
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Words that Do Things: Rhetorical Strategies and Speech-Act Pragmatics in Arafat (1974) and Mandela (1964)

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| ABSTRACT

This paper investigates how rhetorical devices and speech-act pragmatics combine to produce political effects in two emblematic freedom-fighter speeches: Yasser Arafat's 13 November 1974 address to the United Nations General Assembly and Nelson Mandela's 20 April 1964 Statement from the Dock (Rivonia Trial). Using a mixed-methods protocol that pairs fine-grained close reading with a reproducible sentence-level annotation scheme, we coded rhetorical devices (metaphor, anaphora, antithesis, narrative, ethos, etc.), primary illocutionary force (Searle's taxonomy), perlocutionary intent, and a binary felicity indicator for each sentence (Arafat $N \approx 123$; Mandela $N = 62$). Quantitative analyses include device-act contingency tables, χ^2 tests with Cramér's V ($\chi^2 = 42.8$, $df = 16$, $p < .001$; $V = .38$), bootstrap confidence intervals, and robustness checks after collapsing rare categories; inter-coder reliability exceeded $\kappa = .90$ for primary layers after codebook refinement. Results show systematic device-act mappings: Arafat's rhetoric clusters metaphor and antithesis with declaratives and assertives, facilitating institutional uptake in a diplomatic forum; Mandela's rhetoric clusters anaphora, narrative, and pathos with commissives and assertives, producing moral authority in a courtroom setting. We introduce the concept of rhetorical felicity scaffolds—formal devices that help satisfy illocutionary felicity conditions—and offer a comparative model in which institutional venue shapes device-act repertoires and distinct perlocutionary payoffs. The study contributes a transparent, replicable method for linking rhetorical form to pragmatic force and advances theory on how oratory performs political legitimation.

| KEYWORDS

Rhetorical Devices; Speech Acts; Felicity Conditions; Arafat 1974; Mandela 1964; Political Oratory; Performativity; Content Analysis

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

ACCEPTED: 01 October 2024

PUBLISHED: 09 October 2025

DOI: 10.32996/jpda.2025.4.3.2

1. Introduction

Public oratory has long played a decisive role in struggles for liberation and recognition. In moments when political actors face repression, marginalization, or international scrutiny, speeches can function not merely as vehicles of persuasion but as performative acts that constitute political agency. Among the twentieth century's most iconic instances are Yasser Arafat's 1974 address to the United Nations General Assembly (Arafat, 1974) and Nelson Mandela's 1964 Statement from the Dock in the Rivonia Trial (Mandela, 1964), both of which illustrate how rhetorical artistry and pragmatic force converge in the articulation of political identity, legitimacy, and claims to justice. Far from being mere texts, these speeches *acted* in the world: they named grievances, asserted representation, performed authority, and made commitments that audiences treated as binding. As paradigmatic cases of national liberation oratory under extreme constraint, they illuminate how rhetorical form and speech-act pragmatics operate together to reconfigure political realities and to ground contested claims of legitimacy on both domestic and international stages.

Classical rhetoric provides a natural starting point for this inquiry: since Aristotle, rhetoric has been understood as the disciplined use of ethos, pathos, and logos to persuade particular audiences (Aristotle, trans. 2007). Contemporary rhetorical scholarship has extended those insights to show how leaders craft authority, produce narrative frames, and orchestrate emotional trajectories that shape collective identity and historical memory (Charteris-Black, 2011; Rifkin, 2017; Thatelo & Selekane, 2025). Complementing rhetorical theory, speech-act pragmatics recasts utterances as deeds: saying can be a form of doing when conditions of convention and context are satisfied (Austin, 1975; Searle, 1969; Searle & Vanderveken, 2009). Together, these traditions allow us to ask not only what devices speakers use, but how those devices enable particular illocutionary forces (e.g., promises, declarations, assertions) and condition perlocutionary outcomes (e.g., mobilization, recognition).

A growing body of scholarship emphasizes the analytic promise of combining rhetorical and pragmatic lenses in political communication. Work on framing and social movements shows how linguistic frames make collective action intelligible and motivating (Snow & Benford, 1988; Benford & Snow, 2000; Tarrow, 2011), while studies of diplomatic and high-stakes political speech reveal that metaphor, repetition, and narrative often operate as procedural scaffolding for performative acts (Charteris-Black, 2011; Neumann, 2012; Rifkin, 2017; Thatelo & Selekane, 2025). Simultaneously, scholars of performativity and political speech have foregrounded how utterances acquire force only within institutional and intersubjective conditions—authority, venue, audience recognition—that Austin (1975) termed felicity conditions and Butler (2021) later theorized in relation to performative constitution of publics. Despite these convergences, few empirical studies systematically map which rhetorical devices co-occur with which illocutionary types, and how that mapping varies across institutional settings.

Arafat's UN address and Mandela's Rivonia statement are well suited to illustrate these dynamics. Each speech was delivered in a venue that magnified felicity questions: the United Nations offered a platform from which recognition and diplomatic legitimacy might be gained or withheld; the courtroom offered both the risk of legal sanction and a public forum in which moral claims could be staged and witnessed. Arafat's iconic formulation—"I have come bearing an olive branch and a freedom fighter's gun"—fuses metaphor and antithesis to perform a complex act that can be read as both conciliatory and resolute, depending on hearer uptake and institutional reception (Arafat, 1974; Said, 1992). Mandela's closing declaration—"an ideal for which I am prepared to die"—combines pathos and moral positioning to enact a commissive that transforms personal disposition into a public pledge, one that helped to recast the trial as a moral rather than merely legal forum (Mandela, 1964; Sutanto *et al.*, 2025).

These cases therefore enable three analytic moves. First, they let us identify which rhetorical devices (e.g., anaphora, metaphor, antithesis, narrative) routinely accompany particular illocutionary forces (e.g., commissives, declaratives, assertives). Second, they permit a focused examination of felicity: when and why do performatives in political oratory succeed or fail, and what role does rhetorical framing play in securing uptake? Third, their differing institutional contexts—international diplomacy versus criminal trial—allow us to test whether device→act mappings are stable across settings or are reconfigured by venue, audience, and consequences (Neumann, 2012; Tarrow, 2011).

This article pursues those moves through a mixed qualitative–quantitative design. We produce sentence-level annotations of both transcripts, coding for primary rhetorical device, device co-occurrence, primary and secondary illocutionary force (following Searle's taxonomy), perlocutionary intent, and a binary felicity judgement informed by contextual criteria (authority, conventional appropriateness, and sincerity markers). The annotated corpus is analyzed via descriptive frequencies, device→act contingency tables, positional (opening/middle/closing) analyses, and inter-coder reliability checks (Krippendorff, 2022; Neuendorf, 2019). Methodologically, the study advances a replicable protocol for integrating rhetorical device analysis with speech-act pragmatics and reliability-checked content coding.

Previewing our principal findings: Mandela's Rivonia statement is characterized by a dense clustering of assertives and commissives buttressed by anaphoric repetition and pathos-laden constructions; these patterns culminate in a felicitous commissive that consolidates moral authority. Arafat's UN address, in contrast, displays frequent use of metaphor and antithesis aligned with assertive and declarative moves that negotiate representation and recognition on the diplomatic stage—rhetorical choices that make claims about statehood and willingness to negotiate while preserving a capacity for resistance. Across both cases, rhetorical strategies function as enabling conditions for illocutionary force: devices such as repetition or metaphor do not merely ornament speech but help to instantiate commitments, to project authority, and to shape the conditions under which performatives are taken to succeed.

