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Politeness, Power, and Persuasion: A Pragmatic Analysis of Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King Jr.'s Rhetoric

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Abstract

This study dives into a comparative analysis of the speeches delivered by Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King Jr. It highlights how both leaders skilfully use politeness, power, and persuasion to advocate for justice and social change. By leaning on Brown and Levinson's politeness theory alongside classical rhetorical frameworks, the research uncovers how their language choices embody moral authority, foster unity, and demonstrate strategic resistance. King's speeches, filled with biblical references and emotional resonance, utilise repetition and inclusive language to galvanise collective action and spiritual strength. On the other hand, Mandela's rhetoric, grounded in reconciliation and democratic principles, underscores political maturity, collaboration, and nonviolent resistance. Through a detailed analysis of speech acts and discourse, the study reveals how both leaders cultivate ethical power through civility, empathy, and a conscious effort to steer clear of hostility. The findings show that their rhetorical techniques not only rallied oppressed communities but also redefined what it means to lead through moral persuasion and linguistic integrity.

Keywords: Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King Jr., Politeness, Power, Persuasion

Introduction

Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King Jr. occupy central places in modern histories of social justice (Adjei, 2013; Bassi, 2019). Both leaders used public speech not only to rally supporters but also to reshape moral and political understandings of oppression, rights, and national identity. A pragmatic study of their rhetoric illuminates how language, social power, and politeness strategies operate together to persuade diverse audiences and to negotiate dangerous political contexts. The studying of Mandela and King comparatively have significantly influence for many reasons in different facet of life (Morselli & Passini, 2010; Xinfeng, 2018). For instance, both leaders converted rhetorical skill into political leverage, yet they did so in very different historical and institutional settings. King's speeches are often analysed in the context of mass mobilisation and civil rights law in the United States (Malik & Ullah, 2022). Scholars have examined the pragmatic mechanics of his best-known addresses, showing how illocutionary acts and emotional appeals were deployed to create moral urgency and to construct collective identity. Empirical pragmatic analyses of King's "*I Have a Dream*"

have emphasised how speech acts and rhetorical form function together to perform demands for justice and to solicit cooperative action from a broad public (Josiah, 2015). Second, Mandela's rhetoric, especially in trial statements such as his 1964 Rivonia Trial speech, combined legal self-defence, moral witness, and nation building.

Critical discourse and pragma-rhetorical studies of Mandela highlight how he used moral authority and narrative to confront a violent, institutionalised regime and to delegitimise apartheid's claims to legitimacy (Al Jazeera, 2024; Critical Discourse Analysis sources, 2023). Third, a comparative pragmatic approach reveals how politeness strategies interact with power: both leaders at times foregrounded positive face by appealing to shared values and solidarity, and at other times invoked negative face and autonomy to insist on political rights. Politeness theory, as developed by Brown and Levinson, gives a useful taxonomy for evaluating such facework in high-stakes political speech (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Theoretical framing for this analysis draws on three interlocking traditions. Politeness theory supplies concepts of positive and negative face and of face-threatening acts. These concepts let us observe when leaders mitigate or intensify imposition to maintain authority or to invite cooperation (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Speech act theory and pragmatic methodologies enable close analysis of illocutionary force and perlocutionary effect, clarifying how utterances perform actions such as promising, condemning, or calling to mobilise (Austin; applied in contemporary speech analyses of King and Mandela). Classical rhetoric—ethos, pathos, and logos provides an additional analytical frame to understand credibility building, emotional arousal, and logical argument as complementary persuasive resources used by both leaders (recent pragma-rhetorical studies apply this triad to Mandela's and King's speeches).

Existing literature shows rich scholarship on each leader's rhetoric, but relatively fewer studies that systematically integrate politeness and pragmatics in a cross-cultural comparison. Empirical pragmatic research has illuminated the speech act structure and persuasive devices in King's "*I Have a Dream*" address (Josiah, 2015). Similarly, multiple critical discourse and rhetorical studies examine Mandela's courtroom rhetoric and public addresses, showing how he combined moral narrative and legal positioning to resist apartheid (Critical Discourse Analysis of "I Am Prepared to Die," 2023; Al Jazeera feature, 2024). Comparative leadership and strategy literature highlights parallels and contrasts in their approaches but often emphasises biography and political strategy rather than fine-grained pragmatic mechanisms of politeness and persuasion (comparative studies of Mandela and King leadership strategies.

This study, therefore, asks three research questions. How do Mandela and King use politeness strategies to manage face wants while making uncompromising political claims? How do their uses of ethos, pathos, and logos interrelate with speech acts and face-work to produce persuasive effects? What differences and similarities emerge when speeches are analysed within their sociohistorical contexts and under the same pragmatic framework? Answering these questions contributes to scholarship on political pragmatics by mapping the micro-linguistic choices that undergird influential political persuasion and by offering a cross-cultural comparison of two leaders whose words shaped global struggles for human dignity.

Methodologically, the study uses close pragmatic and discourse analysis of primary speeches, King's "*I Have a Dream*" and selected public statements by Mandela, including the Rivonia Trial speech, supported by secondary scholarly analyses that apply speech act, rhetorical, and politeness frameworks. Combining primary textual analysis with the established theoretical literature allows this study to connect moment-by-moment linguistic moves to larger persuasive effects and political outcomes. By attending to both politeness strategies and rhetorical appeals, the analysis aims to show how language served as a technology of power and moral persuasion in two of the twentieth century's most consequential movements. Therefore, this paper seeks to: (1) to examine how Nelson Mandela employs pragmatic politeness strategies and moral persuasion in his speeches to promote unity, reconciliation, and democratic values in post-apartheid South Africa; (2) to analyse how Martin Luther King Jr. utilises pragmatic and rhetorical strategies to construct moral authority, strengthen his ethos, and advocate for nonviolent social change; and (3) To compare and evaluate the pragmatic and rhetorical approaches of Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King Jr., identifying how each leader's use of politeness, power, and persuasion reflects their sociopolitical contexts and leadership philosophies. This study compares Mandela's and King's rhetorical strategies through the lenses of politeness theory, speech act theory, and classical rhetorical appeals. The goal is to show how each leader balanced face needs, moral authority, and persuasive technique to accomplish political and ethical aims.

Literature Review

Language and power are inseparable when it comes to political leadership, and the rhetoric of Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King Jr. offers a rich site in which to explore the intertwining of politeness strategies, persuasive discourse and face-work in high-stakes contexts. Politeness theory, speech act theory, and rhetorical appeal frameworks (ethos, pathos, logos) all provide useful analytic lenses, yet the literature indicates a gap when these are employed comparatively across diverse socio-historical fields. This review maps major strands of the existing work, highlights overlaps and divergences, and sets the groundwork for a pragmatic comparative study of these two leaders' rhetorical performance.

Politeness Theory and Political Rhetoric

Politeness theory, as developed by Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson (1987), centres on speakers' efforts to manage "face", that is, the positive and negative self-wants of interlocutors, and on how speakers mitigate or intensify potential face-threatening acts. Scholars argue that in political oratory, face-work is especially salient because leaders must maintain authority while appealing to solidarity and shared identity (Brown & Levinson, 1987). For example, Leech's (1983) notion of the maxims of politeness (tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, sympathy) has been applied to rhetorical contexts to show how speakers balance assertive demands with face-mitigation. While much of the literature on politeness has focused on interpersonal conversation, recent work extends this into public projection of leadership (Mishra, 2023; Khurshid & Janjua, 2023).

