

*English Rhetoric*

英语修辞学

王玉龙 张煜 张德玉 编著



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·北京·

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## 序

在西方,修辞学是一门古老而又年轻的学科。说它古老,是因为早在 2300 多年前,古希腊的哲人亚里斯多德(Aristotle)的《修辞学》(Rhetoric)一书就已经问世,并为西方修辞学的发展奠定了理论基础;说它年轻,是因为随着时代的发展,它汲取了哲学、文学和语言学等学科的最新研究成果,扩展了研究领域,丰富了研究手段。这就好像给一位耄耋之年老人的躯体里注入了新鲜血液,使它焕发出勃勃生机。

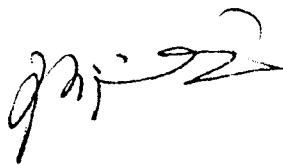
比较而言,英语修辞学是一门较年轻的学科,只有 500 多年的历史。确切地说,直到 1524 年,世界上才有了第一本用英语撰写的修辞学专著,这就是英国学者伦纳德考克斯(Leonard Cox)所著的《修辞艺术》(Arte or Crafte of Rhetoryke)一书。修辞学在美国的历史更短。20 世纪 60 年代,比利时学者佩雷尔曼(Perelman)将他的新修辞学(New Rhetoric)理论引入美国,从而极大地推动了美国学术界对修辞学理论的研究。需要指出的是,在美国,英语修辞学研究的历史虽然不长,但修辞学的学科地位却非常独特,更为学者们所关注。

在我国,英语修辞学的研究和教学历史也不长,不少

高校英语专业的课程设置中甚至还没有开设这门课程，这与时代的要求和广大学生的需求是很不相称的。究其原因，有人说修辞学太枯燥，太空洞，无用，也有人说，修辞学太高深，太抽象，难学。其实，修辞学并不像人们想象的那样。它和其他任何学科一样，有完整的理论体系，这个体系并不高深，只要用心，就一定能掌握。修辞学里确有一些较为枯燥的专业术语，但数量是有限的，况且有些术语读者不必死记，只要能辨认就可以了。说到英语修辞学的用处，是不言而喻的，无须作者赘言。只要留心一下任何一个平面媒体的版面，你就会发现，修辞学像一个巨人，其身影覆盖了每一个角落。就这个意义上说，没有修辞学就没有媒体，没有修辞学就没有语言，没有修辞学就没有生活。

是为序。

青岛科技大学外国语学院

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Jin' or similar, written in a cursive style.

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# Introduction

## What Is Rhetoric

What is rhetoric? This is the question facing any reader or writer who is engaged in the study of English rhetoric. Rhetoric, according to *Longman Modern English Dictionary*, is the art or science of communication in words. Whether speaking or writing, one has to get oneself across effectively, i. e. , to be eloquent, accurate, impressive, persuasive and expressive. The study of how to express oneself effectively, generally speaking, is the main concern of rhetoric.

Figurative language, which likens one thing to another in an imaginative or fanciful way, can bring freshness, vigor, and resonance to writing. Too much literal language can shackle the prose, tethering it to the hard, dull ground. Figurative language can unchain the author's thoughts, allowing an occasional leap of the imagination.

Figurative language helps readers understand connections through comparison or analogy. This process is so deeply embedded in our language that we often overlook it. For example, the verb *overlook* in the previous sentence creates a metaphor because it suggests that we can see or fail to see a process the same way that we can see or fail to see a physical object.

It is known to all that language is the means of communication of man. But man is confined by many factors while applying this means of communication. Such factors, to a certain extent, may be classified into linguistic factors and non-linguistic ones. Linguistic factors refer to the

rules concerning the language itself such as grammar. People must follow these rules in their speaking or writing, otherwise they would not be properly understood; on the other hand, non-linguistic factors refer to the speaker's or the writer's mood, age, position, occupation and education etc. should be taken into consideration when one speaks or writes. All the factors mentioned above contribute a lot to effectiveness that reveals itself mainly in appropriateness and accuracy. By appropriateness we mean the words and sentence patterns one chooses while speaking or writing should suit one's age, position, occupation and education etc. For example, adults should not use the language of children; teachers should not use vulgar language with their students. Meanwhile one has to pay close attention to the audience's age, position, occupation and education, etc. So one should vary one's tone and way when speaking or writing to a different audience. By appropriateness we also mean the words and sentence patterns one chooses while speaking or writing should suit the communication occasions. For instance, on diplomatic occasions one's wording should be formal and elegant; when at home one needn't care so much about wording—he might speak or talk more freely and informally; at academic conferences technical and specialized words are often used; while at parties people prefer humorous and witty conversations. By accuracy we mean the words and sentence patterns chosen to express one's ideas, feelings and intentions should be both grammatically correct and contextually proper. Otherwise, misunderstanding or ambiguity will occur. For example, a student of mine once, in his English composition, complained about the poor service and long queue in the dining hall and expressed his worries like this: "Now eating has become a problem." Obviously he made a mistake in diction. What he really intended to say is that "dining" has become a problem. Here is a good example from the American writer Erich Segal's *Love Story*, which shows how accuracy is

achieved by proper diction :

“Friends,” said Mr. Blauvelt to the others, “we are here to witness the union of two lives in marriage. Let us listen to the words they have chosen to read on this sacred occasion.”

