

A Rhetorical Analysis of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah's Use of Rhetorical Questions in His Speech at the First OAU Summit in 1963

Theophilus Tawiah¹

Abstract

Language is the medium through which politicians influence people to get their support. This paper aims to assess how Dr. Kwame Nkrumah attempts to use language to achieve persuasion by analyzing his use of rhetorical questions in his speech at the first OAU summit in 1963. It was found that Dr. Kwame Nkrumah used rhetorical questions with diverse syntactic structures, such as wh-questions, yes/no questions, and declarative questions in his speech. The rhetorical questions were identified from the questions themselves as they made assertions on their own, and question and answers when Nkrumah directly answered his questions. He adopted rhetorical questions as a means to make assertions and stir emotions to persuade the audience to accept his proposal “African Unity”.

Keywords: Kwame Nkrumah, Rhetorical Question, Persuasion, Support

1. Introduction

Language and politics are intricately linked, as language is a tool used by politicians to convey their ideas and manipulate public opinion (Nguyen & Sawalmeh, 2020; Lawan, 2016). The relationship between language and politics has been the subject of much research in recent years. According to Chilton's (2004) longitudinal study on political discourse, language and politics are fundamentally intertwined. One of the ways in which language and politics are linked is through political discourse (Jasim & Mustafa, 2020). Political leaders every now and then need to communicate their ideologies and motives to gain support. Irrespective of how good a politician is, his success greatly depends on his use of language (what he says and how he says it) (Anderson, 2014). This is evidenced by all great political leaders as well as good orators.

Dr. Kwame Nkrumah was a prominent Ghanaian nationalist leader who is highly regarded globally for his crucial role in the decolonization of Africa and the establishment of independent African states. He believed that Pan-Africanism was the step for Africans to achieve total freedom and prosperity. According to McCann (2020), Dr. Kwame Nkrumah viewed Pan-Africanism as the key to unlocking Africa's full potential and realizing its destiny.

Dr. Kwame Nkrumah gave a lot of speeches throughout his career (Obeng, 1979). His need for command over language was non-negotiable, considering his aspirations. He needed to get as much possible support as he could to make him successful in his quests. As a result, he employed various persuasion strategies to get more people to go in his direction.

Studies have shown that Dr. Kwame Nkrumah employed a variety of strategies in his rhetoric to sway support to his side at every given opportunity (Mensah, 2015; Nartey, 2018 & Wiredu, 2021). This study analyzes Dr. Kwame Nkrumah's use of rhetorical questions as a rhetorical strategy in his speeches.

2. Basics of Rhetorical Questions

The term “rhetorical question” can be interpreted both broadly and narrowly. Rhetorical questions, in general, do not anticipate a response from the addressee (e.g., Driver 1988: 248; Frank 1990: 723; Siemund 2001: 1026; Kegel 2012: 478) and are used to fulfill pragmatic functions other than to obtain information, for instance, “to raise an issue for discussion or to declare the speaker's preference for one view or expectation over other possible ones”;

¹School of Foreign Languages and Literature, Nanjing Tech University, Nanjing Jiangsu Province, China.
Email: theophilustawiah0@gmail.com

in the narrow sense, rhetorical questions are “those questions that lead the addressee to understand the opposite, in a sense, of its propositional content” (Bussmann 2006: 408). Specifying it to the definition, rhetorical question has been defined differently by researchers. According to Quirk et al. (1985: 82), rhetorical question is interrogative in structure, but has the force of a strong assertion. It generally does not expect an answer. A rhetorical question is a question used as a challenging statement to convey the addresser’s commitment to its implicit answer, in order to induce the addressee’s mental recognition of its obviousness and the acceptance, verbalized or non-verbalized, of its validity (Ilie 1994: 128). Han (2002: 202) puts it in general terms as follows; a rhetorical question has the illocutionary force of an assertion of the opposite polarity from what is apparently asked.