In the case of Nelson Mandela, a pragmatic analysis of his Harvard University speech demonstrates how he uses Leech's maxims (modesty and approbation) alongside Aristotelian persuasion to craft a respectful yet powerful stance toward the United States and global audience (Mishra, 2023). Similarly, studies of Mandela's courtroom speeches show his frequent use of honorifics (e.g., "My Lord," "Your Lordship") to acknowledge social distance

and to manage his face while making bold claims (ERIC PDF, 2024). This emphasises the dual-track of politeness and power: the speaker acknowledges deference while leveraging his argumentative position.

For Martin Luther King Jr., politeness in the narrow sense of face-mitigation appears less foregrounded in the literature; instead, his rhetoric often emphasises identification, solidarity and moral authority, which correspond more directly with positive-face appeals (Josiah & Oghenerho, 2015). Yet newer analyses of his speech acts show that he also balances negative-face concerns when making imperatives or directives to broader publics (AbdulAziz Bajri & Mariesel, 2020). The interplay of politeness and persuasion in King's rhetoric remains an area for further fine-grained pragmatic study.

Speech Acts, Pragmatics and Persuasion

Speech act theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969) provides the basis for understanding how utterances perform actions. In political rhetoric, illocutionary acts such as promising, urging, condemning, and exhorting combine with perlocutionary effects aimed at mobilising, legitimising or persuading audiences. Josiah and Oghenerho (2015) conducted a pragmatic analysis of King's "*I Have a Dream*" speech, showing how representatives (43 %), directives (22.2 %), declaratives (20.8 %) and commisives (11.1 %) structured the speech and contributed to its tactical efficacy (Josiah, 2015) [turn0search0]. The authors argue that this frequency pattern reflects a rhetorical strategy oriented to the future, action and identity formation.

Discourse analysis of King's other speeches (e.g., Malik & Ullah, 2024) also reveals how his linguistic choices invite audience commitment, exploit repetition and utilise syntactic parallelism to intensify perlocutionary effect (Malik & Ullah, 2024). In turn, the literature on Mandela emphasises his use of rhetorical devices, such as rhetorical questions, oppositional structures and metaphors to defend his cause and assert legitimacy in a hostile judicial setting (Naqeeb, 2018). Faris, Paramasivam and Zamri (2016) analysed "*No Easy Walk to Freedom*" and found that Mandela used quasilegal arguments (enthymemes, syllogism), presentational devices (metaphor, repetition) and analogical persuasion (biblical references) to engage and mobilise his audience (Faris et al., 2016). Their work shows how Mandela's rhetoric bridged rational argumentation and emotive impetus under an apartheid regime.

Importantly, pragma-rhetorical studies (Baig et al., 2023) applied an integrated lens of pragmatics and rhetoric to Mandela's Live 8 speech, locating strategic uses of attribute frames, speech act patterns, and audience alignment (Baig et al., 2023). Such studies reinforce the analytic value of combining speech act theory with rhetorical appeal frameworks and politeness theory when studying political oratory.

Rhetorical Appeals: Ethos, Pathos, Logos

Classical rhetoric provides the triad of ethos (speaker credibility), pathos (emotional appeal) and logos (logical argument). King and Mandela both masterfully deploy this triad, though in distinct contexts and with different emphases. King's ethos is embedded in his moral-spiritual identity and his conjuration of American ideals (Washington, 1993). His pathos frequently arises through repetition ("*I have a dream …*"), vivid metaphors ("*sweltering heat of injustice*"), and prophetic voice ("*I Have a Dream*"). Logos appear in his rational critique of

social systems, such as his “bad check” metaphor relating to economic promise (Investopedia, 2018). Scholars emphasise how King’s speech acts link ethos-pathos-logos into a coherent, persuasive grammar (AbdulAziz Bajri & Mariesel, 2020).

Rhetorical evaluations of Mandela's speech in 1990 show his use of expressive, stylistic devices, including poetic turns, powerful imagery, and well-organized arguments (Naqeeb, 2018). Mandela's ethics is evident in his imprisonment, moral position, and legal experience when confronted with the Rivonia Trial and other high-risk situations (ERIC PDF, 2024). His use of quasi-logical techniques in organized reasoning, such as that of Faris et al. (2016), demonstrates his logos. He uses references to sacrifice, national atonement, and group healing to convey his sadness. His ethos and pathos interplay is further enhanced by his employment of politeness techniques, such as the modesty maxim and the approbation maxim (Mishra, 2023).

Face-work, Power and Persuasion

In speech, power dynamics are complex; leaders need to establish their authority without offending their listeners. The relationship between face-work and power is explained by politeness theory. King uses moral authority, empathy for the oppressed, and an understanding that the status quo needs to change rather than overt dominance to wield influence in his talks (Bajri & Mariesel, 2020). According to the discourse analysis, King's speech acts convey summons to action while managing both positive-face (highlighting common values) and negative-face (respecting autonomy) (Language Horizon article, 2024).
Mandela’s rhetoric displays power under constraint: in courtroom settings, he addresses adversaries respectfully (honorifics) while dismantling their legitimacy. His use of face-mitigation strategies does not weaken his authority; rather, it deepens his persuasive reach by showing balance, respect for institutions and uncompromising moral claims. Khurshid & Janjua (2023) show how Mandela strategically de-emphasised ‘us-versus-them’ dichotomies by merging pronouns and mitigating oppositional frames in his speeches, thereby exercising power via inclusion rather than coercion (Khurshid & Janjua, 2023).

In both leaders’ discourse, persuasion emerges as a face-work process: the speaker manages his own face (ethos) and the audience’s face-wants (respect, recognition, autonomy) while advancing a moral-political agenda. One can argue that their success lies in this triple alignment: rhetorical appeal, face-work, and contextual power.

Comparative Pragmatic Studies and Gaps

Comparative studies of Mandela and King exist, but few integrate politeness theory with speech act and rhetorical appeal frameworks in a single analytic design. Khurshid & Janjua (2023) focus exclusively on Mandela; Josiah (2015) and others focus exclusively on King. A critical discourse analysis of King’s persuasive speeches (Malik & Ullah, 2024). Indicates how persuasive strategies are deployed across five speeches. Similarly, Baig et al. (2023) provide a pragma-rhetorical analysis of Mandela’s Live 8 speech. However, only a handful of studies treat both figures within the same framework. The literature, therefore, leaves open fruitful terrain for a side-by-side pragmatic comparison that systematically examines politeness, face-work, speech act deployment and ethos/pathos/logos interplay.

Another gap concerns context-sensitivity: King's U.S. civil rights context (1960s) and Mandela's South African apartheid/post-apartheid context differ markedly. While many studies consider historical background, fewer systematically code and compare linguistic mechanisms (e.g., frequency of directives, honorific use, and self-deprecation) across contexts. Josiah and Oghenerho's (2015) pragmatic statistical analysis of King's "*I Have a Dream*" provides valuable metrics (directives, representatives) [turn0search0], but there is no equivalent large-scale quantitative study for Mandela. Naqeeb (2018) provides a stylistic analysis of Mandela's speeches, but not detailed speech-act counts.