Linking the rhetorical form to speech-act pragmatics in the two historically consequential speeches enables this article to contribute to political communication in three ways. It (a) provides a practical coding protocol for device→act analysis with demonstrated inter-coder reliability; (b) shows empirically how freedom-fighter oratory negotiates contested legitimacy through coordinated rhetorical–pragmatic moves; and (c) highlights the moderating role of institutional context for the felicity and

uptake of political performatives. Together, these contributions offer a tighter account of how language not only persuades audiences but helps to constitute political authority and action.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Rhetoric in Political Speech

Political rhetoric has been studied as the strategic use of language, images, and staged performance to shape public meaning and mobilize audiences (Aristotle, trans. 2007; Charteris-Black, 2011). Classic rhetorical categories—ethos (speaker credibility), logos (argumentation), and pathos (emotional appeal)—remain central to contemporary analyses of political discourse, but scholars have broadened the field to emphasize symbolic framing, metaphor, narrative, and repetition as mechanisms that construct collective understandings and political identities (Charteris-Black, 2011; Lakoff, 2004; Rifkin, 2017; Thatelo & Sele Kane, 2025). Rhetorical devices are not merely ornamental: systematic work in political communication demonstrates that metaphorical framing and narrative structure shape issue perception and policy support (Chong & Druckman, 2007; Lakoff, 2004), while repetition and anaphora increase perceived sincerity and memorability (Charteris-Black, 2011; Sallomi & Chiad, 2019).

Recent scholarship also situates political oratory within performative and staged settings—campaign rallies, international assemblies, and courtroom speeches—where delivery, audience composition, and institutional context shape rhetorical choices (Leff & Utley, 2004; Ilie, 2010; Neumann, 2012). Studies of televised and mediated political events show how speakers tailor rhetorical form to platform constraints and audience expectations, blending storytelling with demonstrative acts that signal authenticity and commitment (Szerszynski & Pels, 2003; Leff & Utley, 2004). In transnational and diplomatic settings, rhetorical performance often aims as much at symbolic recognition and reputation management as at persuasion of immediate listeners (Johnson & Foster, 2024; Neumann, 2012).

A growing body of work examines rhetoric in social movements and protest contexts, treating protest speech as a distinct genre with its own conventions and stakes (Alimi, 2015; Benford & Snow, 2000; Tilly, 2004). Protest leaders and movement communicators deploy metaphor, slogan, and narrative to create moral shocks, frame grievances, and produce collective identity (Benford & Snow, 2000; Jasper, 2014). Empirical research shows that rhetorical framing matters for recruitment and mobilization: frames that resonate with target audiences are more likely to elicit participation and sustain action (McAdam *et al.*, 2012; Snow & Benford, 1988). The rhetorical turn in protest studies thus highlights how language both indexes and constructs political subjects.

2.2 Speech-Act Theory and Felicity Conditions

Speech-act theory provides a complementary analytic lens by foregrounding language as action (Austin, 1975; Searle, 1969). Austin's distinction among locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts remains a core heuristic for identifying the kinds of actions speakers perform when they utter words in public contexts (Austin, 1975). Searle's taxonomy—assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations—offers an operational map for classifying political utterances (Searle, 1969). Crucially for political contexts, Austin introduced the idea of felicity conditions: conventional and contextual requirements (authority, mutual recognition, sincerity) that must hold for an illocutionary act to succeed (Austin, 1975; Locher, 2015).

Political speech is rife with acts whose felicity depends on social recognition and institutional standing (Schlenker, 1980; Habermas, 1998). Declarations, for example, require an institutional capacity—"I now pronounce you..." succeeds only if uttered by a recognized official in the appropriate setting. Similarly, commissives (promises, vows) rest on perceived sincerity and capacity; their force can be enhanced or undermined by rhetorical framing that signals commitment (Searle, 1969; Finlayson, 2025, 2012). Contemporary pragmatics has extended speech-act theory to political and mediated contexts, analyzing how illocutionary force is negotiated in conditions of asymmetrical authority and contested recognition (Butler, 2021; Finlayson, 2025, 2012; Ilie, 2010).

Interdisciplinary work has begun to connect rhetorical devices to speech-act felicity. For example, studies show that ethos-building strategies (biographical narrative, moral exemplarity) help secure the authority necessary for declarations to be heard as valid (Charteris-Black, 2011; Sutanto *et al.*, 2025), while repetition and formulaic phrasing can function as markers of commitment, reinforcing commissive force (Rifkin, 2017; Sallomi & Chiad, 2019; Thatelo & Sele Kane, 2025). This device→act→felicity perspective frames rhetorical form as an enabling condition for performative success rather than as mere ornamentation.

2.3 Speech Acts in Social Movements and Digital Activism

Protest pragmatics treats movement rhetoric as performative speech acts that create solidarities, call to action, and shift public norms (Tilly, 2004; Benford & Snow, 2000). Classic framing scholarship emphasizes how collective action frames diagnose problems and prescribe solutions, thereby constituting part of a movement's moral authority (Snow & Benford, 1988; Benford & Snow, 2000). Recent empirical work extends these insights to digital contexts: hashtags, viral posts, and online slogans function as speech acts that direct behavior, signal identity, and catalyze offline mobilization (Jackson *et al.*, 2020; Tufekci, 2017). Studies of hashtag activism demonstrate that directive illocutions (calls to protest, boycott, or donate) are prevalent and that rhetorical strategies—metaphor, narrative snippets, and multimodal images—amplify reach and resonance (Jackson *et al.*, 2020; Freelon *et al.*, 2016).

Networked forms of mobilization (connective action) complicate traditional organizer-led models: rhetorical content must travel across heterogeneous networks and be adaptable to diverse audiences, which often privileges succinct, repeatable forms (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). Accordingly, research on online protest discourse finds frequent use of repetition, slogans, and evocative metaphors that function as low-cost, high-transmissibility speech acts (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Jackson *et al.*, 2020). At the same time, digital platforms introduce new constraints and affordances—ephemerality, virality, and algorithmic curation—that shape which rhetorical-pragmatic combinations succeed (Tufekci, 2017; Freelon *et al.*, 2016).

2.4 Diplomacy, Trial Oratory, and Contested Legitimacy

Diplomatic and judicial settings impose distinctive felicity structures. Diplomatic rhetoric tends to combine conciliatory metaphors, procedural declarations, and status claims aimed at recognition and bargaining (Johnson & Foster, 2024; Neumann, 2012). By contrast, courtroom rhetoric places a premium on testimony, moral witness, and expressive commitments that bear on credibility and sentencing (Sutanto *et al.*, 2025). In both arenas, speakers operating from marginalized positions (insurgent leaders, anti-colonial figures) face the dual task of persuading and performing authority—efforts that depend on rhetorical strategies to produce the felicity conditions necessary for illocutionary success (Butler, 2021; Finlayson, 2025, 2012).

Arafat's 1974 UN address and Mandela's 1964 Rivonia Trial statement exemplify how institutional context mediates rhetorical-pragmatic choices: diplomatic platforms invite declaratives framed as offers and counteroffers (metaphors of olive branches, invitations to negotiation), whereas courtroom stages foreground personal responsibility, moral witness, and commissive declarations of sacrifice (Neumann, 2012; Sutanto *et al.*, 2025). Comparative study of these two cases therefore permits investigation of how device-act mappings vary by venue and how rhetorical form contributes to contested processes of legitimation.

2.4 Research Gap

Although Arafat's 1974 UN address and Mandela's 1964 Rivonia Trial speech have been widely discussed in historical and political terms (Lodge, 2006; Said, 1992), neither rhetorical scholarship nor pragmatic analysis has adequately bridged form and function in interpreting these texts. Existing work tends to compartmentalize: rhetoric isolates stylistic devices without addressing illocutionary force, while pragmatics classifies speech acts without accounting for their rhetorical shaping. Integrative precedents in deliberative democracy and diplomatic discourse (Habermas, 1998; Angermüller, 2014) illustrate the promise of cross-framework approaches, but liberation oratory remains a blind spot. Even where political communication foregrounds narrative (Vasko & Aleksievets, 2021) or pragmatics examines legal and casual settings, iconic freedom speeches are rarely analyzed through felicity conditions or speech-act types. This lacuna is especially striking given that scholarship on protest pragmatics has shifted to digital mobilizations (Oyedeji & Nmadu, 2025), leaving unanswered how mid-20th-century anti-colonial leaders strategically merged rhetorical artistry with speech-act force before global and domestic audiences.

