Rhetorical Analysis of Trump's Immigration Speech

Immigration has been a difficult topic for a long time. It is a subject matter that leaves American citizens divided in terms of how to approach and/or solve the issue. Some have a harsh stance on the matter preferring that immigrants be deported while others are more lenient and push for what they believe is a better way. On September first of 2016, Donald Trump gave a campaign speech in Phoenix Arizona to the public about his solution to fix the American immigration system. He delivered a message that he considered to be the “truth” about immigration and how our current system serves only the “wealthy donors, powerful politicians, and political activists” (Trump). It seemed as though the audience was extremely skewed as he received booming applause along with the chanting of his name with every word he uttered. The majority his speech can easily be perceived to targeted Mexican immigrants and explains that immigration reform should mean “making changes to American laws and policies for the improvement of the lives of American citizens” (Trump) rather than the “lowering of wages and opening borders” (Trump). He uses past events of violence made by immigrants to strengthen his argument and accuses his then opponent Hilary Clinton and former president Obama of putting American families in danger by opening U.S. borders. Through employing the Toulmin model
and identifying the Aristotelian appeals, I intend to analyze the rhetorical components of this speech and discuss its use of rhetoric.

Aristotelean Appeals

Aristotle was a philosopher and scientist in ancient Greece and is acknowledged as a founding member of western philosophy. One of his most defining works is a written piece called *On Rhetoric* where he defines rhetoric as “an ability in each [particular] case, to see the available means of persuasion.” (Aristotle). It is also defined as “proofs that persuade and audience” (Placzewski, Ice & Fritch). These Proofs are broken into what makes the three appeals that are *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*. *Ethos* appeals to credibility and trusting lends itself to the rhetor’s character and *Pathos* appeals to emotion and aims to invoke such into the audience. While *Logos* appeals to logic and allows the argument to stand on its own to persuade the audience. Although all three of these appeals are effective when utilized efficiently, ethos was argued to be the most effective of all the appeals by Aristotle due to the fact that an audience would be receptive to a rhetor if trust was established. These appeals are used to target three main points of human interaction to persuade a person or group to another’s position or stance in a circumstance. The appeals leave a rhetor three possible tools to use at a single time to influence multiple people in an audience or just one person with a well-rounded argument.

Toulmin Model
The Toulmin model, named after philosopher Stephen Toulmin, is a skeleton of sorts that showcases the relationship between data and the conclusion that is derived from it. The model in its current state was constructed from Toulmin’s works and assembled by Wayne Brockriede and Douglas Ehninger. The model itself has five components that help illustrate the relationship which are described as Data, Warrant, Claim, Qualifier, Backing, and the Rebuttal. The claim is essentially what the rhetor is attempting to convince his/her audience to believe to be true. There are four types of claims that are described by Argumentation scholars, A claim of facts, a claim of definition, a claim of value, and a claim of policy. “A claim of fact is statement that can be verified through observation or even experience, a claim of definition is a claim that states how a concept or term should be defined, a claim of value is a claim that advances a statement of what is worthy, and a claim of policy is a claim that states what should be done” (Placzewski, Ice & Fritch). The data component of this model is the information that forms the basis of the claim. One may feel free to also think of it as evidence for an argument. The data’s ability to support the claim is what determines whether an argument is good or bad. The warrant is the component of the model that serves as the thread that connects the data to the claim and determines whether the conclusion that is drawn from the presented data is sound. The warrant truly determines if grounds are established in an argument. The qualifier is a statement or more, that is usually an educated assumption, that can be deduced based on how sound the warrant is. The rebuttal is the exception component of the model. It is employed in conditions in which the data may not be authoritative and is challenged or if the warrant itself is challenged and believed or proven to have no grounds. The Backing serves as the insurance policy of the model proving that there is support for the warrant and that the warrant can be trusted, accurate, and up to date.
This model can be employed to better understanding the components of an argument and allows one to be able to determine whether the bases of an argument is founded in reason or not.

**Terministic Screens**

A terministic screen is a sort of lens of words, or terms rather, that shape how one views and ultimately approaches the world around them. Due to this, this lens causes people to lean one way, in terms of how they interpret the world around them. Terministic screens can be employed to determine if there is some underline bias in an argument. It can also show if an argument is based on fact or if it is based in personal opinion.

