

# Dramatism Theoretical Analysis on the Speech of We Will Fight to the End

Wenwen Zhong, Liping Zheng\*

Guangxi University of Science and Technology, Liuzhou 545006, China.

\* Corresponding Author

## Abstract

In 1940, 400,000 British and French troops were surrounded by German troops at Dunkirk. In the nick of time, the British evacuated the soldiers trapped at Dunkirk by sea, a move that was reviled by the entire nation. At this moment, Churchill delivered a rousing speech in the House of Commons of We Will Fight to the End. This paper utilizes the theory of the dramatic pentad to reveal the rhetorical motives behind the speech, namely, that temporary retreat does not mean surrender, the determination to fight the enemy to the end, and the purpose of appeasing the nation and lifting the spirits of the people. The text is analyzed on the basis of this theory to further explore how the rhetor shows the rhetorical motives through language and highlights the power of language.

## Keywords

The speech of We Will Fight to the End; Dramatism theory; Rhetorical motivation; Power of language.

## 1. Introduction

Kenneth Burke was a great rhetorician of the twentieth century. Today his ideas on new rhetorical theories continue to exert a significant influence in the field of rhetoric. His theories are applicable to analyze various types of speeches, news and advertisements and so on. In this paper, we will analyze a political speech We Will Fight to the End made by British Prime Minister Winston Churchill during the World War II period through the theory of Dramatism.

### 1.1. Background of the study

In 1940, the Anglo-French Allied Forces collapsed under a strong Nazi German attack and were forced to move to Dunkirk. In the nick of time, the Anglo-French allied forces conducted a massive withdrawal operation at Dunkirk. By way of the sea, Britain and France withdrew most of their armies, saving a great deal of manpower and financial resources for a future counter-offensive. However, all of Britain's heavy equipment was abandoned on the European continent, which led to a lack of self-defense. The Dunkirk retreat was a disappointment to the whole nation and saddening, and the government was also reviled. At such an important time, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill made a famous speech of We Will Fight to the End.

### 1.2. Purpose of the Study

The Dunkirk evacuation was a large-scale military evacuation, and although the British army lost a large amount of armaments in this evacuation, it retained a large number of troops and summarized combat experience of great value. Churchill's speech We Will Fight to the End played an important role in pacifying and calming the public after the Great Retreat. The textual analysis of the speech is used to reveal the rhetorical motives of the speaker, i.e., how the speaker used the means of language to pacify the people and achieve an uplifting effect.

### 1.3. Research Methodology

Kenneth Burke is a famous rhetorician whose work is represented by *The Grammar of Motives*. Dramatism is the view of language as action rather than as a means of conveying information. Dramatism consists of five elements, namely scene, actor, action, instrument and purpose. By analyzing the speech *We Will Fight to the End* through the theory of the dramatism, the rhetorical motivation of the speaker and the power behind the language can be explored.

## 2. Kenneth Burke's New Rhetoric

Kenneth Burke introduced other features of rhetoric that expanded the definition of rhetoric beyond the traditional definition of rhetoric, notably "sameness," the theory of the "dramatic pentad," and so on.

### 2.1. The Theory of the Dramatism

According to Burke, the rhetor's response to a rhetorical situation, i.e., a complete description of an event, must be designed with five elements, i.e., the actor, the action, the scene, the instrument, and the purpose, and the different pairings of these five elements will demonstrate the rhetor's motivation for how he or she will use the language to illustrate the rhetorical situation at hand.

The five elements of drama are separated and united with each other. Secondly, the relationship between the five elements is not static; they transform into each other in different issues and scenarios, are variable and fluid. As a result, different rhetors have different interpretive frameworks for the same event, thus showing different rhetorical motives.