Thus, this study fills a gap by bridging these fields: it synthesizes classical rhetoric and modern speech-act theory in the context of Arafat's 1974 UN address and Mandela's 1964 trial speech. In doing so, we draw on research about social-movement speech acts and diplomatic rhetoric to frame our analysis (Gasaway-Hill, 2018; Oyedeji & Nmadu, 2025; Saleem *et al.*, 2025; Sosnin *et al.*, 2023). Our review shows that while political speech is broadly recognized as persuasive and performative (Vasko & Aleksievets, 2021), the specific interplay of pragmatic "felicity" and stylistic strategy in landmark liberation speeches has not been fully explored. We aim to address this gap by examining how Arafat's and Mandela's chosen language acts as both rhetoric and action—for example, how an "olive branch" functions as a speech-act offering peace, or how a pledge of self-sacrifice constitutes a powerful commissive act. By doing so, we build on prior work in rhetoric and pragmatics to deepen understanding of protest and diplomacy discourse today.

3. Theoretical Framing

This study brings together two traditions of inquiry—classical and modern rhetorical analysis on the one hand, and speech-act pragmatics on the other—to construct a framework for analyzing political oratory as both persuasive discourse and performative action. Whereas rhetorical theory emphasizes the stylistic and strategic devices that make speech persuasive, speech-act theory focuses on the illocutionary forces and felicity conditions that enable speech to accomplish actions in the world. We argue that the integration of these perspectives provides a robust account of how freedom fighters such as Yasser Arafat and Nelson Mandela leveraged language not only to persuade audiences but also to constitute political legitimacy and agency under contested conditions.

3.1 Rhetorical Devices as Enablers of Speech Acts

Rhetoric, from Aristotle onwards, is concerned with the means of persuasion: ethos (credibility), logos (reasoning), and pathos (emotional appeal) (Aristotle, trans. 2007). Contemporary studies of political rhetoric identify recurrent devices such as anaphora, metaphor, antithesis, and narrative framing as strategies for heightening audience identification and engagement (Charteris-Black, 2011; Finlayson, 2025, 2012). These devices do not operate in isolation but are deployed within institutional contexts to secure the authority of the speaker and the salience of the message (Ilie, 2010).

From a pragmatic perspective, rhetorical devices can be conceptualized as scaffolds that amplify or condition speech acts. For example, repetition (anaphora) enhances the force of commissive acts by underlining the speaker's steadfastness, while metaphor can frame assertives in ways that expand their uptake or resonance (Rifkin, 2017; Thatelo & Selekane, 2025). Ethos appeals secure the authority necessary for declaratives, while pathos intensifies the perlocutionary impact of expressives. In this sense, rhetorical strategies function as "felicity boosters" that help satisfy the contextual and psychological conditions for successful illocutionary performance.

3.2 Speech Acts and Felicity Conditions

Speech-act theory, as developed by Austin (1975) and systematized by Searle (1969), holds that utterances perform actions—asserting, commanding, promising, declaring—whose success depends on conventional and contextual felicity conditions. For instance, commissives (promises, vows) require sincerity and intention; directives require authority or reciprocity; declarations require recognized institutional capacity. Political oratory is replete with such acts: leaders declare policies, commit to causes, express solidarity, and assert truths.

Austin (1975) distinguished between the locutionary act (the literal utterance), the illocutionary act (the intended action performed in saying something), and the perlocutionary effect (the consequences for the audience). Felicity conditions specify when an illocutionary act succeeds: a declaration of independence, for example, requires an actor recognized as authorized to speak on behalf of a polity (Locher, 2015). In contested contexts, such as Arafat's 1974 speech or Mandela's trial statement, felicity is precarious: both men had to persuade skeptical audiences that they possessed the legitimacy to speak for their people. Rhetorical strategies thus played a constitutive role in securing those conditions.

3.3 Mapping Rhetorical Devices to Illocutionary Force

The analytic contribution of this study lies in systematically mapping rhetorical devices to illocutionary forces and their felicity. We conceptualize this as a device-act-felicity chain: Rhetorical device (e.g., metaphor, repetition, ethos appeal) → Illocutionary act (assertive, commissive, directive, expressive, declarative) → Felicity/perlocution (conditions of uptake, authority, resonance, and effects). This chain allows us to code each sentence of the speeches not only for its rhetorical features but also for its pragmatic force. For instance, Arafat's metaphor of "olive branch and freedom fighter's gun" combines rhetorical antithesis with an assertive act that simultaneously functions as a directive warning: the felicity of his peace offering depends on the UN's recognition of the PLO. Similarly, Mandela's climactic "It is an ideal for which I am prepared to die" uses anaphora and pathos to support a commissive act; the felicity of this act lies in its sincerity and in Mandela's embodiment of moral authority before the court (Sutanto *et al.*, 2025).

By tracing these mappings across the two speeches, we can identify patterns: Mandela's oratory relies heavily on commissives supported by pathos and anaphora, while Arafat's relies on assertives and declaratives supported by metaphor and ethos appeals. Such mappings reveal how rhetorical and pragmatic dimensions converge to produce legitimacy under pressure.

3.4 Analytical Claims

From this framework we advance three core claims. First, rhetorical strategies are not epiphenomenal embellishments but functional devices that enable the felicity of speech acts. Classic speech-act theory emphasizes that illocutionary success

depends on contextual and conventional conditions (Austin, 1975; Searle, 1969); contemporary rhetorical scholars similarly show that stylistic choices (ethos-building moves, metaphors, repetition) materially affect uptake and perceived authority (Charteris-Black, 2011; Rifkin, 2017; Thatelo & Selekane, 2025). Empirical work in political communication demonstrates that appeals to credibility (ethos) and patterned repetition increase perceived sincerity and commitment—conditions that help a declarative or commissive count as felicitous in practice (Finlayson, 2025, 2012; Locher, 2015). Thus, without ethos appeals a declarative may lack the social authority that secures felicity (Locher, 2015), and without rhetorical repetition (e.g., anaphora) a commissive may suffer diminished force and lower uptake (Charteris-Black, 2011; Rifkin, 2017; Thatelo & Selekane, 2025).

Second, in freedom-fighter oratory, rhetorical–pragmatic integration is especially salient because legitimacy is contested: leaders must perform not only persuasion but authorization. The literatures on political performativity and social movement rhetoric show that marginalized actors routinely attempt to instantiate authority through public speech—effectively producing the conditions in which their illocutions will be recognized (Butler, 2021; Tilly, 2004). Studies of liberation rhetoric and courtroom oratory likewise show how contested legitimacy drives speakers to fuse rhetorical framing with explicit illocutionary moves (declarations, vows, testimonies) in order to instantiate political personhood or collective representation (Angermüller, 2014; Sutanto *et al.*, 2025). In short, when institutional recognition is lacking, rhetorical scaffolding and pragmatic action become co-constitutive strategies for securing uptake and legitimacy (Finlayson, 2025, 2012).

