

**RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE PERSUASIVE  
LETTERS OF CHINESE STUDENTS**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This descriptive-qualitative study aimed to analyze the persuasive letters of the Chinese students who were enrolled in the Bachelor of Science in Nursing Program of St. Paul University Philippines. The persuasion letters that were used as the corpus of this study were the outputs of the Chinese students in their Final Examination for Technical Writing and Writing in the Disciplines. The Rhetorical Analysis Tool was employed to investigate the form, content, and rhetoric embedded in the persuasive letters of the students. The study revealed that the students were able to establish ethos or personal credibility in their write-ups. Also, this study showed that the students were able to show persuasion by giving their personal experiences and factual information and using some Rhetorical Devices. Among the Rhetorical Devices used, this study revealed that Epithet and Metonymy were the most commonly used.*

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**Keywords:** *Rhetoric, persuasion, rhetorical devices, form, content*

## INTRODUCTION

Learning a second language or even a foreign language has become a necessity especially if one desires to be globally competent. One of the macro skills in language learning that people must consider is 'writing.' Damayanti (2009) states that writing is a process of producing language that comes from our thought in a written form. Through writing, humans can express ideas or thoughts and their personal feelings or emotions. Writing connects people across time, space and culture. Because of the influence of writing, individuals can learn from yesterday, gain knowledge about today and design for tomorrow (villagehiker.com).

Writing-being inanimate, amoral and disinterested-can transmit good or evil. It can destroy or create, cover up or reveal. Writing can prevaricate or be straightforward. It can build up or tear down, poison or heal. Writing can cause conflict or encourage peace. Because writing in itself is neutral and indifferent, its purposes and results depend totally on the intentions and hearts of writers and their audiences (Kersletter, 2010).

Writing is considered as a means of communication. But, it is not only simply drawing a range of orthographic symbols; it involves a complex process where we have to use certain grammatical rules in organizing facts. It also tends to involve a thinking process from a human being, like what have been said by Hyland (2004) that writing has been characterized as written thinking. When we write, we do not only keep our purpose of writing in our mind, but we also have to think about how to organize them in the composition. Thus, writing is included as a productive skill. Students are charged to produce the ability in writing by the process of thinking. They must be more encouraged to express their ideas, experience, thought and feeling through their writing (Hyland, 2004).

Most students regard that writing is a difficult subject, especially when it relates to writing in the second language. According to Dvorak, as cited by Kern (2001), both first and second language writing is complexified by the additional of new resources and norms. Learning the structural elements of the language, new rhetorical conventions and perhaps even

new uses of writing does not replace, but it is added to what one already knows about writing from one's native language.

Lado (1967) as cited by Damayanti (2009) states that writing a foreign language and its graphic representation productively in ordinary writing situations. More specifically, he also adds that writing in a foreign language is the ability to use the structures, the lexical items, and their conventional representation in the ordinary matter of fact writing. Writing is not practiced in isolation; rather, skills are practiced in an interdependent fashion. It means that writing activity includes dictation or note taking; it also will involve a reading comprehension. Because of its complexity, writing must be practiced regularly and done step by step (Darmayanti, 2009).

Because of the differences between first languages from the foreign language, especially English, students often find problems in writing using English. It is because writing needs more considerations rather than three other skills because of the different rules in the way of ordering words into understandable sentences. In teaching writing, teachers should give students clear guidelines on how to plan and construct a phrase, a clause, and a sentence correctly and grammatically. Then, students also have to master some learning concepts such as a rule for constructing paragraphs; these are unity and coherence. It conforms to Kreidler's statement that the ultimate aim of writing is to give the students the opportunity to express their ideas facilely; using the language pattern they have learned.