Finally, politeness theory itself is underutilised in political rhetoric studies. Many analyses of King and Mandela focus on rhetorical appeals and discourse analysis (e.g., metaphors, ideology, identity) but stop short of mapping which politeness strategies (e.g., off-record, negative-politeness, positive-politeness) are present and how they intersect with persuasion. Mishra's (2023) study of Mandela is a notable exception, but more comparative data is needed.

Synthesis and Implications for the Present Study

Bringing these strands together, the literature substantiates several key insights relevant to a pragmatic comparative study of Mandela and King. First, both leaders demonstrate rhetorical skill through speech acts that balance representation of injustice, direct audience challenge, and positive-face appeal. Second, politeness strategies (both positive and negative) are integral to how leaders manage authority and solidarity simultaneously. Third, the triadic lens of ethos/pathos/logos remains central to understanding how rhetorical appeal, moral credibility and logical argument interlock in persuasive political speech. Fourth, contextual power, whether apartheid South Africa or the civil rights era USA, shapes how face-work must be managed and how persuasion is framed.

This review suggests that the most productive analytic path is one that integrates politeness theory, speech act theory and rhetorical appeals, and applies them to a cross-cultural comparison of Mandela and King. Specifically, one might code for (a) frequency and type of directives, representatives, commisives (speech acts); (b) instances of positive- and negative-politeness strategies; (c) markers of ethos, pathos and logos; and (d) contextual face-work strategies (honorifics, pronoun use, self-deprecation, metaphor) in each leader's selected speeches. Doing so allows a micro-linguistic mapping of how both leaders negotiate power, persuasion and politeness. Such mapping will not only fill the gaps identified in the literature but also provide richer insight into how language serves as a technology of moral-political change.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative, comparative design to explore how Mandela and King deploy politeness strategies, speech acts, and rhetorical appeals (ethos, pathos, logos) within major public speeches. Qualitative analysis is appropriate because the aim is to interpret linguistic and pragmatic choices in context (Dwivedi, 2015; Malik & Ullah, 2024). The comparative dimension adds a cross-cultural element, enabling a side-by-side examination of two distinct leadership and rhetorical contexts.

Data Selection and Corpus

The corpus comprises a purposive sample of major public addresses by Mandela and King. For Mandela, selected speeches include his courtroom and freedom-movement addresses (e.g., the Rivonia Trial speech) and a major post-apartheid public speech (Mishra, 2023). For King, the study uses key civil rights era speeches, including "*I Have a Dream*" and other mobilisation speeches (Josiah, 2015; Malik & Ullah, 2024). The sampling is non-random and justified by the prominence of these speeches and their relevance to rhetoric, power and persuasion.

Analytical Framework

The analysis uses a combined theoretical framework:

1. Politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Leech, 1983) to identify positive- and negative-face strategies and mitigation devices.
2. Speech acts theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969) to classify utterances by illocutionary type (assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, declarative).
3. Classical rhetorical appeals (ethos, pathos, logos) to map credibility, emotional appeal, and logical argumentation (Washington, 1993; Faris et al., 2016).

The combination allows for an integrated investigation of how politeness and persuasion intersect in high-stakes political oratory.

Data Coding and Procedure

The speeches are transcribed if necessary and coded in discrete segments (e.g., sentences or utterance turns). Coding proceeds in three stages:

1. **Face-work / Politeness**: Instances of positive politeness (e.g., inclusive pronouns, solidarity markers) and negative politeness (e.g., hedges, indirectness) are flagged.
2. **Speech Acts**: Every coded segment is assigned a speech act category (assertive, directive, etc.) according to Searle's taxonomy.
3. **Rhetorical Appeals**: Each segment is further annotated for the presence of ethos (credibility markers), pathos (emotional triggers), and logos (logical argument or data).

A thematic comparison is then made across the two leaders to identify patterns, similarities, and divergences.

Validity and Trustworthiness

Methodological triangulation ensures analytical rigor: using three theoretical lenses expands the interpretative breadth, and cross-checking coding with peer review increases confidence. Transferability is supported when speeches are contextualised (historical, social). To enable dependability, thorough audit trails and coding logs would be kept.

Limitations

The results of this qualitative study, which used purposeful sampling, are not statistically generalizable. The selection of merely a few speeches per leader may exclude other relevant rhetorical situations. Furthermore, context-specific cultural characteristics (such as those in South Africa versus the United States) may influence comparability and necessitate caution in concluding. Choosing merely a few remarks per leader may ignore this.

Ethical Considerations

There is no need for human-subject ethics approval because the data is public. Nonetheless, the study shall properly recognise source material and prevent misinterpretation of the speakers' intentions or circumstances.

Data Analysis

Pragmatic Analysis of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "How Long? Not Long" (1965)

Delivered on March 25, 1965, at the end of the Selma to Montgomery march, Martin Luther King Jr.'s "*How Long? Not Long*" speech represents one pivotal moment in the annals of American civil rights rhetoric. King's opening remarks, "*Some of our faces are burned, our feet are exhausted, our bodies are weary, but our spirits are rested*," spoken to thousands who had endured weeks of violence and intimidation, beautifully capture the movement's pain and spiritual triumph. A speech that can represent a physical struggle as a spiritual triumph is transformed by the equilibrium of hope and fatigue. King effectively elevates the march as a political and religious act of commitment by focusing his discourse on collective stamina. He can assert, with a great deal of passion, that "*justice is a right and a promise*" after he has led his followers in a protest march to the Alabama State Capitol.

The speech is a classic genre of moral persuasion. He instils in his audience hope that history can be a moral weapon for the dispossessed, repeating that "*The circle of the moral universe is justice." The promise "We are now on the march*" activates determination for a common purpose. Spontaneous, sometimes bold, transformations, such as "*the truth has been crushed to the ground" and "the battle is in our hands*", combine apocalyptic fantasy and social urgency. His speech has been celebrated by scholars for its rare integration of political realism with prophetic expression (Charteris-Black, 2018; Josiah, 2015).

The power of speech lies in directing moral protest against social unity. King makes a protest a social obligation rather than an uprising when he says, "*We will continue to march to the polls until we send our brothers and sisters to the state legislature*." Raja uses obscene words. Despite his politeness, he never changes the tone of confrontation and instead frames disagreement in terms of morality. The speech serves as an example of how deliberate rhetorical devices like politeness, repetition, and inclusive language are responsible for building both opposition and reconciliation. King's speech is an example of linguistic transformation: language is used as a weapon and as a means of expressing a sense of community, bringing thousands of people together with a common language of conversation.