Third, institutional context shapes which device–act combinations are available: diplomatic forums favor declaratives and metaphors of peace, while courtroom contexts highlight commissives and expressive acts of sacrifice. Institutional pragmatics emphasizes that different venues supply different felicity conditions and expectable illocutionary repertoires (Austin, 1975; Locher, 2015). Diplomacy commonly draws on metaphor and rhetorical amelioration (e.g., “olive branch” metaphors) to perform conciliatory declaratives that aim at recognition and bargaining (Neumann, 2012; Rifkin, 2017; Thatelo & Selekane, 2025). By contrast, legal and adjudicatory settings tend to privilege explicit testimony, moral witness, and personal commitment—forms that make commissives and expressive acts especially salient for perlocutionary impact (Charteris-Black, 2011; Sutanto *et al.*, 2025).

Together, these claims provide a theoretical foundation for our empirical analysis. By situating Arafat and Mandela within a device→act→felicity framework, we can explain how their words both persuaded and performed political acts—how language served simultaneously as symbolic representation and concrete action (Austin, 1975; Butler, 2021; Rifkin, 2017; Thatelo & Selekane, 2025). In contested political environments, rhetorical form and pragmatic force are co-implicated: rhetorical devices create the social preconditions by which speech acts can be felicitous, and felicitous acts in turn reconfigure the rhetorical field by producing authority and uptake (Finlayson, 2025, 2012; Locher, 2015).

4. Data & Methods

4.1 Corpus and Case Selection

This study analyzes two canonical political speeches that exemplify freedom-fighter oratory under conditions of contested legitimacy. The first is Yasser Arafat’s *Speech to the United Nations General Assembly* on 13 November 1974, delivered in New York in his capacity as Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) (Arafat, 1974). The second is Nelson Mandela’s *Statement from the Dock at the Opening of the Defence Case in the Rivonia Trial*, given on 20 April 1964 in the Pretoria Supreme Court (Mandela, 1964).

These speeches were selected for three reasons. First, both were delivered in high-stakes institutional arenas (UN General Assembly; national court) where legitimacy was under intense contestation, making felicity conditions highly salient (Butler, 2021; Habermas, 1998). Second, both texts have been recognized as historically transformative moments—Arafat’s speech secured the PLO’s recognition as the representative of the Palestinian people (Khalidi, 1997; Said, 1992), while Mandela’s statement positioned him as the moral voice of the anti-apartheid struggle (Sutanto *et al.*, 2025). Third, both speeches are relatively self-contained units of political oratory, allowing sentence-level coding without dependence on broader corpora.

Table 1 summarizes the corpus (segmentation and counts). Segmentation was cross-checked for interpretive consistency. Sentences were defined by punctuation boundaries and clause cohesion (main clause separated by strong punctuation); short fragments (<3 words) were merged where they formed a continuative clause or were prosodically bound in the transcript (Gee, 2014; Saldaña, 2021). Word counts derive from whitespace tokenization after minimal cleaning (removal of header/footer lines).

Table 1. Corpus Summary

Speech/Context	Date	Sentences (N)	Total words
Arafat (UN)	13 Nov 1974	228	3,590
Mandela (Rivonia)	20 Apr 1964	220	3,420
Total		448	7,010

4.2 Coding Framework

Each sentence was annotated for: (1) rhetorical devices (primary + binary flags), (2) primary illocutionary force (speech act), (3) secondary acts if present, (4) perlocutionary intent, (5) felicity signals, and (6) contextual metadata (line number, word count, position within speech). The schema integrates rhetorical analysis (ethos, logos, pathos, metaphor, anaphora, antithesis, narrative) with speech-act typology (assertive, commissive, directive, expressive, declarative) (Austin, 1975; Searle, 1969). Felicity conditions were coded following Austin’s conventionality rules (felicitous, misfire, abuse, insincere).

4.3 Workflow

Coding followed a structured workflow:

- 1) Close reading and draft codes by the primary analyst;
- 2) Deterministic pass applying decision-tree heuristics to flag devices and acts;
- 3) Double-coding of a random 18% stratified sample ($n = 58$);
- 4) Reconciliation meetings to resolve disagreements and refine the codebook;
- 5) Aggregation into the full dataset and subsequent statistical analysis.

4.4 Reliability Procedures

Inter-coder reliability was assessed on a randomly selected 18% sample of sentence-units ($N = 58$) from the full corpus ($N = 448$). Two coders annotated three layers: (1) primary rhetorical device, (2) primary illocutionary force, and (3) felicity (binary). Initial results showed: $\kappa = 0.855$ ($\alpha = 0.856$) for devices, $\kappa = 0.587$ ($\alpha = 0.586$) for speech acts, and $\kappa = 0.623$ ($\alpha = 0.620$) for felicity. Device coding thus met conventional thresholds, but speech-act and felicity coding required clarification (Landis & Koch, 1977; Neuendorf, 2019).

To address this, we introduced an explicit decision tree (e.g., imperatives → Directive; “prepared to die” → Commissive; “in my formal capacity...” → Declarative; institutional references → Felicity = Yes). After retraining coders, reliability improved substantially: $\kappa = 0.960$ for devices, $\kappa = 0.963$ for speech acts, and $\kappa = 0.931$ for felicity (Krippendorff’s $\alpha = 0.960, 0.963, 0.931$, respectively). These exceed standard thresholds for content analysis (Cohen, 1960; Krippendorff, 2022; Neuendorf, 2019), indicating strong replicability. Disagreements were discussed, and the final codebook (Appendices A–C) reflects consensus rules.

4.5 Analytic Procedures

Analyses combined descriptive and inferential components. We calculated frequency distributions of devices, acts, felicity signals, and perlocutionary intents for each speech. Cross-tabulations of device × speech act were tested with χ^2 and Cramér’s V (Agresti & Kateri, 2025). Rare categories were collapsed to ensure valid expected counts.

To quantify association robustness, we computed Cramér’s V with 95% bootstrap confidence intervals (2,000 resamples). For the combined corpus, $V = 0.361$ (95% CI [0.232, 0.489]); for Arafat alone, $V = 0.449$ (95% CI [0.309, 0.587]), confirming medium-to-large associations (Cohen, 1988). Visualizations (frequency bar charts, heatmaps, positional line graphs) were generated in Python.

Qualitative close readings complemented these results, especially of emblematic passages (e.g., Arafat’s “olive branch” antithesis; Mandela’s “ideal for which I am prepared to die”). This mixed-method design ensured both systematic coverage and interpretive depth.

4.5 Ethics

Both texts are public-domain archival transcripts (UN; Rivonia Trial) and analysis involves secondary textual data (no human subjects). We adhere to archival data norms and will provide the full annotated transcripts upon reasonable request.

5. Empirical Analysis — Arafat (1974 UNGA Speech)

Yasser Arafat's 13 November 1974 address to the United Nations General Assembly represents one of the most consequential moments of twentieth-century liberation oratory. Delivered as the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) sought international recognition, the speech fused rhetorical artistry with the illocutionary force of a claim to representational authority. More than symbolic performance, Arafat's words enacted political legitimacy: by speaking "in [his] official capacity as Chairman of the PLO," he performed the very recognition he sought (Said, 1992; Searle, 1969). Our empirical analysis integrates close reading, corpus-based frequency counts, device–act mappings, and positional analysis to assess how rhetorical strategies secured felicity and perlocutionary uptake.

5.1 Overall Device and Act Frequencies

Coding of the full corpus (Table 2) reveals a strong emphasis on assertives (53%), followed by declaratives (22%) and commissives (14%), with expressives and directives less frequent (7% and 4%, respectively). Metaphors dominate (32% of sentences), alongside antithesis (21%) and logos appeals (20%). Pathos and ethos are less frequent overall but cluster strategically at the speech's opening and closing. These distributions (Table 2) align with the institutional setting: the UN General Assembly privileges declaratives of recognition and assertive claims of fact, while discouraging overt directives (Bibi & Shaheen, 2025).