**Analysis: Aristotelian Appeals**

In Trump’s speech on immigration, the appeals of pathos, ethos and logos are employed both individually and simultaneously. He prefaces the entire address on immigration with “I’ve just landed having returned from a very important and special meeting with the president of Mexico.” (Trump, 2016). It is here where Trump starts to build his own credibility allowing his audience to know that immigration is his top priority and that he is active in regards to developing a solution. Opening his dissertation this way added strength to his speech because it enabled him to establish trust early on and allowed him to show his audience that he is proactive in regards to their concerns. He reinforces his credibility by establishing trust in his audience by assuring that his intentions and their interests are the same by stating “We agree on the importance of ending the illegal flow of drugs, cash, guns, and people across our boarder, and to put cartels out of business.” (Trump, 2016) and cry stating that the people’s concerns were “valid” and appeals to them through flattery by dubbing them “decent and patriotic citizens”(Trump, 2016). Pathos is established throughout the speech where trump employs the
use of past cases of violence and death caused to American citizens by immigrants. He injects emotion and logic in his argument by stating the ages and jobs first, where there innocents is implied in order to encourage the audience to feel sympathy for the victims and enhances their frustrations with the lack of action regarding immigrants that have committed crimes but were allowed to stay in the country. He builds on this through explaining how by removing said immigrants will lead to some level of resolution in the U.S. immigration system. When he states that “[Countless ] citizens who have died in recent years would be alive today if not for the open-border policies of this administration…” he is establishing logos by drawing a connection between murder and open-border policies even though there is no data to support this claim. However, this does showcase the level of trust rally goers had in Trump’s statements and how ethos was at play early on in the speech. One could even go on to say that pathos is equally present in this passage provoking a sense of loss in his audience and attempting to invoke guilt, at that time, current administration for not taking action sooner. He also builds the credibility, ethos, of the victims by stating their accomplishments that uphold value to the American people. For instance, when he introduces Marylin Parish not by her name first but by “a 64-year old Air-Force Veteran, a great woman, according to all who knew her,…”(Trump, 2016). His use of both ethos and pathos were extremely effective in persuading his audience due to a few reasons. Donald Trump has already built a high level of trust and admiration within his targeted audience and builds on that through his “hold no punches” approach as well as tone of immediate action which already influences how affective his use of the appeals were in persuading his audience. He was able to invoke emotion and build his own credibility in this speech through his use of anecdotes and commitment to his own personae that he has sequestered over time to further
persuade and hold his audience. The use of these appeals certainly strengthen Trump’s argument and are incorporated in the Toulmin model which will also be employed the analysis of this paper.

**Analysis: Toulmin Model**

To truly understand the bases of the argument being made, the Toulmin model was employed to break down the components of the main point that was being made in this speech and to showcase how this model was effective in serving as a vehicle for the rhetoric present in this speech. Out of all the four claims, a claim of policy is the dominant claim present in this paper. In his speech, Trump spends much of his time discussing or implying how things should be done and approached. He often makes remarks regarding how the immigration system is ineffective and how it “does not serve the American people”(Trump, 2016) and instead serves “wealthy donors, political activists, and powerful, powerful politicians.”(Trump, 2016). What is being strongly implied is that the concerns of American citizen are not being placed as a top priority and that the interests of political activists, wealthy donors, and powerful politicians are prioritized and better upheld. In addition to the latter, There is also claim of definition present. In this speech, Trump states what he believes is the politicians definition of immigration reform as “amnesty, open borders, and lower wages”(Trump, 2016) and states that it should be defined as “improvements to our laws and policies to make life better for American citizens.”(Trump, 2016). The policy claim that was made was that “To fix our immigration system, we must change leadership in Washington” and a claim of fact being “Our immigration system is worse than
anybody ever realized” (Trump, 2016). The data is never presented outright and the only information presented that would form the basis for this claim is that “the facts aren’t known because the media won’t report on them.” (Trump, 2016). This leads to a concern regarding the warrant only because it is what links the data to the claim. However, only a claim is being made with no data to be connected via warrant to the claims being made. Although Trump’s argument was received well with his audience, he was not able to present a strong argument due to the substantial amount of his argument was missing a warrant resulting in no grounds being made, a lack of data resulting in a weak argument, and provided no backing for any of his claims. However, his lack of data, warrant, and backing Trump leaves plenty of room for rebuttal and for challenges to be made against his position. What the Toulmin model does successfully, in regards to this speech, is reveal the holes that exists in his arguments and showcases how, in detail, weak his argument really is.

**Analysis: Terministic Screens**

Terministic screens have proven themselves to be extremely effective in the use of this speech. Early on, almost immediately, Trump discusses “illegal flow of drugs” and “people across our border” which already establishes a particular lens in which people see immigrants present illegally almost fostering the assumption that illegal immigrants are responsible. He also goes on to relate terrorism and murders to the presence illegal immigrants casting a blanket term over a group of people and fixing a lens with a negative connotations and using these terms to support his claims. The employment of terministic screens certainly helps his argument because
he is utilizing the pre-existing screens already in the audience to build an understanding and make a common belief a focal point in his argument.

Whether the use of rhetoric in the presentation of his position and arguments were intentional or not, Trump was able to connect and influence his audience seamlessly. His strengths were revealed through the employment of the Aristotelean appeals. Trump’s use of ethos proved to be his smoking gun and allowed him to identify and engage with his audience brilliantly which explains clearly why ethos is believed to be the most effective of the three appeals due to credibility and trust allow for an audience to be more receptive to a rhetor. Utilizing the Toulmin Model showcased the wholes that existed in Trump’s claims by breaking down the argument into elements and revealing that although the claims were strong, they were not supported by data, warrant, or backing showing that his argument has many weaknesses and much room for rebuttal. Terministic screens revealed that how the majority of his supporters present at the rally view illegal immigrants in a particular light and the use of certain terms definitely swayed his audience in a skewed manner.
References