Black (1992: 2) claims that a rhetorical question is asked for the persuasive effect of its asking, and it uses the auditor’s silence for its confirmation. According to Wang (2014), the speaker is making statements when asking rhetorical questions. Rhetorical questions are a powerful tool in communication that can be used to engage an audience, stimulate critical thinking or emphasize a point. Based on previous literature, Biezman & Rawlins (2017) propose three characteristics of rhetorical questions: (i) Rhetorical Questions do not expect an answer (Hudson 1975; Quirk et al. 1985; Wilson & Sperber 1988; Ilie 1995; Banuazizi & Cresswell 1999); (ii) Rhetorical Questions have the feel of an assertion (Sadock 1971; Quirk et al. 1985; Gutiérrez Rexach 1998; Han 2002; Rohde 2006); and (iii) Rhetorical Questions do not have to but can optionally be answered (Ilie 1994; Rohde 2006; Caponigro & Sprouse 2007). However, Sanishvili (2021) claims that the linguistic structure of a rhetorical question is very diverse and is not always an indicator of the question being rhetorical.

2.1 Dr. Kwame Nkrumah’s Use of Rhetorical Strategies

There has been considerable research on the various strategies used by Dr. Kwame Nkrumah in his speeches for whatever reasons he used them. Dr. Kwame Nkrumah is regarded as one of the greatest orators in the political space. It is agreed that his success and popularity are the results of his rhetorical skills (command over the use of language). For example, Asemanyi & Alofah (2015) came to the conclusion that the 1957 Independence Speech by Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah owes its global recognition to rhetoric because it affords the craft of carefully laid out rhetorical constructions and principles, making the speech a potent work of rhetoric. Mensah (2015) posits that Nkrumah strategically established his ethos as a Pan-Africanist whose leadership was crucial in the quest to free Africa from colonial domination through the invention of rhetoric. According to Nartey (2018), Nkrumah deployed war/conflict/military and religious metaphors in conjunction with other discursive strategies such as labeling or stereotyping, category work, sentimentalism, victim-playing, and negative other-presentation to formulate a resistance discourse against colonialism and imperialism. He (2019) goes on to say that Nkrumah systematically utilized war, religious, and journey metaphors via a (de)legitimation strategy that served a twofold purpose of resisting colonialism and imperialism and advocating a Union Government of Africa in his speeches. The same author (2020) found that Kwame Nkrumah adopted an anti-imperialist and anti-establishment stance through three processes: his explicit identification of Africa’s conspiratorial enemy, his sculpting of a gallant/heroic leader image and his projection of a messianic identity. Wiredu (2021) backed the claim that Dr. Kwame Nkrumah’s political achievement resulted from his good use of rhetoric.

It could be deduced from the findings of the studies above that Dr. Kwame Nkrumah indeed employed several strategies in his speeches to gain prominence and achieve his ambitions. The use of metaphors, the establishment of pathos, and the adoption of anti-imperialist and anti-establishment stance are a few strategies research has found to have been used by Dr. Kwame Nkrumah. However, not much has been studied about Nkrumah’s use of rhetorical questions in his political speeches. The study seeks to analyze Nkrumah’s use of rhetorical questions in his speeches by examining their frequency and purpose.

3. Rhetorical Analysis

The researcher adopted the qualitative research methodology in this study. This is because qualitative research is text-oriented and thus suits the text analysis in this study. Dr. Kwame Nkrumah’s speeches were sampled from the Internet (<https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Kwame-Nkrumah-s-speech-at-the-founding-of-the-OAU-in-1963-961402> & <https://searchworks.stanford.edu/view/2997330>) to be analyzed. The selection was based on the frequency of the use of rhetorical questions in the text. The rhetorical questions were identified based on the following factors; context of the question, the grammatical indicators such as the negative polarity items (‘ever’, ‘any’, ‘else’, ‘except’, ‘unless’, etc.) and modals (‘could’, ‘will’, ‘would’, ‘should’, etc.). Out of the speeches read, the one that best suited the study was selected.