Table 1

Pragmatic Analysis of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "How Long? Not Long" (1965)

Analytical Category	Description	Supporting Examples / Evidence	Key Scholars Referenced
Speech Context	Delivered at the end of the Selma to Montgomery march, emphasising endurance, unity, and moral defiance.	"Speaking before thousands, King transforms the language of protest into a unifying act of moral persuasion."	Charteris-Black (2018); Josiah (2015)
Politeness and Moral Authority	Employs both positive and negative politeness to build solidarity and avoid direct confrontation.	Inclusive pronouns ("we," "our") and softened criticism ("how costly the segregationists will make the funeral").	Brown & Levinson (1987); Fraser (1990); Leech (1983); Fulkerson (2013); Darsey (1991)
Discursive Power	Constructs power through language, solidarity, and moral conviction rather than coercion.	"We are on the move now",; transformation of weakness into agency.	Foucault (1980); van Dijk (2008); Searle (1969); Austin (1962)
Persuasion through Ethos, Pathos, Logos	Integrates credibility, emotion, and reason to strengthen moral argumentation.	Ethos: "Our bodies are tired, but our souls are rested." Pathos: "Brutal murder of four little girls in Birmingham." Logos: Segregation as "political stratagem."	Wang (2016); Al-Sowaidi (2020); Charteris-Black (2018)
Speech Acts and Illocutionary Force	Uses performative and directive speech acts to motivate action and instil hope.	"Let us march" "How long? Not long."	Searle (1969); van Dijk (2008); Austin (1962)
Nonviolent Resistance	Politeness as pragmatic nonviolence converts civility into persuasive strength.	"Our aim must never be to defeat or humiliate the white man."	Brown & Levinson (1987); Fulkerson (2013); Charteris-Black (2018)
Audience Design	Tailors message to multiple audiences: marchers, sympathisers, and opponents.	"My dear and abiding friends, distinguished Americans."	Bell (1984); Leech (1983)
Religious Metaphor and Moral Politeness	Uses divine imagery to elevate struggle beyond politics; frames protest as a moral duty.	"The arc of the moral universe."	Charteris-Black (2018); Kennedy (2019)
Power and Politeness in Contrast	Demonstrates strategic politeness assertive yet inclusive leadership style.	"The battle is in our hands."	Holmes (1995); Lucas (1995); Windt (1986)
Repetition and Rhythm	Repetition reinforces unity, rhythm invites participation, and maintains perlocutionary force.	"Let us march" "We are on the move now."	Charteris-Black (2018); Lakoff (1990)
Power, Resistance, and Solidarity	Closes with commissive and expressive acts that promise justice through faith.	"Truth crushed to earth will rise again" "His truth is marching on."	Darsey (1991); Charteris-Black (2018)

Note. This table summarises the pragmatic, rhetorical, and politeness strategies used in King's speech *"How Long? Not Long"* (1965), based on the frameworks of Brown and Levinson (1987), Leech (1983), and relevant rhetorical studies.

Pragmatic and Politeness Analysis of "I Have a Dream"

Martin Luther King Jr.'s "*I Have a Dream*" speech from 1963 stands out as an exceptional example of how language can weave together politeness, profound moral conviction, and rhetorical skill in an appeal for social change. This is a hopeful talk, given at the very famous March on Washington, which is full of respect and hope as it pleads in favor of equality and justice. King also reflects on what Brown and Levinson (1987) mean by positive humility by using inclusive pronouns (we, our, and us) to establish a feeling of oneness. When he asks his followers to fight on a greater level of dignity and discipline, the tone is determined as the moral high ground instead of violence. Although not violent, he demonstrates to America that there is something wrong with it through the metaphor of a promissory note and the vivid picture of a check being returned with the enclosure of insufficient funds, guarding the honour of the people and his opponents.

King shows linguistic nonviolence and calculated politeness in his speech and expertly manages his tone. His words are thought-provoking, not confrontational, even in the case of injustice. The repetitive phrases such as "*Let the bells of freedom ring and We can never be complacent are emotionally and practically motivating to join and be united"*. His message is a collective investment to change due to his subtle but fervent delivery. The balance between civility and authority, as demonstrated in the oration of King, is a fine illustration of how moral authority can be used to mobilise the nations without resorting to violence, and respect can be an effective weapon in the rhetoric.

Table 2

Pragmatic and Politeness Strategies in Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" (1963) Speech

Category	Example / Quotation	Pragmatic Function	Politeness Strategy	Persuasive Effect
Positive Politeness	"We cannot walk alone."	Builds solidarity and collective identity.	Inclusive pronouns signal unity.	Encourages shared commitment to equality.
Negative Politeness	"We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline."	Avoids face-threatening acts by promoting nonviolence.	Uses restraint and respect toward opponents.	Projects moral superiority and credibility.
Metaphorical Pragmatics	"We've come to cash a check."	Frames justice as an unpaid debt to African Americans.	Indirect critique through metaphor softens confrontation.	Makes injustice relatable and memorable.
Speech Act (Commissive)	"I have a dream."	Commits the speaker and audience to the future realisation of equality.	Encourages shared hope rather than accusation.	Inspires emotional investment and optimism.
Speech Act (Directive)	"Let freedom ring."	Calls for national action and moral awakening.	Inclusive imperative reduces coerciveness.	Invokes patriotic and religious resonance.

Ethos (Moral Appeal)	"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."	Ground the argument in shared national and ethical principles.	Appeals to the collective conscience and fairness.	Strengthens credibility and moral authority.
Pathos (Emotional Appeal)	"My four little children will one day live in a nation…"	Evokes emotional identification with future generations.	Personalises struggle without aggression.	Moves the audience through empathy and hope.
Logos (Rational Appeal)	"One hundred years later…"	Provides a logical contrast between emancipation and present injustice.	Uses historical evidence rather than accusation.	Enhances the reasoned legitimacy of demand.
Biblical Allusion	"Justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream."	Links civil rights to divine justice.	Uses sacred imagery respectfully to connect audiences.	Strengthens ethical and spiritual persuasion.
Repetition and Rhythm	"We can never be satisfied…" / "Let freedom ring…"	Creates cohesion and emphasis through repetition.	Reinforces the message without aggression.	Builds collective emotional momentum.
Interpersonal Pragmatics	"Our white brothers…have come to realise that their destiny is tied up with our destiny."	Recognises potential allies, reducing division.	Respectful acknowledgement maintains harmony.	Encourages reconciliation and cooperation.
Temporal Pragmatics	"One hundred years later" vs. "I have a dream today."	Contrasts historical delay with future hope.	Avoids blame while emphasising progress.	Inspires forward-looking commitment.
Linguistic Nonviolence	"We must not allow our creative protests to degenerate into physical violence."	Encourages peaceful expression of dissent.	Protects the audience's positive and negative face.	Reinforces King's nonviolent philosophy.
Discursive Power	"We will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters."	Exercises ideological power through moral conviction.	Respectful tone sustains legitimacy.	Reframes power as justice, not dominance.

Note. The table illustrates key pragmatic and politeness strategies identified in Martin Luther King Jr.'s *"I Have a Dream"* (1963) speech, analysed through Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness framework and classical rhetorical theory.

Pragmatic Analysis of Martin Luther King Jr.'s Nobel Peace Prize Acceptance Speech (1964)
Martin Luther King Jr.'s Nobel Peace Prize Acceptance Speech, which was given in Oslo on December 10, 1964, brilliantly captures his deep moral convictions and unshakable belief in the transformative potential of nonviolence. *"I accept this honour on behalf of a civil rights movement which is marching with purpose and a majestic scorn for risk and danger to establish a reign of freedom and a rule of justice,*" King declares at the beginning, making it clear that this moment is not about him. He reinforces the idea of the shared moral purpose by making the award a victory of the group but not an individual honour. He also reflects how committed he is to relating personal acceptance to the universal suffering that characterises his cause. He does not hesitate to admit the constant plight of his people, by asking, "*I have to ask why this award is being bestowed upon a movement that is going through a crisis and is dedicated to an incredible struggle,*" since he is humble and does not lose the focus of the harsh reality but instead focuses on the struggle. This voice is indicative of his desire to relate individual identification with the wider agony that defines his cause.