The five elements of drama play a crucial role in the embodiment of rhetorical motifs, which are both separate and unified. (As shown in Figure 1)

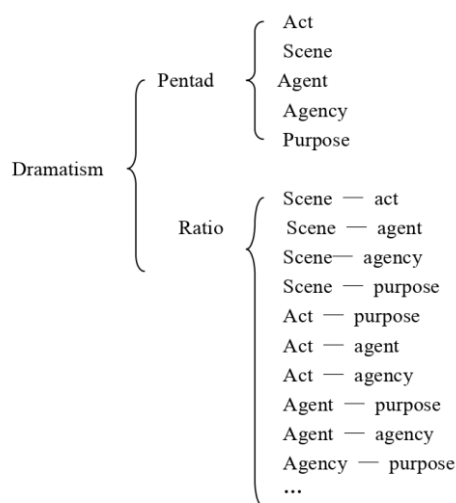


Figure 1 The Pentad and Ratio of Dramatism

### 2.2. Current Status of Domestic Research

The domestic discussion of Burke's new rhetoric is still in the primary stage, and there are only a few scholars who have conducted systematic and comprehensive research on his theory. The earliest researcher in China who studied Burke's new rhetoric theory is Mr. Gu Yiguo. Besides, Hu Shuzhong, a rhetorician in China, also researched Burke's related theories, and Hu's students also published papers on Burke's rhetorical theories one after another. All in all, the domestic research on Burke's theory is still not thorough and comprehensive, and lacks of in-

depth research. There are even fewer studies on Burke's rhetorical philosophy and the relationship between Burke and its related disciplines.

### 2.3. Current Status of Foreign Research

The study of Burke's rhetorical theory is to some extent related to the Burke research society in the U.S.A. The statistics of the study of Burke's theory from the 1920s to the present and it is known that there is a long history of research on his theory abroad.

First, Burke's meta-rhetorical ideas are examined. This involves the interpretation of the rhetorician, rhetorical ontology, and epistemology of rhetoric, among others. The second is a study of Burke's relevance to other philosophers or schools, focusing on their causal or theoretical origins. The third is the study of Burke's New Rhetoric, which focuses on the theories of "sameness" and "dramatic quintessence", and is represented by scholars such as Hockomas and Rosenfeld. Finally, it is the applied research on Burke's new rhetorical theories, which involves the fields of rhetorical criticism, writing teaching and so on.

## 3. Case-specific Analysis

Human discourse arises directly from a social scene and reflects the state of things. One of the world's ten most famous speeches of We Will Fight to the End came from Churchill during World War II. As soon as the news of the Dunkirk retreat of the British and French Allied Forces spread, I thought the headlines in the newspapers would be the news of the defeat, but who knew it would actually be Churchill's speech in the House of Commons. How did Churchill infect, persuade and energize his audience through his speech? The following will use the dramatism theory to analyze the speech We will fight to the end, will be analyzed from the object, the text, the context of the three aspects of the analysis, to reveal the rhetorical motivation of the rhetorical discourse, to show the speech of the verve and the power of the language.

### 3.1. Objects

The object needed for the formation of a speech is composed of the speaker and the audience, and the speaker can be defined as the rhetorician in Burke's New Rhetoric, and the two are interrelated and indispensable. The success of a speech depends on how the rhetorician infects or persuades the audience through the power of language, and the reaction of the audience shows how the infectious power of the speaker is. Therefore, by focusing on analyzing the object of the speech, we can know the purpose of the speech, i.e. rhetorical motivation.

#### 3.1.1. Rhetoricians

The rhetorician is called the actor in the five elements of drama and refers specifically to the unit person or group of persons who accomplish an act. It covers words that express general and specific aspects of the person, such as words like policeman, doctor and teacher. In addition to this, it also covers words relating to the motivational aspects of the actor, such as words like kind, lovely and impulsive. The actor can also be a collective word, such as race, country, etc. In the speech "We will fight to the end", there are five different actors in five different scenarios, namely "I", "the mighty enemy", "our brave men", "our young men", "our young men", "our young men", "our young men", "our young men", "our young men", "our young men", "our young men", "our young men" and "our young men". "our warriors", "the young men" and "I".

Part one:

When, a week ago today.. I feared it would be my hard lot to announce the greatest military disaster in our long history.... ..These were the hard and heavy tidings for which I called.... . starving captivity.