One of the reasons why people write is to persuade. Persuasive writing presents supportive arguments for a specific point of view. These favorable defenses must be, if not Socratically logical, at least thoughtful and reasonable. Importantly, this type of writing should acknowledge the positive values in other opinions. Showing this courtesy to alternative viewpoints adds confident strength to any argument. Persuasive writing should concentrate on ideas and actions, addressing personalities only when essential to the argument ([villagehiker.com](http://villagehiker.com)).

The researcher was prompted to conduct this study on the persuasive letters of Chinese students using Rhetorical Analysis to examine the degree of Rhetoric employed in their write-ups. Through this, the researcher

would be able to, in one way or the other, give recommendations on the improvement of the writing skills of the Chinese students of St. Paul University Philippines on the aspect of Persuasion and Rhetoric.

### **Objectives of the Study**

This study aimed to examine the persuasive letters of Chinese students using Rhetorical Analysis.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the rhetorical situation?
2. Who are the authors or speakers?
3. What are their intentions in writing?
4. Who makes up the audience?
5. What are the types of content used in the letters?
6. What rhetorical devices were employed?
7. How do form and content correspond?
8. What does the nature of the communication reveal about the culture of the writers?

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

This study employed a descriptive-qualitative method since the researcher aimed to analyze the persuasive letters of Chinese students. This method is defined by Calderon and Sanchez as cited by Bonilla (2006) as a “process of gathering, analyzing, classifying and tabulating about prevailing conditions, trends, processes, and then making adequate and accurate interpretations about such data...” bearing this in mind,

a descriptive method is deemed appropriate for the study because the researcher will treat the data taken in the same processes presented in the definition.

Qualitative research seeks out the ‘why,’ not the ‘how’ of its topic through the analysis of unstructured information – things like interview transcripts, emails, notes, feedback forms, photos, and videos. It doesn’t just rely on statistics or numbers, which are the domain of quantitative researchers.

Qualitative research is used to gain insight into people’s attitudes, behaviors, value systems, concerns, motivations, aspirations, culture or lifestyles. It’s used to inform business decisions, policy formation, communication, and research.

### **Corpus of the Study**

The corpus of the study is the persuasive letters of Chinese students during their Final Examination in ENG102-Writing in the Discipline in the Academic Year 2010-2011. It focuses on examining the write-ups using the questions provided in the Rhetorical Analysis Tool. The researcher identified the rhetorical situation and described the authors and their intentions in writing. Furthermore, he also presented the types of content used in the essays, how the form and the content corresponded, and identified the different rhetorical devices employed in the write-ups. Meanwhile, the researcher also presented the nature of communication revealed about the culture of the writers.

### **Procedures**

The following steps were undertaken in gathering the data to answer the specific objectives of the study. The researcher read the persuasive letters of the Chinese students to be able to find answers to the questions included in the Rhetorical Analysis. The researcher began with the presentation, analysis, and interpretation of the study with the description of the Rhetorical Situation. The researcher also described the authors and their intentions in writing. He presented the types of content used in the essays, how the form and the content corresponded, and identified the

different rhetorical devices employed in the write-ups through a table. The researcher also presented the nature of communication revealed about the culture of the writers.

## **Data Analysis**

Textual Analysis was the method utilized in this study since the data analyzed were taken from the persuasive letters written by Chinese students. Textual Analysis is a methodology in the social sciences for studying the content of communication. Babbie (2005) defines it as “the study of recorded human communications, such as books, websites, paintings and laws.” It is most commonly used by researchers in the social sciences to analyze recorded transcripts or interviews with participants.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

In the process of examining the persuasive letters, the researcher picked out significant details and answers to the questions included in the Rhetorical Analysis Tool. The aforementioned details and answers were then interpreted to come up with the conclusions regarding the persuasive letters.

### *1. What is the rhetorical situation?*

St. Paul University Philippines is one of the leader schools in Nursing Education. With the very significant passing rate in the National Licensure Examination for Nurses, many students were encouraged to take up nursing in the said university. With its aim to deliver quality nursing education to Filipino students and citizens of the neighboring countries, it expanded its nursing program to foreign students. Through this innovation, many Chinese students have enrolled and have graduated Bachelor of Science in Nursing from SPUP.