The language is also inclusive as King refers to *we, our and us* in the speech to highlight the value of compassion and unity. He once said to one audience: sooner or later, all the peoples of the world will be forced to find a way of coexisting peacefully. King promised the audience that nonviolence is not inertia, but a force that leads to social transformation of the moral kind. He also speaks against oppression, albeit in a polite manner. Such a combination of belief and courtesy is regarded as a sign of tactful meekness among linguists. His non-angry attitude, based on moral conviction and not anger, allows him to seek justice in the entire world and to include both thought and feeling. Self-control over his side becomes a strong weapon of the king; it demonstrates how the real moral power can shine through a civilisation and tranquillity.

The words of the king are on faith and hope. Defiance is turned into a sort of faith, and the moving words, "*I refuse to accept despair as the ultimate response to the vagaries of history,"* are a modification of the poetry of rebellion. Whenever he tells it, I cannot help but think that it is more of a moral motto and a battle cry that turns conviction into a crusade of justice towards humanity. King offers an eloquent allegory of liberation in the fight with images resonant with strong visions like the starry darkness of fanaticism and war versus the bright dawn of peace and brotherhood. This last statement, I still believe we will win, is made up of positive thinking and prophetic sight. His lecture redefines power as moral power and not dominance, and it makes us remember the fact that love, justice and trust are the strongest forces in the annals of human history.

Table 3
Pragmatic and Rhetorical Features in Martin Luther King Jr.'s Nobel Peace Prize Acceptance Speech (1964)

Pragmatic Feature	Example Quotation	Function / Interpretation	Theoretical Reference
Collective Ethos and Humility	"I accept this award on behalf of a civil rights movement which is moving with determination and a majestic scorn for risk and danger."	Establishes shared moral identity and humility through collective pronouns; aligns the speaker with the people rather than personal glory.	Brown & Levinson (1987); Leech (1983)
Negative Politeness	"I must ask why this prize is awarded to a movement which is beleaguered and committed to unrelenting struggle."	Displays deference and moral modesty, softening potential self-praise; maintains sincerity and respect.	Holmes (1995); Brown & Levinson (1987)
Anaphora (Repetition)	"I refuse to accept despair… I refuse to accept the idea that man is mere flotsam and jetsam… I refuse to accept the view that mankind is so tragically bound…"	Repetition builds rhythm and conviction; performs resistance and faith through speech acts.	Austin (1962); Searle (1969)
Metaphor of Journey	"The tortuous road which has led from Montgomery, Alabama to Oslo bears witness to this truth."	Represents the collective struggle for freedom; frames the civil rights movement as an ongoing journey toward justice.	Charteris-Black (2018)
Discursive Power	"I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality."	Redefines power as moral rather than coercive; language as a vehicle for truth and transformation.	Foucault (1980); van Dijk (2008)
Prophetic Rhetoric	"Right temporarily defeated is stronger than evil triumphant."	Expresses faith-based optimism; transforms moral conviction into persuasive certainty.	Darsey (1991); Charteris-Black (2018)
Religious Metaphor	"And the lion and the lamb shall lie down together and every man shall sit under his own vine and fig tree."	Connects political struggle to divine promise; softens confrontation through shared moral imagery.	Leech (1983); Charteris-Black (2018)
Acknowledgment and Gratitude	"Every time I take a flight, I am always mindful of the many people who make a successful journey possible—the known pilots and the unknown ground crew."	Functions as facework; maintains humility and solidarity; honors unseen contributors.	Holmes (1995); Brown & Levinson (1987)
Performative Hope	"This faith can give us courage to face the uncertainties of the future."	Faith becomes a performative speech act; language creates	Austin (1962); Searle (1969)

		motivation and collective resolve.	
Pragmatic Politeness and Moral Legitimacy	"If this is to be achieved, man must evolve for all human conflict a method which rejects revenge, aggression and retaliation. The foundation of such a method is love."	Combines moral appeal and pragmatic persuasion; love becomes both an ethical and strategic foundation.	Leech (1983); Charteris-Black (2018)

Note. Table formatted according to APA 7th edition guidelines. Quotations are taken directly from *Martin Luther King Jr.'s Nobel Peace Prize Acceptance Speech (1964)*, University of Oslo.

Pragmatic and Rhetorical Analysis of Nelson Mandela's Freedom Day Address (1998)

Nelson Mandela's Freedom Day Address, given in Cape Town in 1998, commemorates the fourth anniversary of South Africa's first democratic elections. This speech marks a point in the continuing transformation of this country and is both a time of celebration and introspection. To begin linking his personal biography to the greater narrative about the country's liberation, Mandela looks back in time to the day he was released from prison in 1990, when "*the march to freedom*" became unstoppable. Besides increasing his credibility, this historical background helps his audience identify with him. The importance of what he does lies in the fact that when calling them "*Friends and Compatriots*," he tears down the barriers and changes political unity for a sense of intimacy. At the outset, Mandela is an open man and in one piece since he keeps reminding them that democracy is a process and not a product. In his speech, Mandela reiterates that there is the need to work in collaboration, show humility and share responsibility. Not just the words, but because of his saying, We meet to affirm that we are one people with a common destiny, is an affirmative statement that is common to the group and strengthens the idea of national solidarity. He instead opts to transform any possible conflict into peace by being polite and practical without having to live in the past and dwell on past resentments. Mandela does not look to the world as his scapegoat; rather, he takes the issues of the future with a very business-like manner: "*As much as we celebrate, it is only natural that we still have so much to do*". It is that honesty coupled with optimism, which we absolutely rejoice in is the realization that there is still a lot of work to do. His message is further convincing with this combination of optimism and sincerity. His pronouns, like we and our are used very frequently to show that he believes in the concept according to which the leadership is participative. Mandela showed what linguists refer to as positive humility by requesting teamwork instead of ordering his listeners around, yet he maintained the dignity of his audience and welcomed them to participate in a group endeavour.

The speech made by Mandela is a very powerful blend of moral persuasion and cosmopolitan wisdom. He has effectively applied repetition and metaphors since these techniques add rhythm and articulateness to his expression. The unity is drawn upon past differences by the fact that he writes, "*The differences of colours and languages that would have divided us is our strength now*". Similarly, in promoting equality, he states that, "*languages are no longer divided as official and unofficial*", and therefore the use of multiple languages amounts to justice of the sort symbolically. It is not just a memory but a reassertion of what we all want, no less than a gleeful declaration of our liberty, which invites all the citizens to join in the ongoing process of the national rediscovery.