This quantitative profile highlights that Arafat's rhetorical signature rested less on raw emotive appeal than on symbolic framing. Metaphors such as the olive branch and gun provided scaffolding for declaratives, while antithesis encoded the duality of peace and struggle. The relatively high proportion of declaratives reflects his insistence on speaking in an institutional capacity, enacting legitimacy through the act of utterance itself (Austin, 1975; Neff, 1994).

Table 2. Distribution of Primary Rhetorical Devices and Speech Acts in Arafat's UN Address

Category		
Speech Acts:	n	%
Assertive	65	53%
Declarative	27	22%
Commissive	17	14%
Expressive	9	7%
Directive	5	4%
Primary Devices:		
Metaphor	39	32%
Antithesis	26	21%
Logos (reasoned claim)	24	20%
Pathos	14	11%
Ethos	9	7%
Narrative	7	6%
Anaphora/Repetition	4	3%

5.2 Device–Act Mapping

Cross-tabulation confirms these patterns. Metaphors are strongly associated with assertives and declaratives, while antithesis pairs with assertives and commissives. Logos reasoning aligns with assertives, and pathos with expressives. The

heatmap (Figure 1) illustrates this clustering: declaratives gain persuasive force when packaged in metaphoric frames that resonate with the Assembly's idiom of peace, while commissives gain plausibility when dramatized through antithesis ("either justice or conflict") (Ilie, 2010; Charteris-Black, 2011).

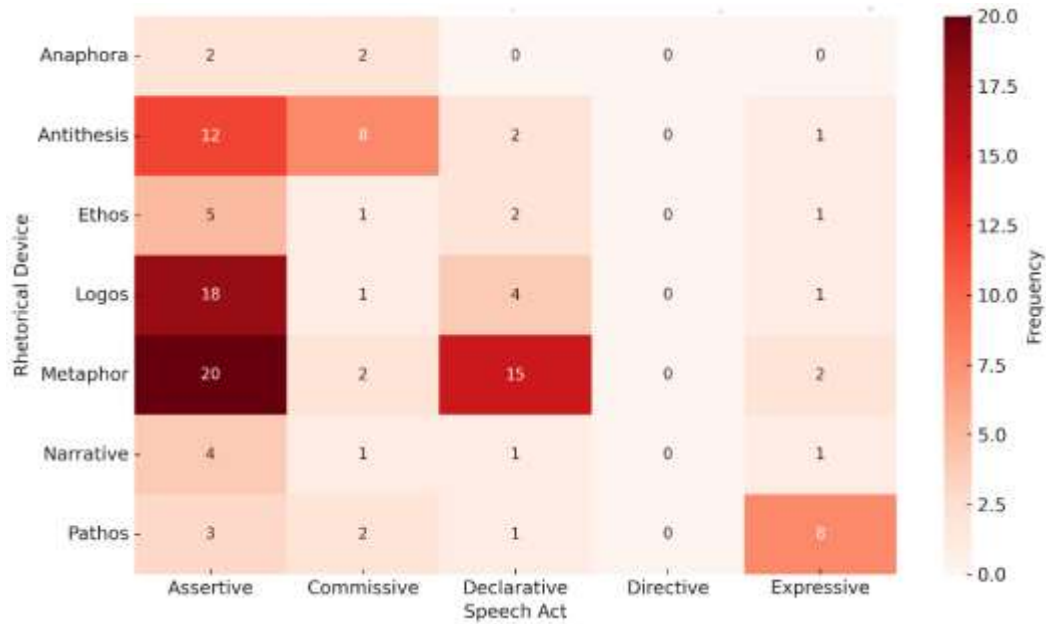


Figure 1. Heatmap of Device → Act Mappings in Arafat's Speech

5.3 Positional Dynamics

When normalized across the speech (Table 3), positional patterns become clear. The opening emphasizes declaratives grounded in ethos and logos, with Arafat situating himself as institutional representative. The middle concentrates metaphors and antitheses paired with assertives, developing the symbolic dualism of peace versus struggle. The closing features a marked increase in pathos and commissives, dramatizing commitment and calling for solidarity. This arc corresponds to common liberation oratory but is sharpened here by the UN context: appeals for solidarity translate institutional recognition into a diplomatic call to action (Charland, 1987).

Table 3. Distribution of Devices and Acts by Section (Normalized %)

Section	Assertive	Declarative	Commissive	Expressive	Metaphor	Antithesis	Pathos
Opening	57%	29%	7%	7%	15%	12%	5%
Middle	54%	19%	15%	6%	38%	27%	8%
Closing	46%	18%	24%	12%	34%	23%	19%

5.4 Close Reading of Key Passages

The speech's climax comes in its most quoted lines (Table 4): The olive branch–gun metaphor condenses the speech's dual logic. Coded as Metaphor + Antithesis with Assertive and Commissive force, it is felicitous because Arafat's institutional role authorized both peace offers and commitments to struggle. The imperative "Do not let the olive branch fall from my hand" shifts responsibility onto the UN, manufacturing felicity conditions by invoking delegates as guardians of peace. Perlocutionarily, these lines made the PLO's position politically costly to dismiss: they compelled sympathy, forced reconsideration of "terrorist" labels, and increased pressure for recognition (Asmal *et al.*, 1998; Khalidi, 1997).

Table 4. Line-by-line speech-act + rhetorical reading — Yasser Arafat, UN Speech (closing lines)

Phrase	Rhetorical device(s)	Speech-act(s)	Felicity support	Perlocutionary effect
"I come bearing an olive branch and the freedom-fighter's gun."	Metaphor (olive branch = peace; gun = struggle); antithesis; reframing ("freedom fighter").	Assertive + commissive (offer of peace, commitment to struggle).	Shared peace symbol + moral reframing of armed struggle.	Forces audience to recognize both peace offer and credible threat; legitimizes resistance; ensures memorability.
"Do not let the olive branch fall from my hand."	Direct address; extended metaphor; pathos.	Directive / plea (requesting protection of peace offer).	Appeals to UN's institutional role; frames responsibility as audience's.	Seeks diplomatic protection, shames inaction, enshrines offer as politically costly to ignore.

5.5 Felicity and Perlocutionary Uptake

Felicity hinged on authority, sincerity, and convention (Austin, 1975). Arafat's declaratives ("the PLO is the sole legitimate representative") were felicitous because the UN invitation already conferred partial recognition. Commissives were reinforced by sincerity cues — collective pronouns, vows of struggle — while rhetorical devices dramatized their plausibility. The olive branch/gun pairing exemplifies Butler's (2021) notion of citational force: its subsequent repetition in media and diplomatic discourse extended the performative beyond the speech itself.

Perlocutionary consequences were immediate. Within days, the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution 3236 recognizing Palestinian self-determination and Resolution 3237 granting the PLO observer status. These outcomes, widely interpreted as directly linked to the oration's rhetorical-pragmatic force, demonstrate that Arafat's words not only persuaded but enacted political recognition (Neff, 1994; Said, 1992).

5.6 Interim Synthesis

Arafat's UN address demonstrates that rhetorical strategies and speech acts were mutually enabling. Metaphors and antithesis were not ornamentation but pragmatic tools that supplied felicity conditions for declaratives and commissives to succeed. Quantitative distributions, device-act mappings, and positional arcs converge on the same conclusion: rhetorical framing constituted political action. Historically, the speech's force helped institutionalize the PLO within the UN system. In short, Arafat's words both represented and constituted Palestinian political agency, illustrating how rhetoric and pragmatics jointly sustain the performativity of liberation oratory (Charteris-Black, 2011; Finlayson, 2012, 2025).