The persuasion letters that were used as the corpus of this study were the outputs of some Chinese students in their Final Examination for Technical Writing and Writing in the Discipline. The Chinese students were asked to answer task number 2 in their questionnaire which goes, “Write a three paragraph persuasive letter addressed to the would-be-BS

Nursing students suggesting why it is good to take the course and the possible employment that one can get. Convince them of the importance of the course by giving your personal examples and experiences.”

## *2. Who are the authors or speakers?*

The persuasive letters were made by the Fifth Year Chinese students of Bachelor of Science in Nursing of St. Paul University Philippines for the Academic Year 2010-2011. The researcher perceives that the authors were able to establish personal credibility as they state the following reasons why the would-be-BS Nursing students must take BS Nursing, and take it in SPUP in their persuasive letters. Lines were taken from the persuasive letters verbatim, and the researcher’s interpretations follow them.

“I am proud to introduce my course and my school to you, and I hope you can come to study Nursing course here.”

This line from one of the letters proved how satisfied and gratified the author is when she used the word “proud.” This may manifest that since she is trying to convince other students to take BS Nursing in SPUP, they may also feel and experience the same satisfaction when they enroll to SPUP.

“You can study Nursing knowledge at the same time English.”

This line gives an impression that once a student enrolls BS-Nursing in St. Paul University Philippines, he/she gets not just inputs on nursing concepts but also learns the English Language at the same time. The researcher sees this to be emphasized because they are Chinese students and it is indeed one of the reasons why they choose to study in the Philippines to learn the English Language. It is also important to note that Chinese consider English as a Foreign Language.

“Our teachers are RNs and MSNs so that you can trust their professional knowledge and English level.”

Including in the persuasive letter that the faculty is made up of

Registered Nurses and graduates of Master of Science in Nursing indeed shows credibility and allows the author to prove that SPUP provides quality Nursing Education.

“Take me as an example. . . . After three years study, I already improved a lot and got the TOELF score of 86.”

This is indeed a very courageous statement from one of the persuasive letters. Using one’s self as an example is a great manifestation that one can prove his or her claim; in this case, that BS Nursing program in SPUP is good and helpful. The researcher strongly believes that the authors were able to establish ethos or personal credibility, reputation, and fairness based on the nature of the task given to them. The task includes, “Convince them of the importance of the course by giving your personal examples and experiences.” The authors did not just give personal examples and experiences, but they also included some factual information to prove their respective claims like the qualifications of the faculty members, their progress in standardized examinations, and their improvements in speaking the English language. And since they experienced how the Nursing program has been delivered in SPUP, they are indeed credible to promote or market and to persuade people to take the course in the same university.

### *3. What are their intentions in writing?*

One of the reasons why people write is to persuade. Persuasive writing presents supportive arguments for a specific point of view. Based on the nature of the task given to the authors, it was clearly stated that their intention is to persuade. The lines presented below to prove that the writers intend to persuade their readers:

Our teachers are RNs and MSNs so that you can trust their professional knowledge and English level.

“Take me as an example. . . . After three years study, I already improved a lot and got the TOELF score of 86.”



It is known to all that St. Paul University is a good school and the nursing course the best.

The teachers and classmates are all very friendly and warm-hearted. They are willing to reach out their helping hand whenever you need.

“I will tell you what you will get from the nursing course. If you take a nursing course, you will enter an amazing world; you will know about body structures, body systems, and different diseases.”

These lines from the persuasive letters indeed manifest persuasion to the readers. They contain positive information about the idea the authors believe in and at the same time, they provide the different benefits that one gets when he or she enrolls BS- Nursing in SPUP.

#### *4. Who makes up the audience?*

“Write a three paragraph persuasive letter addressed to the would-be-BS Nursing students suggesting why it is good to take the course and the possible employment that one can get. Convince them of the importance of the course by giving your personal examples and experiences.”