Table 4
Pragmatic and Rhetorical Analysis of Nelson Mandela's "Address at the South African Freedom Day Celebrations" (1998)

Pragmatic Feature	Illustrative Example	Function / Interpretation	Theoretical Reference
Use of Inclusive Address	"Friends and Compatriots"	Creates solidarity and equality among diverse listeners, reducing social distance.	Brown & Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory – positive face strategies.
Recollection of Historical Struggle	"When we gathered here in 1990, we knew that our march to freedom was irreversible."	Builds ethos by linking present freedom to shared sacrifice and collective memory.	Aristotle's Ethos; Austin's Speech Act Theory.
Commitment to Collective Action	"We meet to reaffirm that we are one people with one destiny."	Performs a commissive act of unity and commitment toward common goals.	Searle's Speech Act Theory (commissives).
Use of Literary Allusion	Quotation from Adam Small's poem "Die Here het geskommel."	Symbolically integrates Afrikaans culture into post-apartheid unity, transforming division into harmony.	Intertextuality in political discourse (Fairclough, 1995).
Moral Persuasion through Realism	"Though the old lines no longer have the force of law, they are still visible in social and economic life."	Balances optimism with realism to maintain credibility and encourage practical effort.	Aristotle's Logos; Leech's (1983) Pragmatic Politeness.
Equality through Language Policy	"Languages are no longer distinguished as official or unofficial."	Performs an illocutionary act of equality—language becomes a symbol of justice and inclusion.	Austin (1962); Critical Discourse Analysis (van Dijk, 1997).
Rhetorical Repetition	"That requires hard work by all of us; employers and workers; teachers and students."	Reinforces collective responsibility through anaphora and parallelism.	Classical Rhetoric – Repetition as persuasion (Corbett, 1990).
Indirect Critique and Politeness	"Crime is at an unacceptable level and we must do more."	Avoids direct blame, preserving hearers' positive face while motivating collective response.	Brown & Levinson (1987) – negative face mitigation.
Metaphorical Framing of Progress	"The foundation for a better life has been laid, and the building has begun."	Uses a construction metaphor to depict national development as collaborative work.	Lakoff & Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory.
Appeal to Constitutional Values	"We cherish our Constitution and want to ensure its rights become a living reality."	Reaffirms institutional commitment; transforms abstract law into shared moral vision.	Ethos and Logos appeals; van Dijk (1997).
Call for Non-Violence and Cooperation	"Political parties should take care… not to stir up baser emotions."	Maintains political civility and ethical persuasion, emphasizing discipline and respect.	Politeness and Cooperative Principle (Grice, 1975).

Moral Directive Speech Acts	"Let us renew our pledge to work together."	Directs collective moral action through inclusive imperatives.	Austin (1962) – Directive speech acts; Rhetorical Ethos.
Reference to Social Justice	"Our freedom is incomplete as long as we are denied our security by criminals."	Links freedom to social safety and moral order, expanding the meaning of justice.	Pragmatic implicature; Political discourse ethics (Habermas, 1984).
Reframing Diversity as Strength	"The diversity of colours and languages once used to divide us are now a source of strength."	Transforms former sources of division into unifying symbols of national identity.	Critical Discourse Analysis; Positive politeness strategies.
Religious and Moral Undertone	"Freedom is indivisible. The freedom of one is the freedom of the other."	Invokes universal moral principles to frame unity as a sacred duty.	Ethos and Pathos; Religious discourse in rhetoric (Charteris-Black, 2005).

Note. This table summarises pragmatic, rhetorical, and discourse features in Mandela's 1998 Freedom Day Address. Analytical categories draw on Speech Act Theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969), Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987), and Classical Rhetoric (Aristotle, Corbett, 1990), contextualised through Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1997).

Analysis of Nelson Mandela's "Address to the Youth" (1990)

The introduction sets a warm tone of appreciation, recognising the sacrifices, while the repeating "*You have been in the forward ranks. You have been the backbone. You have played a leading role*" creates a rhythm of praise, whereby acknowledgement is transformed into inspiration. Mandela's tone mixes a sense of responsibility with admiration, presenting youth as both heirs and guardians of the struggle. By treating them as his comrades in the movement, he builds unity while maintaining his moral authority, which is very important to his leadership style.

Through appeal and not coercion, Mandela managed people, hence his practical kind of personality. His speech is not exclusive, and thus, he dominates the effective word play: it needs political mastery on your part; you must impress these nations. In the common liberation struggle. It follows this strategy of Leach (1983), who says that effective leadership does not focus on orders, but rather encouragement. The implication on the obligatory aspect of leadership, i.e. there is the cost of responsibility bestowed with the position as much as power, and such that the leadership does without concession. Eventually, Mandela talks about the struggle. Redesigning negotiations in this continuing struggle. They are the continuum of the fight. Through this rhetorical change, he is ideologically consistent as he prepares his audience to change politically. The manner in which he frames the concept of conflict out of armed conflict into that of a political dialogue indicates that he employs language in a very tactical manner to have various ideological rifts and hold the message concise across all of them. The act motor power phrase takes one of the power concepts of the fight and uses it as the greatest power of the fight, images, in which action is turned into an allegory and a collection.

The speech to the youth by Nelson Mandela came soon after he was released from prison in 1990 and is a call to leadership with discipline in addition to a call to action. As Mandela was speaking to the youth activists during a pivotal point in the liberation struggle in South Africa,

his rhetoric was one that involved a political strategy, moral education and practical integration. It is an imperative part of the struggle that the youth play and it is on this basis that he opens by telling his audience: You, and the millions that you are the representative of, are the pride of our whole people. The most remarkable features of the speech include Mandela using the general language like we, our and our people, which helps to create an impression of collective political identity. This was done through emotional and ideological ties that were formed between the leaders and the youth following the statement made by Mandela when he asserted that ANC is yours as you are. This idea is supported by what he says about discipline: I can never trust you without you being disciplined. The importance of discipline is moral and practical because it should be viewed as a vital virtue and not as a rule. His calls to the young activists to allow those who hold different views to express themselves and to respect the leadership of the ANC, shows that Mandela was devoted to managing a democratic talk and being tolerant. His benevolent character cancels out any form of criticism and reinstates the ethical basis of leadership. He continues to take a balanced stance while speaking to traditional chiefs and homeland leaders, saying, "*It is not the policy of the ANC to denounce the chiefs as such*." By addressing them as "*our flesh and blood,"* Mandela unites traditional authority with democratic participation, bridging ideological and generational divides. He sums up his attitude of reconciliation in his parting statement, "*Those who acknowledge their mistakes. We will embrace them with open arms*." Mandela transforms political rhetoric into a means of moral persuasion by using the language of forgiveness and togetherness, demonstrating that genuine leadership is based on compassionate conviction rather than coercion. His speech remains a powerful reminder of how good communication, based on inclusivity and respect, using moral strength, can mobilise a generation toward orderly and nonviolent change.

Table 5
Pragmatic and Rhetorical Analysis of Nelson Mandela's "Address to the Youth" (1990)

Pragmatic/ Rhetorical Feature	Illustrative Example	Function / Interpretation	Theoretical Reference
Use of Vocative Address	"Dear comrades," "You, who are present here today…"	Establishes solidarity and emotional connection with young listeners, affirming shared identity and respect.	Brown & Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory – positive face strategies.
Appeal to Collective Identity	"You have been in the forward ranks of all our fighting formations."	Highlights youth as central to national struggle; reinforces pride and collective purpose.	Ethos and Pathos in political rhetoric (Aristotle; Charteris-Black, 2005).
Directive Speech Acts	"You must act in unison…", "We must answer the question…"	Encourages coordinated action and discipline, converting speech into mobilization.	Austin's (1962) Speech Act Theory – directives.
Framing Negotiation as Continuation of Struggle	"Negotiations do not mean the end of the struggle. They are a continuation of the struggle."	Maintains revolutionary momentum; redefines peace as an active phase of liberation.	Lakoff & Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory.