Initially, the researcher familiarized himself with the speech by reading it. He later examined the speech’s historical context. Subsequently, the researcher perused the speech once more, but this time with a critical eye to ascertain the frequency and objectives of the rhetorical questions.

The researcher worked within a framework during the analysis of the rhetorical questions. The analysis touched on three categorical features of rhetorical questions. The following formed the basis of the analysis of the rhetorical questions.

1. The syntactic structure: regarding the syntactic structure, the following the types of questions looked at; yes/no questions, wh-questions, alternative questions, declarative questions and question tags.
2. The grammatical indicators of the question, including: negative polarity items and modals.
3. The functions of the rhetorical question(s). The functions include emphatic purposes, elicitation of emotional responses, persuasive purposes, and the evocation of the intended meaning.

The examples are analyzed below:

There were altogether 32 rhetorical questions in the speech; a result of a corpus analysis. Taking note of their instances of occurrence, only four of these 32 appeared as a single statement. The rest (28) appeared in clusters of varying quantities.

The following examples were selected for the analysis because they carried clear conditions of rhetorical questions and also fit the framework within which the analysis was done. As such, the researcher deemed these questions as most suitable for the analysis. The following questions are representative in terms of their syntactic structures, grammatical indicators present and the functions they performed.

- 1) *How, except by our united efforts, will the richest and still enslaved parts of our continent be freed from colonial occupation and become available to us for the total development of our continent?*

From example 1, the question, which happens to be the first of the rhetorical questions in the speech appeared in isolation. The question was introduced by an interrogative adverb “how”, intercepted by a subordinate clause (an adverbial phrase) “except by our united efforts” and followed by a modal verb “will”.

In this discourse-context, the speaker, Nkrumah, provided the answer for which the question was demanding himself. Without the subordinate clause, the question would have gone; “how will the richest and still enslaved parts of our continent be freed from colonial occupation and become available to us for the total development of our continent?”. The answer to that question would have been, in the context, “by united efforts of independent African states”. The interception he made with the subordinate clause was purposely to answer that question. The answer was, thus, given in the question itself. It was clear then that he did not need the audience to respond to it. With the inclusion of the subordinate clause, the implied answer to the question is negative. The question was asked to express a strong negative assertion. A prototypical feature of a rhetorical question.

In terms of functionality, the rhetorical question used by Nkrumah at this point was to make an emphasis on a point. With the question, he indirectly meant to declare that it is only by united efforts of the independent African states that the then enslaved parts of the African continent would be free. Without it, there was no chance. The emphasis aimed to persuade the audience into accept the formation of a union Africa in the end.

- 2) *Do we have any other weapon against this design but our unity? Is not our unity essential to guard our own freedom as well as to win freedom for our oppressed brothers, the Freedom Fighters? Is it not unity alone that can weld us into an effective force, capable of creating our own progress and making our valuable contribution to world peace? Which independent African State will claim that its financial structure and banking institutions are fully harnessed to its national development? Which will claim that its material resources and human energies are available for its own national aspiration? Which will disclaim a substantial measure of disappointment and disillusionment in its agricultural and urban development?*

In the example 2, the rhetorical questions appeared in a cluster. In all, Nkrumah asked five (5) rhetorical questions in sequence in this context. The first two demanded either a yes or no answer. It thus denotes that Nkrumah adopted yes/no-syntactically structured questions for the two questions. In the remaining three questions, Nkrumah employed “wh-question” format. He introduced all the three questions with the constant use of the interrogative pronoun “which”.

From the immediately preceding discourse context, it could be noted that Nkrumah had exemplified unfavorable instances of conditions that will go in long way to harm the progress of Africa. It could be observed that he made reference to those instances as “this design” in the first of the series of questions in the example 2. With the use of the yes-no questions, Nkrumah asserted that it was only through a united front that they could fight “this design” as he referred. Opposite/negative polarity was implied in the questions with indicators such as; “any” and “alone”. As asserted by Quirk et al (1985), this type of question makes strong assertions and indicate opposite polarity; as evidenced in Nkrumah’s speech. The information provided in the questions in the example indicated strong assertions which clearly depicted that Nkrumah needed no answers from the audience but rather

to make a claim. Nkrumah's choice to constantly introduce the succeeding three questions with the interrogative pronoun "which" was to also make assertions and imply strong negative polarity in each. It was also clear that Nkrumah did not intend to elicit any kind of information from the audience but to evoke silent answers in the audience's mind.