Scene: House of Commons

Agent: "I"

Act: announced the retreat from Dunkirk and promised to build a strong British army later in the war

Purpose: to pacify the population

Following the defeat of the British and French forces, "I" did not scoff at the British army, but rushed to the House of Commons to deliver a speech to the whole country, which appeared on the front page of the newspaper, promising the people that the temporary retreat did not mean that the defeat had ended, but that it was a good preparation for the next battle, thus stabilizing the army and the people's hearts. The "I" at the beginning of the speech opens the door and announces the news of the defeat, but then calms the people's heart and makes a promise, which reflects the art of speech of the action person "I" and demonstrates the charm of discourse rhetoric.

Part two:

The enemy attacked on all sides with great strength and fierce... was thrown into the battle or else concentrated upon Dunkirk and the beaches. . was thrown into the battle or else concentrated upon Dunkirk and the beaches... . 220 light warships and 650 other vessels were engaged.

Scene: Dunkirk Beach

Agent: Mighty enemy

Act: shelling the British and French forces on the beach

Purpose: To emphasize the strength of the enemy's forces, their sheer numbers, and the fact that the British and French allies were being passive

With enemy air and land forces coming in from all sides, the Anglo-French allied forces were miserably surrounded and stalemated. Hundreds of fighter planes bombarded the beach, and the dunes were the only cover for the Anglo-French allies. The British and French forces were forced to retreat from the sea, but there were still large numbers of infantry and artillery making a feeble struggle. This highlights from the side that the enemy forces completely overwhelmed the British and French armies, explains the defeat in the previous part of the war, highlights the cruelty and ruthlessness of the war, and paves the way for the next part of the story which glorifies the British warriors.

Part three:

It was in conditions such as these that our men carried on .... and struck at the German bombers and at the fighters which in large numbers protected them.

Scene: Dunkirk

Agent: Warrior

Act: Lead the retreat of the fallen warriors

Purpose: To build up strength and break the enemy's plot

The British warriors defied the odds and traveled day and night to get the fallen fighters out of the danger zone, saving thousands of soldiers and eliminating the enemy bomber force. With such a disadvantage, they were still able to evacuate most of their troops from the battlefield, and although they failed to win the war, the rescue operation was successful, retaining most of their military strength and paving the way for a counterattack later on. Although the enemy forces have come in force guns and ammunition, but the British warriors are undaunted, with wisdom, selflessness and perseverance to achieve the success of the rescue operation, to break the enemy's machinations, had to bear the huge losses brought about by this.

Part four:

There never has been, I suppose, in all the world, in all the history of war, such an opportunity for youth. The Knights of the Round Table ... and continue ready to give life and all for their native land. . and continue ready to give life and all for their native land.

Scene: Motherland

Agent: Young people

Act: Stand up for yourself

Purpose: To protect the homeland and all that it aspires to.

Following on from the previous section on the feats of the British Warriors, it extends to the young people of today. The feat of the British warriors at Dunkirk is worthy of study by every young person and is a role model for them. Young people should learn from their indestructible spirit, not afraid of danger, dare to fight. A magnificent moment is born at dawn, and a good opportunity creates a noble knight. Under such treacherous conditions, it is all the more important for the younger generation to look up to them, to appreciate the warriors who sacrificed their lives bravely for their country, and to inherit their spirit. In that speech, the rhetorician opens the door, layers and layers of emotion are laid out distinctly, mapping from the warriors on the battlefield to the young people of today, reflecting the speaker's art of speaking and charisma.

Part five:

I have, myself... ..we shall prove ourselves once again able to defend our Island home, to... . with all its power and might, steps forth to the rescue and the liberation of the old.

Scene: House of Commons

Agent: "I"

Act: Never surrender, fight to the end

Purpose: to inspire the army and pacify the people

Through the description of the four parts from the beginning, "I", the enemy, the warrior and the young man, the last part is summarized through "I". The last part summarizes the "I" by comparing the enemy and the warrior, and then inspiring the young people. Finally, "I" call on everyone to fulfill the obligations of each person, to protect the country, to dispel the gloom of war, and the French Imperial Republic to work together, adhering to the friendship between the two countries, and sworn to defend the territory of the country. Since the retreat from Dunkirk, we will never surrender, arm ourselves, do everything in our power to protect every inch of land, and fight to the end. This reflects "my" trust in the British army, my commitment to the people and my hope for victory in the war.