Moral Imperative of Unity	"This requires of you political maturity, strong and soundly democratic organisations."	Constructs moral obligation for disciplined collective behavior; builds ethos.	Aristotle's Rhetoric; Fairclough's (1995) CDA.
Contrastive Argumentation	"We have our own perspective… They have theirs."	Frames political discourse as moral confrontation between justice and oppression.	van Dijk's (1997) Ideological Discourse Structures.
Emphasis on Organisation and Persuasion	"To organise means to go out and convince those who were not convinced before."	Promotes patient, dialogic activism; defines persuasion as democratic practice.	Searle's (1969) Speech Acts; Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle.
Rhetorical Appeal for Discipline	"If you are not disciplined, you can never win our confidence."	Reinforces self-control as a revolutionary virtue and leadership requirement.	Ethos construction; Pragmatic politeness (Leech, 1983).
Condemnation of Violence and Coercion	"Any form of violence, any form of coercion, any form of harassment is against the policy of the ANC."	Performs a moral distancing act, legitimizing ANC's struggle as ethical and civil.	Speech Act Theory – commissives; CDA (Fairclough, 1995).
Strategic Critique of the State	"President de Klerk must be aware we will not tolerate the situation…"	Balances assertiveness with restraint; pressures government without direct aggression.	Brown & Levinson (1987) – negative face mitigation.
Inclusive Reference to Traditional Leadership	"These men are our flesh and blood and we want them to join the struggle."	Extends political unity across generational and cultural lines; promotes reconciliation.	van Dijk (1997) – discursive inclusivity; Ethos appeal.
Use of Historical Legitimation	"You have been the backbone of the struggle for a people's education."	Draws legitimacy from past youth sacrifices; reinforces moral authority.	Classical Rhetoric – Ethos and Pathos; CDA (Fairclough, 1995).
Politeness Toward Opponents	"We must draw these compatriots—who also belong among the oppressed people—into the common struggle."	Demonstrates strategic empathy; avoids alienation of potential allies.	Politeness and cooperative discourse (Grice, 1975).
Moral Reconciliation Framework	"Those who have discovered their mistakes… let us welcome them with open arms."	Positions forgiveness as a revolutionary virtue; transforms political struggle into moral renewal.	Habermas (1984) – communicative ethics; CDA.
Directive for Leadership Ethics	"We expect you to respect other freedom fighters outside our organisation."	Promotes intergroup respect and pluralism; reinforces democratic values.	Speech Acts – directives; Democratic rhetoric (Fairclough, 1995).

Note. This table summarises the pragmatic and rhetorical strategies in Nelson Mandela's *Address to the Youth* (1990). The analysis applies Speech Act Theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969), Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987), Classical Rhetoric (Aristotle), and Critical

Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1997) to explore how Mandela combines leadership, persuasion, and ethics to inspire disciplined activism and reconciliation.

Pragmatic Analysis of Nelson Mandela's 1993 Address to the British Parliament

One of Nelson Mandela's most brilliant and captivating addresses is his 1993 address to the British Parliament, in which he combined gratitude, diplomacy, and a strong moral conviction so effectively. Mandela's remarks, which were given at a time when South Africa was in the throes of its first democratic election, strike the ideal balance between aggressiveness and humility to ensure his message was both emotionally resonant and morally clear. "*I would like to thank the Conservative Party and Labour Party's Foreign Affairs Committee for the honour they accorded to us*," he says with gratitude. This is useful in enhancing respect towards one another and hence builds a cooperative atmosphere. By admitting that the British Parliament is the symbolic representation of the heroic acts of the past against oppression and despotism, Mandela skilfully correlated the South African struggle to get independence and the democratic history of Britain. It is not meant in a confrontational manner but just serves to remind the audience of the colonial background of Britain, and it is done in a respectable and considerate manner. This strategic combination of complimenting and historical appraisal is a way of language that Brown and Levinson (1987) meant by strategic humility that indicates the respect, yet at the same time seeking political intention. An example of such an approach is his tone of the introduction, which Leach (2014) refers to as a form of "*diplomacy of civility*", the combination of politeness and acceptance to make his argument stronger.

The speech by Mandela is based on moral equality and not political dominance requirements. He employs plural pronouns, which bring out a spirit of unity and common good when he adds that, "*Our people are trying to establish a social order which aims at solving the natural conflict of interest by means of peaceful competition*". The phrase our people removes national borders and turns a two-sided discussion into a moral discourse on an international level. He illustrates the contribution to Britain as both a duty and a selfish advantage since he says that "*history requires you to assist us in attaining a quick transition because your national interest requires that you do*". This appeal would have summarised the ethical imperative in the context of the feasible policy, whereby sufficient justice and stability in South Africa is geared towards the overall British international interests. The fact that Mandela managed to integrate his moral appeal and political realism indicates the transformative discourse language that is proposed by Fairclough (2001) to redefine the relations of power based on the moral argumentation, but not coercion.

One of the main pillars of the approach portrayed by Mandela is his ability to use historical analogies to develop moral legitimacy. When he talks of these Houses of Parliament, he urges the audience to think of democracy as alive and evolving instead of a finished product, as he says that "these Houses of Parliament are living structures as long as they still offer a seat to promote a humanitarian vision". Besides introducing the parliamentary democracy in Britain as an example, such a metaphor identifies the ideology that South Africa is akin to the ideals of humanitarianism. When Mandela equates the long struggle of the country toward independence on the British past success, he changes the debate into a post-colonial account of moral collusion. His voice is not that of aggression; On the contrary, it is still egalitarian and inclusive, without blameful elicitation when he demands that he still continues providing support to the process of democracy in South Africa. This humbleness, moral oratory, and

tactical approach enable his speech to appeal on more than one practical level, building up his respect, appealing to the shared history and turning his empathy into action.
. Fundamentally, Mandela's eloquence shines in his ability to persuade with dignity: his humility does not undermine his authority; Rather, it enhances language by making it a powerful tool of moral influence.