This is the opening remark by the priest who presided over the wedding ceremony for a couple of lovers. The words underlined are so simple, plain, dignified and accurate that no other words could be used in their place without affecting the original meaning.

From the above examples we can see that effective communication is based on precise and appropriate choice of words, sentence patterns and figures of speech, etc. In other words, rhetoric is choice of linguistic means and choice of ways of expression. So in this sense we may say that rhetoric is “choice”. Rhetoric is not a kind of language beautifier, as is the view held by many English learners, but falls into language itself.

## **Brief History of Western Rhetoric**

It is generally held that the history of Western rhetoric is divided into six phases: 1) classical rhetoric (500 B. C. —400 A. D. , including the ancient Greek and Roman rhetoric); 2) rhetoric in the Middle Ages (476 A. D. —1416, from the collapse of the Roman Empire to the Renaissance); 3) rhetoric in the Renaissance (15—16<sup>th</sup>, c. ); 4) new classical rhetoric (17—18<sup>th</sup>, c. ); 5) rhetoric in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (the low ebb of Western rhetoric); and 6) contemporary rhetoric [ \* The division is based chiefly on G. A. Kennedy (1980), W. B. Horner (1983) and J. J. Murphy (1981) ].

Classical rhetoric is the theoretical source of Western rhetoric and has a great influence over the development of rhetoric in different historical periods. It is not until the Renaissance that rhetoric in European countries came into being one after another. The first book on rhetoric

in English appeared in 1524. It was written by Leonard Cox and entitled *Arte or Crafte of Rhetoryke*. Strictly speaking, the early rhetoric in Western countries were no more than reproduction of the classical rhetoric or Latin rhetoric in the Middle Ages and had few original ideas (see W. S. Howell, 1954).

It should be pointed out that classical rhetoric was not a unified system (see G. A. Kennedy, 1980) and it was mainly concerned with the study of humane tradition with Aristotle's *Rhetoric* as its theoretical foundation. Later from the humane tradition emerged another tradition, i. e. , stylistics.

In Europe, except in Belgium, rhetoric has not been restored to its former heyday, neither has it become a new branch of learning. But in the United States rhetoric received more studies than stylistics and occupied a dominant position. Humane tradition found itself in the fields of linguistic exchange, literary criticism and writing. And by the end of 1960s Perelman's ( \* Ch. Perelman; Belgian philosopher) "new rhetoric" was introduced to America and it exercised a great influence on philosophy.

## **Communicative Rhetoric and Aesthetic Rhetoric**

In the category of humane tradition, English rhetoric may be subdivided into communicative rhetoric and aesthetic rhetoric. The former is what Mr. Chen Wangdao, the master of modern rhetoric, referred to as negative rhetoric, the latter positive rhetoric.

As we know, rhetoric is the art or science of effective communication in words. For effectiveness, both communicative rhetoric and aesthetic rhetoric can be employed by means of logical thinking. Yet while communicative rhetoric lays particular stress on lexical accuracy, structural meticulousness and contextual appropriateness so as to bring its linguistic communicative role into full play, aesthetic rhetoric gives

special emphasis to the employment of figures of speech in virtue of imagination and association so that the language used will be more colourful and expressive, the images created on the reader's mind will be more vivid and impressive. As a result, the writing will be more persuasive and of more artistic appeal.

There are two widely-held views about rhetoric; one is that rhetoric is nothing but the employment of figures of speech, such as simile, metaphor, metonymy, personification, antithesis, hyperbole, euphemism, irony and understatement, etc. When one speaks of rhetoric, he means aesthetic rhetoric only; the other is that communicative rhetoric does exist, but it is inferior to aesthetic rhetoric, so it cannot be put on an equal footing with the latter.

