) is wordy and the unnecessary repetition of “he has a right to have” can be deleted, and (3) is not acceptable because it contains a “faulty parallel structure” — the infinitive (to have) and the -ing participle (using) forms are inconsistent. Only the last sentence is comparatively satisfactory in both grammar and rhetoric.

- C) China has a long tradition in rhetorical studies, and at present, our rhetorical research activities are centered mainly in the following three aspects:

1. Go on studying the traditional and modern rhetoric schools and carry forward the fine traditions while assimilating new concepts, new ideas and new methodologies so as to improve the research and teaching of English rhetoric.

2. Make a comparative study of English rhetoric and Chinese rhetoric, which will not only promote international exchanges but also further our studies of English rhetoric by special attention being paid to our mother tongue. At a na-

tional examination and appraisal conference of academic publications last year, I found something significant: publications concerning foreign language and literature are characterized by their fresh information while publications concerning Chinese language and culture are characterized by their original opinions; therefore, it is advisable to take this difference into consideration so as to make a fair judgment.

3. Combine the study of English rhetoric with a study of other aspects of English and even other branches of learning. This is a new approach, and it often results in multidisciplinary research topics, e. g. rhetoric in discourse, psychorhetoric, rhetorical translation, pragmatic rhetoric, rhetoric in journalism, etc.

1.4 The three principles for our study of rhetoric

There are three principles we should abide by in our study of English rhetoric.

A) First, we should pay due attention to the rhetorical traditions which have been handed down from classical rhetoric and from all the rhetorical modes and techniques at the three levels of rhetorical operations. We should study them, and apply them to our practice of speaking and writing. Meanwhile, the audience and the context should be borne in mind when we use any one of the rhetorical principles and techniques. For example, figures of speech form a useful device to achieve good effects in communication, but if a figure does not fit a specific context, it will only result in a negative effect. The following

example is a joke about the inappropriate use of a simile:

Jack's house was destroyed by fire. Jim went to comfort him and asked him to contact the insurance company. "Cheer up, my friend," he said. "Your insurance claim will be proceeding like a house on fire, I'm sure."

The phrase "like a house on fire" is a proper figure of speech to mean "something urgent", "immediate action(s)", or simply "fast", "quickly", "very soon", but it does not at all suit the context here, for it will only make Jack think of his own house and feel worse.

B) In order to achieve the best results in communication, one has to understand the person or people being written or spoken to, and do what is appropriate for that particular occasion. The following is an example of a true story.

A graduate student had got into a tiff with his landlady over longstanding maintenance problems she had vowed repeatedly to remedy but never actually fixed. In a rage, the student sat down to write her a final letter asking for immediate action.

The question now was how to write the letter to the landlady. One way was to splatter his anger all over the page in an unrestrained outburst and threaten to move out; another was to persuade her into action by reasoning, and the third was to

ask her for help by emotional appeals. He thought and thought, and finally he decided to shame her into action instead of adopting other devices, because the landlady was very selfish and impervious to reason, meanwhile she was vain and sensitive about her reputation. The student then wrote his letter with convincing details by making a contrast between the apartment he now rented with the one he had occupied in another city from which he had recently moved: his present quarters badly needed painting, whereas his former apartment had been spick and span; in the present apartment, there were frequently pools of water in the walkways leading to the building and garbage was put in an unsightly bin placed right in front of the entrance, whereas in his former residence the walkways had been immaculately maintained and the garbage bin discreetly hidden behind a wooden screen. The student concluded his letter by telling the landlady that he was going to be the host of a party the following weekend when a dozen of his friends were coming to his apartment and he was much worried about the present poor facilities there. It turned out that the letter produced good result. The landlady took immediate action as she had promised.

- C) The third principle is that we should guard against the negative influence of our mother tongue. Dorothy M. Guinn and Daniel Marder write:

“Rhetorical operations are patterns of thought that direct and order our perceptions, ideas, and

feelings.”

Since different cultural backgrounds and social customs and habits affect one's use of rhetorical techniques, it is necessary to be aware of the differences of rhetorical operations in English and Chinese. Consider “coherence” for example. The term refers to the relations or connections between the parts of a sentence or between sentences or paragraphs, which require explicit markers of relations in English and so conjunctions are used, e. g. , when two elements form a coordinate structure, a coordinating conjunction is usually employed, and when more than two elements are combined, commas can be used to join them except for the last pair, where a coordinative conjunction (often together with a comma) is necessary, e. g. :

The Englishman, however, is born and brought up in a social system.

Closed doors are for conferences, private conversations, and business, ...

If commas are used to join all the elements as the following sentence without using the conjunction “and”, a special rhetorical effect is aimed at:

I came, I saw, I conquered.

The above is a well-known saying of Caesar when he defeated the Gauls. The consecutive use of commas (instead of using