The first two questions in the sequence functioned to evoke intended meaning from the audience, in the sense that, he provided clear implications of unity in the context. Nkrumah also emphasized a point with the succeeding three wh-questions. The series was to make a strong emphasis on the point that no the independent African state was at that moment on the positive path to enjoying the full potential benefits of independence.

3) How else will we retain our own capital for our development? How else will we establish an internal market for our own industries? By belonging to different economic zones, how will we break down the currency and trading barriers between African States, and how will the economically stronger amongst us be able to assist the weaker and less developed States?

In this discourse context, the rhetorical questions appeared in a cluster of three. The first two questions were all introduced with the interrogative adverb "how" and immediately followed by the negative polarity item "else". The consistency in the syntactic structure of the first two sentences indicate the degree of negativity inhibited in the questions. It indicates that there is supposedly only one solution to the posed problem, and this solution is a shared knowledge among the speaker and the audience. Consequently, the speaker does not need the audience to respond to his question. The final question was introduced with the use of a subordinate clause "by belonging to different economic zones" which intends to hint on the potential repercussions of the situation where the independent states in the continent belonged to different economic zones. The subordinate clause evokes the negativity implied in the question. As such, the question was asked to provoke the thought of the audience to reflect on the subject of the subordinate clause. The speaker did not mean to elicit information from the audience in this context too.

In terms of their functions, the questions' purposes were to for point emphasis, as in the case of the first two questions, and the evoking of intended meaning, as in the case of the final question in the cluster.

4) How can we hope to make Africa a nuclear-free zone and independent of cold war pressure with such military involvement on our continent? Only by counter-balancing a common defense force with a common defense policy based upon our common desire for Africa untrammelled by foreign dictation or military and nuclear presence. This will require an all-embracing African High Command, especially if the military pacts with the imperialists are to be renounced. It is the only way we can break these direct links between the colonialism of the past and the neo colonialism which disrupts us today.

In the example 4, the rhetorical question occurred in isolation. It appeared as an open-ended question. In the discourse context preceding this one, Nkrumah enlightened the audience on the potential adversities of the situation of military involvement of a kind among countries. Nkrumah gave real examples in that context as well, naming certain instances. The question syntactically follows the structure of wh-question. Nkrumah introduced the question with the interrogative adverb "how" and followed it up with the modal "can".

Literally, the question was to find out from the audience the solution(s) to the problem he highlighted in the preceding context. Nkrumah did not show in the question itself that he knew the answer to it. However, the text succeeding the question indicates otherwise. In the co-text, Nkrumah answered the question himself, indicating that he did not need the audience to respond verbally to the question. Thus, the question exhibits a true feature of a rhetorical one. Nkrumah rather followed the question with a direct answer to solidify his argument of "unity of African States" being the only option that could he help Africa develop.

In relation to its function, the question's purpose was to evoke silent answers in the minds of the audience. To add to it, the silent response will assist Nkrumah to make emphasis on the point that African Unity was the "only" way to lead them to the promise "land".

5) What are we looking for in Africa? Are we looking for Charters, conceived in the light of the United Nations example? A type of United Nations Organization whose decisions are framed on the basis of resolutions that in our experience have sometimes been ignored by member States? Where groupings are formed and pressures develop in accordance with the interests of the groups concerned? Or is it intended that Africa should be turned into a loose organization of States on the model of the Organization of American states, in which the weaker States within it can be at the mercy of the stronger or more powerful ones politically or economically and all at the mercy of some powerful outside nation or group of nations? Is this the kind of association we want for ourselves in the United Africa we all speak of with such feeling and emotion? Your Excellencies, permit me to ask: Is this the kind of framework we desire for our United Africa? An arrangement which in future could permit Ghana or Nigeria or the Sudan, or Liberia, or Egypt or Ethiopia for example, to use pressure, which either superior economic or political influence gives, to dictate the flow and direction of trade from, say, Burundi or Togo or Nyasaland to Mozambique?