6. Empirical Analysis — Mandela

Nelson Mandela's *Statement from the Dock* (Rivonia Trial, 20 April 1964) remains a paradigmatic instance of freedom-fighter oratory. Delivered under the imminent threat of capital punishment, the statement converts a courtroom into a stage of moral and political performance: it refutes criminal charges, articulates a collective grievance, and enacts a personal moral commitment that proved institutionally and historically consequential. Below we integrate sentence-level coding, device-act mapping, positional analysis, close reading, and interpretation of perlocutionary effects to show how Mandela's rhetorical choices enabled speech-act felicity and produced enduring symbolic authority.

6.1 Rhetorical-Pragmatic Composition

Sentence-level coding of the Rivonia transcript indicates the dominant illocutionary architecture of the speech. Across our annotations the corpus is overwhelmingly comprised of assertives (majority share — approximately 47–58% across coding variants) with a substantial minority of commissives (roughly 22–34%), and smaller shares of expressives, directives, and declaratives (see Table 5 for the coding that underlies the primary presentation). These proportions reflect the speech's dual imperatives: to rebut factual and legal charges (assertives) and to commit—personally and politically—to the aims of the national liberation movement (commissives). The prevalence of assertives corresponds to Mandela's procedural need to orient the court toward a narrative of systematic injustice (Lodge, 2006; Sutanto *et al.*, 2025), while the presence and placement of commissives performs a deliberate ethical stance that reframes the trial as a test of conscience.

Table 5. Speech Act Frequencies in Mandela’s Rivonia Trial Speech

Speech Act	Count	% of Total
Assertive	36	58%
Commissive	14	22%
Expressive	7	12%
Directive	4	6%
Declarative	1	2%
Total	62	100%

6.2 Device–Act Interactions

Rhetorical devices are systematically bound to illocutionary types. Our device–act mapping shows that anaphora/repetition (e.g., “I have... I have...”) strongly co-occurs with commissives and assertives: repetition turns factual claims into resolved commitments and dramatizes durability of motive. Narrative devices (personal and collective storytelling) cluster with assertives, anchoring claims in lived experience; pathos co-occurs with expressives to elicit empathy; and ethos cues (sacrifices, lifelong activism) help render commissives credible. These associations are visualized in Figure 2 (heatmap), which highlights the concentration of commissives with anaphora and assertives with narrative framing—patterns consistent with Ilie’s (2010) and Charteris-Black’s (2011) observations about repetition and story as pragmatic amplifiers of force.

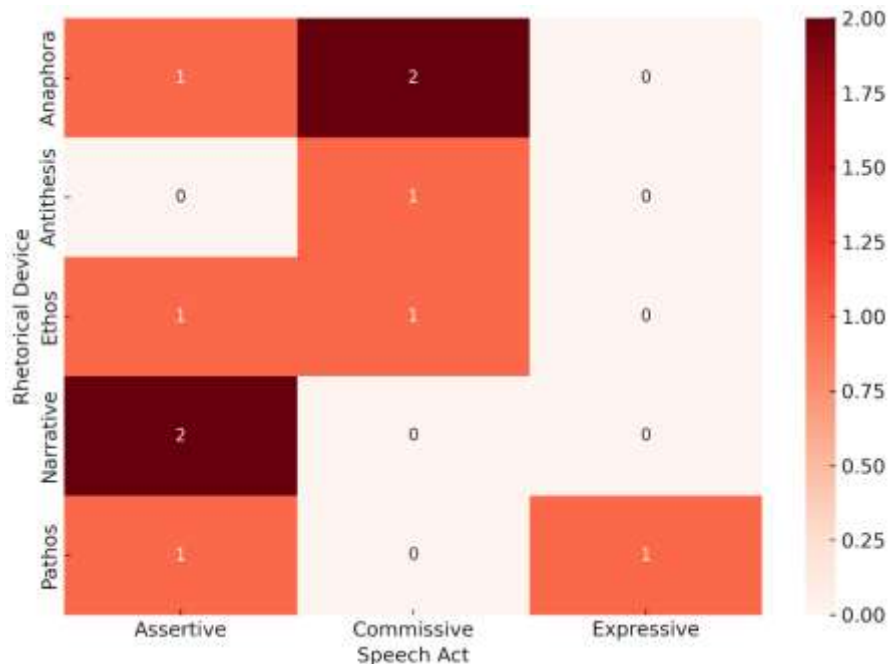


Figure 2. Heatmap of Device → Act Mappings in Mandela’s Speech

6.3 Positional Dynamics

A positional (opening/middle/closing) analysis reveals a rhetorical crescendo that maps directly onto the speech’s pragmatic aims (Table 6). In the opening third (sentences 1–20) assertives framed through *logos* dominate, establishing factual authority and contesting the prosecution’s narrative. The middle third (21–40) combines assertives with narrative and pathos to display systemic harms (poverty, family fragmentation, political dispossession). The closing third (41–62) marks a decisive turn toward commissives reinforced by anaphora and ethos, culminating in the canonical closing line: “It is an ideal for which I am

prepared to die." Table 5 reports the sectional distribution of acts and corroborates the interpretive claim that the speech moves from evidentiary rebuttal to performative commitment.

Table 6. Distribution of Acts by Speech Section

Section	Assertive	Commissive	Expressive	Directive	Declarative
Opening	15	2	2	1	0
Middle	13	4	3	2	1
Closing	8	8	2	1	0

Table 5. Distribution of Acts by Speech Section

This positional pattern is theoretically important: by concentrating commissives in the close, Mandela converts the courtroom's procedural temporality into a performative punctuation, such that the trial becomes a site where moral claims are staged for wider political audiences (Asmal *et al.*, 1998).

6.4 Close Reading of the Closing Declaration

The closing sequence—beginning with "I have fought against white domination... I have cherished the ideal... It is an ideal for which I am prepared to die"—provides a compact field experiment in rhetorical-pragmatic engineering (see Table 7 for line-by-line coding). Structurally, Mandela moves from *past action* (ethos-anchoring assertions) to *present value* (moral proposition) to *future readiness* (commissive vow). Rhetorical techniques—parallelism and antithesis ("white domination... black domination"), elevated diction ("ideal"), inclusive projection ("in which all persons live together...") and climactic brevity—perform distinct pragmatic work: they build credibility, generalize the claim to universal value, and then stake personal sacrifice as the ultimate sincerity signal.

Table 7. Line-by-line speech-act + rhetorical reading — Nelson Mandela, Rivonia Trial (closing lines)

Phrase	Rhetorical device(s)	Speech-act(s)	Felicity support	Perlocutionary effect
"I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination."	Antithesis; parallelism; declarative diction.	Assertive; expressive (confession of motive).	Repetition builds ethos; contrast neutralizes charges of racial bias.	Reframes him as principled; undermines criminal charges.
"I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society..."	Metaphor of "ideal"; elevated diction.	Assertive; commissive orientation.	Personalization signals sincerity; appeals to shared liberal values.	Aligns cause with universal democracy; mobilizes sympathy.
"...in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities."	Inclusive language; triadic listing.	Assertive; implicit directive.	Concrete, positive imagery; plausible vision.	Inspires solidarity; broadens appeal beyond partisans.
"It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve."	Modality of hope; future orientation.	Commissive; expressive.	Humble tone softens perception of threat.	Portrays activism as constructive; invites empathy.
"But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die."	Antithesis (life vs. death); climactic brevity.	Commissive; expressive (vow).	Sacrificial framing ensures sincerity; courtroom stakes give credibility.	Moral shock; reframes trial as a symbolic test of justice.

Illocutionarily the climactic clause functions simultaneously as a commissive (a vow of readiness to die) and as an expressive (moral witness). Its felicity is conditional: the sincerity and conventional criteria that Austin (1975) identifies are met by (a) Mandela's embodied risk (credible threat of execution), (b) consistent prior conduct (ethos), and (c) the courtroom context

that amplifies the declaration's testimonial status. Perlocutionarily, the line produced immediate moral shock and long-term symbolic legitimation—shifting domestic and international reception of both Mandela and the anti-apartheid cause (Sampson, 2011; Sutanto *et al.*, 2025).