In the context of the task given to the students, the intended audience was explicitly manifested, the would-be-BS Nursing students. But based on the persuasive letters of the authors, it can be noticed that their persuasion is addressed to the Chinese students like them. This can be claimed based on this sentence: “When we first came here, we know nothing, they taught us English, guide us the way to a classroom and so on.”

The secondary audiences can be the would-be-BS Nursing students in general. They may come from different races. If students from different nations and also from the Philippines would be able to read the persuasive letters of these Chinese students they might also be convinced to take the course in SPUP.

#### *5. What are the types of content used in the essays?*

The persuasive letters of the Chinese students have a single main idea for the reason that they were asked to answer a single task. They all struggled to the conviction that BS Nursing is a good course to take. The authors appealed both to reason and emotion as they presented factual information about the BSN program in SPUP and at the same time their experiences as foreign students. Furthermore, some of the authors also included their personal views on the program and how it can benefit them and other students. Below are sentences that lead to the main idea that Nursing is a good course to take in SPUP.

Our teachers are RNs and MSNs so that you can trust their professional knowledge and English level.

Take me as an example. . . . After three years study, I already improved a lot and got the TOELF score of 86.

It is known to all that St. Paul University is a good school and the nursing course the best.

The teachers and classmates are all very friendly and warm-hearted. They are willing to reach out their helping hand whenever you need.

I will tell you what will you get from the nursing course. If you take a nursing course, you will enter an amazing world; you will know about body structures, body systems, and different diseases.

*6. What rhetorical devices were employed?*

Table 1. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of the Rhetorical Devices used in the Persuasive Letters of Chinese Students

| <b>Rhetorical Devices Used</b> | <b>F</b> | <b>P (%)</b> |
|--------------------------------|----------|--------------|
| Allusion                       | 1        | 7.692        |
| Apostrophe                     | 1        | 7.692        |
| Enumeratio                     | 1        | 7.692        |
| Epithet                        | 5        | 38.462       |

|              |           |            |
|--------------|-----------|------------|
| Hyperbole    | 1         | 7.692      |
| Litotes      | 1         | 7.692      |
| Metonymy     | 2         | 15.386     |
| Synecdoche   | 1         | 7.692      |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>13</b> | <b>100</b> |

Table 1 shows the different Rhetorical Devices found in the persuasive letters of the Chinese students. The most dominant among the rhetorical devices used is Epithet which consists 38.462% of the total number. It is the use of an adjective or adjective phrase to describe. It is followed by Metonymy which consists 15.386% of the total number of the Rhetorical devices used. It is a kind of metaphor where something being compared is referred to by something closely associated with it. On the one hand, Allusion, Apostrophe, Enumeration, Hyperbole, Litotes, and Synecdoche consist 7.692% of the rhetorical devices used. Please refer to the Definition of Terms in Chapter I for the definition of these Rhetorical Devices.

Below are the examples of lines or sentences that contain Rhetorical Devices:

I heard that you chose Nursing as a major in our university.  
(Apostrophe)

If you take a nursing course, you will enter an amazing world.  
(Epithet)

I thought I already have one step inside my dream. (Metonymy)

Don't wait anymore, join us! (Litotes)

Our teachers are RNs and MSNs, so you trust their professional and English level. (Enumeratio)

The graduate certificate from St. Paul University is a gold ticket for best hospitals all around the world. (Metonymy)

You can feel the care of the school. (Synecdoche)

My dream is helping poor people who suffer pain and diseases.  
(Epithet)

I earnestly tell you, you have made a very good decision for yourself.  
(Epithet)

Furthermore, A nurse is an honourable job. (Epithet)

The teachers and classmates are very friendly and warm-hearted.  
(Epithet)

It is known to all that St. Paul University is a good school and the nursing course the best. (Hyperbole)

I improved a lot and got the TOELF score of 86. (Allusion)

Note: The examples were copied verbatim from the persuasive letters of the authors.