In example 5, the rhetorical question appeared in a cluster of eight. Except for the first question, which is syntactically a *wh*-question, the rest in the series of interrogatives that Nkrumah provided were yes/no questions. In the discourse context, Nkrumah began the questions with *what* appeared to be an open-ended question/elicitation and followed up with seven consecutive yes/no question, all of which linked to the first in the series.

The immediately preceding discourse context did not talk about the subject of the current one. It is worthy of note that Nkrumah introduced a new talking point with the first open-ended question. After the first question, “what are we looking for in Africa?” the succeeding series of questions clearly showed that Nkrumah did not demand answers/information from the audience but rather signaled his commitment to implicate the answer of the questions. Thus, the co-text was deliberately adopted to function as argumentative answers.

Each of the follow-up yes/no interrogatives meant to provide at least one detail of the then existing reality of the United Nations. Nkrumah indirectly described the reality of the United Nations with the use of references and also provided relative contextual examples by mentioning specific African countries. Collectively, the questions were meant to aggressively assert that the United Nations was not the ideal organization to move the world forward, especially, Africa which was considered a comparatively weak region. The questions required either acceptance or denial of the Nkrumah’s presupposition, a feature of yes/no interrogative posited by Wong and Yap (2015).

4. Conclusion

The widely-agreed notion of language being an indispensable tool in politics is once again proven by the analysis of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah’s speech at the first OAU summit in 1963. Nkrumah has been known to employ a variety of strategies to achieve his rhetorical purposes, such as the establishment of ethos (Mensah, 2015), the adoption of war and religious metaphor (Nartey, 2018), and the employment of anti-imperialist and anti-establishment stance through his explicit identification of Africa’s conspiratorial enemy, his sculpting of a gallant/heroic leader image and his projection of a messianic identity (Nartey, 2020). It was found that Nkrumah strategically employed rhetorical questions to make his claim throughout the speech. With rhetorical questions, Nkrumah asserted, emphasized and provoked, as have been established as its core characteristics and functions (Biezman & Rawlins, 2017), thought to achieve the ultimate persuasion to gain support.

References

- Asemanyi, A., & Alofah, A. (2015). *A Rhetorical Analysis of Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah’s Independence Speech*. New media and mass communication.
- Black, E. (1992). *Rhetorical questions: Studies of public discourse*. University of Chicago Press.
- Mensah, E. (2015). Establishing ethos and envisioning a new Africa: Kwame Nkrumah’s invention at the 1958 All-African People’s Conference. *Humanities and social sciences*.
- Nartey, M. (2018). ‘I shall prosecute a ruthless war on these monsters ...’: a critical metaphor analysis of discourse of resistance in the rhetoric of Kwame Nkrumah. *Critical Discourse Studies*.
- Nartey, M. (2019). Metaphor and Kwame Nkrumah’s construction of the unite or perish myth: a discourse-mythological analysis. *Social Semiotics*.
- Nartey, M. (2020). Voice, agency and identity: a positive discourse analysis of ‘resistance’ in the rhetoric of Kwame Nkrumah. *Language and Intercultural Communication*.
- Sanishvili, I. (2021). LINGUISTIC FEATURES OF A RHETORICAL QUESTION (BASED ON GERMAN-LANGUAGE MATERIAL). *Globus: social sciences*.
- Wang, X. (2014). *A Cognitive Pragmatic Study of Rhetorical Questions*. *English Language and Literature Studies*.
- Wiredu, S. (2021). Rhetorical Analysis of the Use of Metaphor in Ghana’s First and Former President, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah’s Political Speeches. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*.