Are these views correct? As a matter of fact, there is no superiority and inferiority between communicative rhetoric and aesthetic rhetoric. We cannot say which is better or which is worse. Both of them are effective means in communication, and it is often the case that they are mingled and permeated with each other. To illustrate this, here is an excerpt from *Erich Segal Man, Woman and Child* which tells about how Sheila (the wife) was shocked when Robert (her husband) confessed that he once had an affair with another woman:

*Husband: Honey, I gotta talk to you.*

*Wife: Sure. Is something wrong?*

*H: Well, sort of. Yes.*

*W: Bob, something in your voice scares me. Have I done anything?*

*H: No. It's me. I've done it. Sheila, remember when you were pregnant with Paula?*

*W: Yes?*

*H: I had to fly to Europe—Montpellier—to give that paper. . .*

*W: And?*

*H: I had an affair.*

*W: No. This is some terrible joke. Isn't it?*

*H: No. It's true. I—I'm sorry.*

*W: Who?*

*H: Nobody. Nobody special.*

*W: Who, Robert?*

*H: Her—her name was Nicole Guirin. She was a doctor.*

*W: And how long did it last?*

*H: Two, three days.*

*W: Two days or three days? I want to know.*

*H: Three days. Does all this matter?*

*W: Everything matters. I thought our marriage was based on total honesty. Why didn't you ever tell me?*

*H: I was waiting for the right moment.*

*W: And ten years later was the right moment? No doubt you thought it would be easier. On whom?*

*H: I didn't want to hurt you, Sheila. If it's any consolation, that's the only time.*

*W: No, it isn't any consolation. Once is more than never.*

*H: Sheila, that was so long ago. I had to tell you now because—I mean—She's dead.*

*W: For God's sake. Bob, why are you telling me all this?*

*H: Sheila, I am telling you because she had a child.*

*W: And we have two—so what?*

*H: He's mine. The boy is mine.*

*W: Oh, no, it can't be true.*

*H: Yes, it's true. I didn't know about him. Sheila. Please believe me.*

*W: Why? Why should I believe anything you tell me now?*

*H: Sheila, listen—*

*W: No, I've heard enough. Bob, why'd you have to tell me? Why?*

H: *Because I don't know what to do. And because I somehow thought you'd help.*

W: *You can't know how it hurts. I trusted you. I trusted. —*

H: *Please, honey. I'll do anything to make it right.*

W: *You can't.*

H: *You don't mean that you want to split. . . ?*

W: *Robert, I don't have the strength right now. For anything. You could do me a big favor.*

H: *Anything?*

W: *Sleep in your study, please.*

Now let us have a detailed study of this dialogue to see the wonder communicative rhetoric works:

The careful use of *gotta* instead of *have got to* shows Robert's intimacy and casualness with his wife.

The proper choice of *something* rather than *anything* indicates Sheila has an ominous presentiment.

*well, sort of* reveals that Robert was heavyhearted and felt somewhat difficult in choosing the right words. But after a while he realized the graveness of the matter and got to know that any of his reluctance or evasiveness could not help, so he answered with a definite and straightforward *Yes*.

*scare* is an informal and mild word, so it's more appropriate than *terrify* or *frighten*. *anything* is well chosen. Here it does not mean any kind of thing but something grave.

The three short sentences, using altogether 8 words, indicate that Robert was eager to confess his guilt. Obviously *yes* should be uttered in rising tone to push him on.

The two dashes, on one hand, show that Robert was hesitant and reluctant and that he was bringing back his memory of the affair and coming to the nub step by step; on the other hand, they also reveal that



Robert was in a complicated mood; happy memory of the past; bitter, regretful and ashamed at the moment. So it's hard for him to express his feelings in the right way.

*And* is used to urge Robert to go on.

*affair* in English refers to the sexual relationship between two people not married to each other, esp. one that lasts for some time. Here it is accurately employed.

Instead of beating about the bush, Robert came straight to the point, frankly acknowledging his fault.

Here *no* is not a negative word but an exclamation that expresses astonishment, bewilderment and skepticism.

This *no* is a negative word, affirming that he was serious. And the dash in the next sentence suggests that he was in a gloomy and self-reproachful mood.

Elliptical. The complete sentence reads like this: *Who was the woman with whom you committed adultery?*

*Nobody* is deliberately chosen. What if *somebody* is used? If so, Sheila would be more angry and jealous. And that would make the situation even worse.

That Sheila addressed her husband as *Robert* instead of the intimate form of address *Bob* reveals the change of her feeling.

This dash makes clear that Robert suffered much pain while making his frank confession.

Apparently this is a cross-examination.

Between *two* and *three* the conjunction *or* is omitted for the sake of casualness and triflingness. On the contrary, Sheila was very particular about the duration of her husband's adultery with the woman. She wanted to know every detail. So she not only added *or* but also added another *days*. This is a kind of trial in a family moral court. Being the *judge*, Sheila's tone ought to be sober and dignified. Here we could