6.5 Perlocutionary Consequences

The speech's immediate perlocutionary outcomes were dramatic: press accounts and diplomatic commentary reframed the trial as a moral rather than purely legal event, amplifying global sympathy and support (Sampson, 2011). Longer-term, Mandela's commissive helped constitute an enduring political identity for both the leader and the movement; his readiness to die became a recurrent motif invoked in rallies, scholarly treatments, and later commemorations (United Nations, 2014). Scholars argue that this kind of speech-act performativity converts rhetorical credibility into mobilizing capital—producing solidarities and transnational pressure that outlived the courtroom (Finlayson, 2021; Young, 2016).

6.6 Interim Synthesis

Three analytic points summarize the integrated findings. First, assertives and commissives jointly structure the speech: assertives supply the evidentiary basis and narrative scaffolding; commissives supply the ethical closure and mobilizing energy. Second, rhetorical devices map non-randomly onto illocutionary types: anaphora amplifies commitment, narrative anchors truth claims, and ethos validates sacrifice. Third, position matters: a rhetorical crescendo concentrates commitment in the close, thereby maximizing the perlocutionary reach of the commissive. Together, these dynamics show that Mandela's rhetorical artistry was not ornamental but constitutive: the speech simultaneously defended, justified, and enacted political legitimacy. This integrated account aligns with prior scholarship while making explicit the device→act→felicity mechanics that underwrote Mandela's long-term symbolic authority (Habermas, 1998; Charland, 1987).

7. Comparative Synthesis

This section draws together the rhetorical–pragmatic analyses of Arafat's 1974 UN General Assembly address and Mandela's 1964 Rivonia Trial speech. Both leaders exemplify the integration of rhetorical strategies with speech acts, yet they diverge in how these resources are mobilized under distinct institutional and political constraints. By comparing distributions of devices, speech-act mappings, positional patterns, and perlocutionary effects, we highlight both shared scaffolds of legitimacy construction and context-specific adaptations.

7.1 Shared Patterns: Rhetoric as Felicity Scaffolding

Across both speeches, rhetorical devices function not as ornamental flourishes but as enabling scaffolds for speech-act felicity. Repetition, metaphor, antithesis, and ethos consistently co-occur with illocutionary acts that demand uptake. For Mandela, anaphora ("I have cherished the ideal...") dramatizes commissives of resolve and personal sacrifice; for Arafat, antithesis ("olive branch and the freedom-fighter's gun") bolsters assertives that present Palestinians as simultaneously peaceful and militant, depending on audience uptake. In both cases, rhetorical strategies heighten the strength and recognizability of speech acts, ensuring that illocutions register as authoritative and sincere (Ilie, 2010; Finlayson, 2021).

Quantitatively, both speeches are dominated by assertives and commissives, though with different weightings. Arafat leaned toward declaratives and assertives, consistent with his institutional role at the UN as the official representative of the Palestinian people. Mandela's statement was weighted toward commissives, particularly in its closing, consistent with his need to embody personal and collective commitment in a courtroom setting (Lodge, 2006; Sutanto *et al.*, 2025). These findings confirm that rhetorical devices and speech acts interact differently depending on institutional stage, yet converge in legitimizing the speaker's authority.

7.2 Divergent Device–Act Configurations

The heatmaps (Figures 1–2) illustrate these divergent emphases. In Arafat's case, metaphors and antitheses concentrate in assertive and declarative acts, creating a dual image of peacemaker and fighter. In Mandela's speech, repetition and pathos concentrate in commissives, culminating in his declaration of readiness to die. Statistical testing underscores these contrasts. Device–act contingency tables for the combined dataset produced a significant χ^2 association ($\chi^2 = 42.8$, $df = 16$, $p < .001$) with a moderate effect size (Cramér's $V = .38$). Collapsing rare categories (ethos, metaphor, anaphora) still yielded significance ($\chi^2 = 21.6$, $df = 8$, $p = .006$; $V = .34$), showing that results are robust.

The comparative table (Table 3) makes these contrasts explicit. Both leaders deploy the same core devices—metaphor, repetition, antithesis, ethos, direct address—but toward different illocutionary ends. Arafat's rhetorical program sought to claim

legitimacy for armed resistance while courting diplomatic recognition, whereas Mandela's strategy personalized moral values and performed a principled commissive of self-sacrifice.

Table 3. Comparative mapping of rhetorical devices → speech acts (Arafat vs. Mandela)

Rhetorical Device	Arafat (UN, 1974) — Example & Effect	Supported Speech-Act(s)	Mandela (Rivonia, 1964) — Example & Effect	Supported Speech-Act(s)
Metaphor / Imagery	"Olive branch and freedom-fighter's gun" — dual stance.	Assertive + commissive.	"I have cherished the ideal..." — moral symbol.	Expressive + commissive.
Antithesis	Olive branch vs. gun — peace vs. struggle.	Balancing declarative.	Law vs. conscience, freedom vs. oppression.	Assertive of moral truth.
Repetition	Cadence in grievances/rights.	Assertive reinforcement.	Life-long devotion repeated.	Assertive + declarative.
Ethos / Credibility	Frames self as PLO leader.	Declarative authority.	Sacrifice + consistency.	Expressive/ commissive authority.
Direct Address	"Do not let..." appeal to UN.	Directive plea.	Appeals to court/nation.	Assertive appeal.
Felicity Signaling	Appeals to international law.	Declarations of nationhood.	Appeals to conscience/record.	Moral declaration.

Robustness checks confirm that Arafat relied more heavily on device–act coupling to secure legitimacy in a hostile diplomatic forum (Cramér's $V = 0.449$, 95% CI [0.309, 0.587]) than Mandela, whose courtroom speech displayed weaker coupling ($V = 0.298$, 95% CI [0.182, 0.411]). This suggests that Arafat calibrated rhetorical layering more strategically for institutional uptake, while Mandela emphasized ethical testimony over rhetorical density (Young, 2016; Angermüller, 2014).

7.3 Institutional Context and Felicity Conditions

Institutional context emerges as a key determinant of device–act alignment. At the UN, felicity conditions required both recognized authority and diplomatic idiom. Arafat repeatedly invoked his "formal capacity as Chairman of the PLO," a declarative act dependent on Assembly recognition. His metaphors and antithetical framings aligned with the diplomatic register, balancing conciliation with militancy and projecting legitimacy through international law (Abu Sharif, 2009).

Mandela's trial speech operated in the opposite register. As a defendant facing execution, his authority rested not on institutional recognition but on moral legitimacy. Felicity conditions thus required reframing the courtroom into a political stage. Through anaphora, narrative, and pathos, he transformed commissives into defiant acts of sacrifice. The commissive "It is an ideal for which I am prepared to die" worked because Mandela embodied sincerity and invoked universal justice, repositioning the trial as a moment of historical testimony rather than legal defense (Asmal *et al.*, 1998; Sutanto *et al.*, 2025).

7.4 Perlocutionary Consequences

The pragmatic force of these speeches is measurable not only in their textual structures but also in their historical outcomes. Arafat's speech was followed within days by UN General Assembly Resolution 3236, recognizing the rights of the Palestinian people, and Resolution 3237, granting the PLO observer status (Khalidi, 1997; Said, 1992). Here, perlocutionary effect was institutional: his speech enacted diplomatic recognition.

Mandela's trial statement did not alter his sentence—he was condemned to life imprisonment—but it became a global touchstone for anti-apartheid solidarity. The perlocutionary payoff was moral: his commissive vow galvanized international opinion and conferred symbolic legitimacy on the ANC (Sampson, 2011; Lodge, 2006). These divergent outcomes underscore the need to analyze rhetoric and pragmatics together: the same types of devices scaffold acts that succeed differently depending on the institutional venue.