### 3.1.2. Audience

The audience also plays an important role throughout the speech. He is a reflection of the speaker's expression of rhetorical effect. In the whole speech, the rhetorician describes from four different rhetorical scenes, first from the outside characters, and then leads to the audience itself, so that they are in the scene, empathize with it, and achieve the purpose of resonance. The following table is listed for the impact of the expression of the above different five scenes on the audience. (As shown in Table 1)

Table 1 The Impact of Scene on Audience

Scene	Act	Effect
The House of Commons	Announced the retreat from Dunkirk and promised to build a strong British army later in the war	To make the listener aware of the truth of the matter and to know that the country is not running away from this defeat, but is facing it bravely, demonstrating Britain's trust in the people
Dunkirk Beach	Shelling of British and French troops on the beach.	Let the audience understand the strength of the enemy forces and know that the British and French forces did not occupy the right place at the right time and retreated in order to preserve their strength
Dunkirk	Lead the retreat of the fallen fighters.	To familiarize the audience with the great disparity in strength between the enemy and our army, and that the temporary retreat is a preparation for the future, and to make the audience sympathetic
The motherland	step forward bravely	It resonates from the warriors on the battlefield to the youth of today, who should also stand up for the defense of their country.
The House of Commons	Never surrender. Fight to the end.	The country made a promise that the British army would never surrender, and that every Englishman should have confidence in his country and believe in the dawn of victory in the war

Different scenes, different actions, the effect on the audience are different, which reflects the success of the rhetorician's speech. For different rhetorical scenes, skillfully grasp the audience's psychological activities, think differently, which can achieve the effect of persuasion, infection and appeasement, showing the unique charm of the speech.

### 3.2. Text

The We Will Fight to the End speech is so impassioned that it cannot be set up without the text, which the rhetorician writes in terms of the relationship between vocabulary, grammar, and content as a way of highlighting the emotion and making the listener empathize with it.

#### 3.2.1. Vocabulary

The choice of vocabulary has a great impact on the writing of a speech. Each vocabulary word produces different effects and expresses different emotions in different contexts. In that speech, the rhetorician employs a large number of nouns, verbs, phrases, etc. to describe the content of the speech.

"The greatest military disaster", i.e. "the most serious military disaster", uses the highest form and appears in the first paragraph of the speech. The opening paragraph points out that the British and French forces suffered an unprecedented military disaster, highlighting the urgency of the war and the disparity between our troops and the enemy's strength. "Re-embarked" is a verb that means "to re-embark on a ship (plane, vehicle), to re-carry", and by extension the article means "to be rescued". The rhetorician does not use the words "rescue" or "save", which reflects the fact that "save" here gives people a chance to come back, rather than being in a very

passive The words "an ignominious and starving" "an ignominious and starving captivity" uses two pejorative adjectives, "ignominious" and "starving". "ignominious" and "starving" to describe an underground prisoner. The powerful enemy army came in strong and took the British and French forces by surprise, but we will build up a strong army later in the war, a plan that may fail and may make us prisoners. "on all sides", i.e. "on all sides", the enemy surrounded the British and French forces from all sides, making them imminent, reflecting the enemy's very large numbers and very powerful artillery. "Single pier", i.e. "alone", the British and French forces were trapped by the enemy on a lonely island where the enemy's explosives were concentrated, and the only thing they could rely on was the sand dunes to defend themselves against the enemy's artillery fire. This shows that the British and French forces were at a disadvantage and had to find a way to escape the crisis. "strained every nerve" is a fixed collocation, i.e., "straining every nerve". At such a critical moment in the war, countless sea merchants nervously put the British and French troops on the transport ships and retreat in an orderly manner, which reflects that The sea merchants loved their motherland, did not live in greed, and helped most of the British and French troops to evacuate successfully.

### 3.2.2. Syntax

The choice of grammar also affects the rendering power of a speech, and grammar such as emphatic sentences, repetition, determinative clauses, and rhetorical questions can be used to modify the content.

Example 1: The whole root and core and brain of the British Army, on which and around which we were to build, and are to build, the great British Armies in the later years of the war .....

This sentence uses a definite article, "on which", "around which" connective modifying "the British Army", emphasizing that the retreat was only a temporary defeat to make sufficient preparations for the war ahead. The British Army was to be built up later in the war, showing that the retreat was only a temporary defeat and a good preparation for the war to come.