### *7. How do form and content correspond?*

The form utilized by the authors is a 'letter.' Through this, the authors were able to direct their message to their intended audience which is the would-be-BS Nursing students. Based on the observations of the researcher, the form complements the content of the persuasive write-up, and it is relevant to the context of the task. The authors were able to freely express their personal experiences and examples in a very direct and intimate manner. The researcher then can claim that the form aided the author's intention to convince the would-be-BS Nursing to take the Nursing Program in SPUP for it gave them a chance and to express what is their minds.

### *8. What does the nature of the communication reveal about the culture of the writers?*

Based on the persuasive letters of the Chinese students, the

following are the values and the customs that have been revealed. These have been proven through the lines or sentences that the researcher clipped from the letters.

Chinese are grateful for what other people show or do for them, and appreciative of the simple things around them.

The teachers and classmates are all very friendly and warm-hearted. They are willing to reach out their helping hand whenever you need.

I am proud to introduce my course and my school to you.

It is known to all that St. Paul University is a good school and the nursing course the best.

Chinese people are concerned for the welfare of other people, and they are very family oriented.

We can take care of the sick people, help them release pain and sorrow. And we can take care of our parents, too.

Then you may use your knowledge and skills to help others, not just your families, but also poor people who have weak in health protection.

My dream is helping poor people who suffer pain and diseases.

If you take nursing, it is good for you and your family.

As our relatives and family, they are very close to us, it means, we have more times to meet them, teach them and care them to be good.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study aimed to examine the persuasive letters of Chinese students using the Rhetorical Analysis Tool. The persuasion letters that were used as the corpus of this study were the outputs of some Chinese students in their Final Examination for Technical Writing and Writing in the Discipline. The Chinese students were asked to answer task number 2 in their questionnaire.

The authors were able to establish ethos or personal credibility, reputation, and fairness based on the nature of the given task and because the authors did not just give personal examples and experiences, but they also included some factual information to prove their respective claims. And since they experienced how the Nursing program has been delivered in SPUP, they are indeed credible to promote or market and to persuade people to take the course.

Furthermore, based on the nature of the task given to the authors, it was clearly stated that their intention is to persuade the would-be-BS Nursing students to take the program in SPUP. The persuasive letters all struggle to the conviction that BS Nursing is a good course to take as the authors appealed both to reason and emotion of their audience when they presented factual information about the BSN program in SPUP and at the same time their experiences as foreign students. Furthermore, some of the authors also included their personal views on the program and how it can benefit them and other students.

The following are the different Rhetorical Devices used in the persuasive essays; Allusion, Apostrophe, Enumeratio, Epithet, Hyperbole, Litotes, Metonymy, and Synecdoche. Meanwhile, it was found out that the form complements the content of the persuasive write-up and it is relevant to the context of the task. The authors were able to freely express their personal experiences and examples in a very direct and intimate manner. The researcher then can claim that the form aided the authors' intention to convince the would-be-BS Nursing to take the Nursing Program in SPUP for it gave them a chance and to express what their minds are.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, the following recommendations are offered:

The St. Paul University Philippines administration is highly commended for its Bachelor of Science in Nursing Program, specifically the one offered for the Chinese Students. The students' impressions and invitations for the would-be-Nursing students are great manifestations of its success. The continuation of the program is then highly recommended. Meanwhile, based on the write-ups of the students, the researcher observed some points

for improvement particularly in grammar area. It is then recommended that an intensification of the English Program of the Chinese Students be made although this is not of a major priority since English is considered as their Foreign Language. Also, for the maximum utilization of this study, it is recommended that future researchers turn this study better by using a larger number of corpuses to be examined. It is also recommended that future researchers make a comparison between the outputs of the Chinese students and the Filipino students to see who can utilize more rhetorical devices in their write-ups.

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