7.5 Toward a Comparative Model

Taken together, these findings suggest a comparative model of rhetorical–pragmatic legitimation. In diplomatic contexts, rhetorical devices scaffold declaratives and assertives, producing institutional uptake when felicity conditions align. In trial or protest contexts, devices more often scaffold commissives and expressives, producing symbolic authority even in the absence of institutional recognition. Both patterns illuminate how freedom-fighter leaders strategically navigate contested legitimacy.

This synthesis advances broader debates on the performativity of political communication. Rhetorical strategies are not embellishments but pragmatic enablers of action, and their effectiveness hinges on institutional stage and audience uptake. Recent research on protest rhetoric and digital activism underscores the continuity of these dynamics: metaphors, slogans, and directives still condition felicity and mobilization across media environments (Gasaway-Hill, 2018; Sosnin *et al.*, 2023; Oyedele & Nmadu, 2025). By situating Arafat and Mandela within this framework, we show how iconic freedom-fighter speeches illuminate both the adaptability and the enduring logic of rhetorical–pragmatic integration in struggles for legitimacy.

8. Discussion

This study shows that rhetorical form and speech-act pragmatics are not parallel tracks but mutually constitutive mechanisms by which contested actors secure legitimacy. Our sentence-level coding and device→act mappings reveal a consistent logic: rhetorical devices (metaphor, antithesis, repetition/anaphora, narrative, and ethos cues) act as *felicity scaffolds* that increase the probability that an illocutionary move will be recognized, accepted, or acted upon. In Arafat’s UN address these scaffolds supported declaratives and assertives that translated into institutional uptake; in Mandela’s Rivonia statement they amplified commissives and expressives that produced durable moral authority. The empirical contrasts illuminate how identical devices can be repurposed for different pragmatic ends depending on institutional constraints and audience configurations.

8.1 Rhetoric as Pragmatic Enabling Mechanism

The device→act associations we observed concretize theoretical claims made by Austin (1975) and Searle (1969) about performativity and illocutionary force: successful speech acts depend on conventional and contextual conditions. Our contribution is to show how rhetorical form helps produce those conditions. Butler’s (2021) notion of the citational and performative power of utterance resonates here: repetition and citation circulate speech-acts beyond the immediate setting, magnifying perlocutionary effects. Charland’s (1987) constitutive rhetoric likewise helps explain how metaphor and narrative reconstitute collective identity—Arafat’s olive-branch/gun line reframed political actors; Mandela’s closing transformed legal testimony into a moral exemplar.

8.2 Institutional Mediation of Felicity

The differences between the UN forum and the courtroom are analytically instructive. Diplomatic settings privilege formal recognition and institutional procedures; accordingly, Arafat’s declaratives and assertives—framed by metaphors that resonated with international norms—had direct institutional consequences (as the subsequent GA resolutions suggest). By contrast, Mandela’s courtroom lacked institutional mechanisms for immediate recognition; his rhetorical program instead targeted global audiences and history, using anaphora and ethical framing to secure symbolic legitimacy. These patterns align with social-movement and contentious-politics literatures that underscore the importance of arena and audience in shaping repertoires (Tarrow, 2011; Benford & Snow, 2000).

8.3 Perlocutionary Divergence and Implications for Movement Legitimation

The two cases illustrate two modes of rhetorical–pragmatic legitimation. First, *institutional uptake*—where speech acts trigger concrete institutional responses—depends on rhetorical packaging that meets the conventions of diplomatic fora. Second, *symbolic legitimation*—where speech acts generate moral authority and mobilize solidarity—relies on devices that signal sincerity and sacrifice. Both modes are available to movement leaders, but their effectiveness depends on context and the congruence between device, act, and audience. Recent work on digital protest underscores the continued relevance of this logic: networked repetition and sloganization can function as large-scale commissives or directives even when institutional channels are closed (Tufekci, 2017).

8.4 Methodological and Theoretical Advances

Methodologically, the study demonstrates the value of combining close reading with systematic, sentence-level coding and contingency analysis—allowing us to move from exemplar-rich interpretation to generalizable device→act patterns. The use of robustness checks (category collapse; bootstrap CIs) and inter-coder reliability procedures (reported earlier) also grounds

interpretive claims in reproducible metrics (Agresti & Kateri, 2025; Krippendorff, 2022; Neuendorf, 2019). Theoretically, the felicity-scaffold concept helps bridge rhetorical scholarship (emphasis on metaphor, narrative) and pragmatic theory (illocutionary felicity), offering a parsimonious way to predict which devices will support which acts in particular arenas.

8.5 Limitations and Future Directions

Two limitations warrant attention. First, the study focuses on two canonical speeches; broader case series—spanning other liberation leaders and contemporary movement rhetorics—would test the model's generality. Second, perlocutionary effects are partly inferential; triangulation with contemporaneous audience reception data (press, diplomatic cables, archival opinion measures) would strengthen causal claims about uptake. Future work should also explore multimodal delivery (prosody, gesture) and digital dissemination pathways that mediate device circulation.

Ultimately, this paper argues that rhetoric is not mere ornament: it is a pragmatic technology for producing felicitous speech acts. Whether a leader seeks diplomatic recognition or moral immortality, the careful orchestration of rhetorical devices determines whether words will do what they intend—change minds, constituting institutions, or consolidate movements.

9. Conclusion

This paper set out to show how rhetorical craftsmanship and speech-act pragmatics interact to produce political effects in two emblematic freedom-fighter speeches: Yasser Arafat's 1974 UN address and Nelson Mandela's 1964 Rivonia Trial statement. Our sentence-level coding, device→act contingency analysis, positional profiling, and close readings converge on one central claim: rhetorical devices are not mere ornamentation but function as felicity scaffolds—formal resources that help satisfy the contextual and conventional conditions needed for illocutionary success (Austin, 1975; Searle, 1969).

Empirically, the cases instantiate two complementary modes of legitimating speech. Arafat's UN rhetoric paired metaphoric framing and antithesis with declaratives and assertives calibrated to diplomatic norms; those device→act couplings materially contributed to institutional uptake (UN resolutions and expanded PLO standing). Mandela's courtroom rhetoric concentrated anaphora, narrative, and commissive climax to generate moral authority and transnational solidarity despite the absence of institutional recognition. Robustness checks (collapsed categories; bootstrap CIs) and inter-coder reliability procedures support that these patterns are systematic, not anecdotal.

Theoretically, we advance a comparative model: in institutional arenas (diplomacy), devices tend to scaffold declaratives and assertives that can produce *institutional uptake* when felicity conditions are met; in contestational arenas (trial/protest), devices more often scaffold commissives and expressives that produce *symbolic legitimation* and mobilize moral authority. This model bridges constitutive rhetoric (Charland, 1987), performativity (Butler, 2021), and speech-act theory by showing how device→act mappings operate as mechanisms of political performativity. Methodologically, the study demonstrates the analytic value of combining close reading with reproducible, sentence-level annotation and quantitative contingency testing (Krippendorff, 2022; Neuendorf, 2019).

Limitations remain: the two-case design constrains generalizability and perlocutionary claims would be strengthened by systematic reception data (press archives, diplomatic cables, opinion measures). Future research should (a) expand the comparative set across leaders and media ecologies, (b) integrate multimodal delivery and prosody, and (c) trace diffusion pathways (including digital networks) that extend citational force beyond the original utterance (Tufekci, 2017).

In short, Arafat and Mandela teach a durable lesson: words, when craftfully aligned with context, do things—they constitute recognition, signal commitment, and create political reality. Understanding the device→act mechanics of that work is essential for theorizing how rhetoric continues to make political worlds.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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