Example 2: Every morn brought forth a noble chance. And every chance brought forth a noble knight.

"Every dawn gives birth to a grand moment, every good opportunity accomplishes a noble knight", uses the technique of prose to describe the young men who stand up for their country, they are noble knights, warriors who bravely dedicate their lives to their country.

Example 3: We shall go on to the end, we shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans .....

"We shall fight to the end, we shall fight in France, we shall fight in the sea", the use of repetition, starting with "we shall" several times, shows Britain's determination to fight the enemy to the death.

### 3.2.3. Content

There are various connections that can exist between the contents of a speech. For example, cause and effect, antithesis, progression, and so on. According to the theory of dramatism, there is an inextricable causal relationship between the five elements, which is organized in the following table. (Table 2)

Table 2 Causal Relationship between the Five Elements

Relationship pair	Whether causation is established	Relationship pair	Whether causation is established
Scenario-Executor	clogged	Purpose-methodology	be
Scenario - Purpose	clogged	Purpose-behavior	be
Scenario-Methodology	be	Implementer-Purpose	be
Scene-Behavior	be	Performer-Scenario	clogged
Behavioral-executive	clogged	Implementer-methodology	be
Behavior - Purpose	be	Implementer-action	clogged
Behavioral-Scenario	clogged	Methods - implementers	clogged
Behavioral-methodological	clogged	Methodology - Action	clogged
Purpose-Executor	be	Methodology - Purpose	clogged
Purpose-Scenario	clogged	Methods - Scenarios	clogged

For example, the causal relation between scenario 1, "The House of Commons", and actor 1, "I", is not established; the House of Commons does not exist because of the existence of "I"; it belongs there. The causal relation between purpose 1 "to pacify the army" and action 1 "to announce the retreat from Dunkirk and to promise to build a strong British army later in the war" is established. The purpose of the state's promise to the people is to pacify and stabilize them. There is no causal relationship between the method and the scenario; the speech can be used in more than one context and is not limited to delivery in the House of Commons.

### 3.3. Context

Context generally refers to the linguistic environment, the setting and state that a person is in. The rhetorician's speech is simultaneously positioned in relation to the context and social context in which the behavior is occurring at the time.

#### 3.3.1. Context in which the behavior occurred

On September 3, 1939, the British and French forces declared war on the Germans because of their interests, but in reality the British and French forces did not support Poland. In 1940, after the surrender of the Belgian army, 400,000 British and French forces began to retreat. They had no choice but to carry out the historic Great Retreat by sea. Against this background, Churchill made a speech showing that the temporary retreat was actually a rescue operation, not a flight.

#### 3.3.2. Social context

The speech was delivered at a time when World War II had broken out and the world was in turmoil. For example, the Japanese atrocities in China, the September 18th Incident, the July 7th



Incident, the Nanjing Massacre, and so on. It also included the Battle of Britain, the Soviet-German War, Pearl Harbor, and so on. The Axis powers were launching fierce invasions of countries all over the world, and the war was full of smoke and turmoil, which reflected the great scope of the war involved and the cruelty of the war.

#### 4. Revelation

Burke's dramatism theory is an important element of Burke's New Rhetoric, and is one of the most important means of analyzing speeches. Not only can we use this theory to analyze such texts as speeches, but we can also use it to analyze advertisements, news reports, or other types of texts for discourse analysis and to verify the operability of the theory. This will allow us to understand the rhetorical motivation of the speaker, i.e., how he or she is trying to infect and persuade the audience through language, and to show the charm and power of language.

#### 5. Conclusion

The theory of the "five elements of drama" has a clearer and more practical application procedure from the operational level. Using this theory to analyze the speech We Will Fight to the End, not only from the relationship between the five elements, but also from the lexical, grammatical and content levels of the text, and the context and social background in which the act takes place. Layers of theme surround the speech, layers of emotion, and layers of content, demonstrating the rhetorician's rhetorical motivation, which is to show that the British army will never surrender and will fight to the end. Therefore, the theory of Dramatism can be applied to the analysis of texts or speeches for the purpose of persuasion, which provides a way to analyze the discourse and demonstrates the power of language.

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