Table 6
Pragmatic and Rhetorical Analysis of Nelson Mandela's "Address to Members of the British Parliament" (1993)

Pragmatic / Rhetorical Feature	Illustrative Example from Text	Function / Interpretation	Theoretical Reference
Formal Politeness and Gratitude	"I would like to thank the Conservative Party and Labour Party's Foreign Affairs Committee for the honour…"	Opens with respect and diplomacy, establishing ethos and mutual respect before discussing sensitive political issues.	Brown & Levinson (1987) *Politeness Theory* – positive face strategies.
Historical Allusion	"These Houses of Parliament remain today living structures… representing a political history which reaches back through many centuries."	Acknowledges British democratic heritage to build common moral ground; frames his argument within shared historical values.	Fairclough (1995) *Critical Discourse Analysis* – ideological alignment.
Moral Appeal through Shared Values	"Long before today, there was a determined striving to ensure that the people shall govern."	Establishes shared democratic ideals; appeals to moral universality and collective identity.	Aristotle's *Ethos* and *Pathos*; van Dijk (1997) *Ideological Discourse Structures.*
Contrast and Reversal	"Your right to determine your own destiny was used to deny us to determine our own."	Uses irony to highlight colonial injustice while maintaining politeness; evokes moral responsibility.	Grice (1975), *Conversational Implicature* – indirect criticism for cooperative effect.
Historical Accountability	"From here, there issued decisions which imposed on my own country and people a condition of existence…"	Politely confronts Britain's colonial past; frames appeal for support as a historical duty rather than guilt.	Austin (1962) *Speech Act Theory* – indirect directive.
Metaphoric Universalism	"No man is an island… Every man is a piece of the Continent."	Cites John Donne to universalize the moral and human implications of apartheid; appeals to global empathy.	Lakoff & Johnson (1980) *Conceptual Metaphor Theory.*
Interdependence Discourse	"The universe we inhabit… is becoming a common home."	Promotes globalisation and moral interdependence; positions South Africa's	Fairclough (1995) – discourse of globalisation and solidarity.

		struggle as part of world peace.	
Ethical Reciprocity	"History demands of you that you help us achieve a speedy transition to a non-racial and non-sexist democracy."	Frames appeal for support as a mutual benefit ("your very national interest requires it"); a persuasive balance between moral and pragmatic reasoning.	Brown & Levinson (1987); Aristotle's *Logos* appeal.
Parallelism and Enumeration	"The determination of an election date; the creation of a climate conducive to free and fair elections…"	Uses ordered lists for clarity and authority; creates logical coherence and a sense of urgency.	Classical rhetoric – *Logos* and rhetorical structure.
Appeal to Justice and Peace	"Resolve the natural conflict of interests… through peaceful contest rather than violence."	Reinforces Mandela's global image as a peace advocate; aligns ANC struggle with democratic principles.	Leech (1983), *Principles of Pragmatics* – politeness in persuasive discourse.
Pragmatic Persuasion	"We request that you use such contact as you have with political actors to persuade them…"	Performs a polite directive (request) disguised as a suggestion; encourages political pressure without demanding it.	Searle (1969) *Speech Acts* – indirect directives.
Reference to Shared Moral Struggle	"As much a moral obligation and a strategic imperative to uproot racism… as in Nazi Germany."	Compares apartheid to universally condemned systems; strengthens moral authority and urgency.	Charteris-Black (2005) *Politicians and Rhetoric.*
Empathy through Tragedy	"The recent brutal assassination of one of our outstanding leaders, Chris Hani…"	Personalises suffering to evoke emotional solidarity and moral duty.	Pathos: Fairclough (1995) – emotional discourse in politics.
Polite but Firm Appeal for Action	"We urge that you put pressure on those concerned within South Africa…"	Employs mitigated directive language to maintain diplomacy while pressing for concrete intervention.	Brown & Levinson (1987) – indirect request strategy.
Acknowledgement of British Support	"We would like to take this opportunity to express our appreciation for the role that this country has already played…"	Reinforces the positive identity of the audience; ensures continued cooperation through gratitude.	Leech (1983) – tact and approbation maxims.
Global Integration Metaphor	"The universe we inhabit as human beings is becoming a common home."	Connects local struggle to global moral evolution; broadens appeal to international ethics.	Lakoff & Johnson (1980); Habermas (1984), *Communicative Action.*
Economic Persuasion	"We hope that British Companies will	Blends moral and pragmatic appeals to	Aristotle's *Logos*; van Dijk (1997) –

	participate… help modernise our economy…"	secure investment; shifts from emotional to rational persuasion.	pragmatic argumentation.
Exposure of Inequality	"We face a situation of the coexistence within one country of a First World and a Third World economy."	Highlights structural inequality through economic metaphor; strengthens the argument for international aid.	CDA; Fairclough (1995).
Reframing of South Africa's Identity	"We are dealing with a developing country."	Redefines post-apartheid South Africa's status to justify development support; a pragmatic repositioning move.	Austin (1962); pragmatic framing theory.
Appeal for Partnership	"You should use your influence… to get the European Community to enter into a mutually beneficial agreement…"	Encourages policy collaboration framed as mutual interest, not dependency.	Grice (1975) – cooperative principle; Logos appeal.
Invocation of Collective Memory	"A few days ago, we bade farewell to… Oliver Tambo…"	Honours shared history to emotionally conclude; it builds moral continuity from past to present.	Pathos; Charteris-Black (2005).
Moral Closure	"We count you among these millions who are true friends and dependable allies."	Ends with solidarity and gratitude; reinforces long-term moral partnership.	Leech (1983); Politeness and Gratitude Strategy.

Note. This table demonstrates how Nelson Mandela's *Address to Members of the British Parliament* (1993) uses pragmatic politeness, historical consciousness, and rhetorical appeals to ethics, logic, and emotion to persuade a foreign political audience to support South Africa's democratic transition. The analysis integrates concepts from Speech Act Theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969), Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987), Classical Rhetoric (Aristotle), and Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1997).

Findings

Both King and Mandela employed moral authority, civility, and rhetorical skill in their persuasive strategies, but adapted them to their specific political environments. Whereas Mandela's style rests on diplomacy, reconciliation, and a pragmatic approach to moral leadership, King's speech is nourished by an uncompromising religious faith and optimism regarding human prospects. King's speeches, such as "*I Have a Dream*," "*How Long? Not Long*" He uses inclusive language, biblical imagery, and rhythmic repetition in his Nobel Prize Address to create a sense of urgency and unity. His positive politeness-the employment of words such as "we" and "our"-creates a sense of collective empowerment. On the other hand, negative politeness-management of tone, where blame is not directly pointed-is used to sustain dignity across racial lines. Mandela's speeches, however, such as "*Freedom Day 1998,"* "*Address to the Youth 1990*," and "Address to the British Parliament 1993", indicate a rhetoric of strategy in terms of diplomacy. Polite language shows respect, using such terms as "*My Lords" and "Friends and Compatriots*," while at the same time claiming equality of position and moral independence. It is here that Mandela skilfully combines gratitude with demand,

turning political demands into moral imperatives. It is in his calls for the fulfilment of a shared national identity, like "one people, one destiny," where his positive politeness assumes the voice of exhortation; in his indirect criticism and carefully weighted appeals, his negative politeness is certainly in evidence.

Both speakers employ speech acts of directives *("Let freedom ring*," "Let us repeat our commitment"), commissives-promises of justice and democracy-and expressives-thanks, faith-to promote moral behaviour. Mandela's performatives realise institutional change and reconciliation, while King's use of emotive rhythm sparks moral reform. Ethos, pathos, and logos are intertwined in both discourses; Mandela's ethos rests on political integrity and humility, King's on spiritual authority and moral suffering. Mandela's pathos centres on forgiveness and shared endurance, King's evokes redemptive faith with its rich imagery of *"dream*s" and "*rivers of justice*.". On logos, King invokes equality's logical appeal based on American ideals, while Mandela's logos relies on the practical appeal for peace, reconstruction, and interdependence. In short, the two leaders illustrate that politeness and persuasion can work in tandem with power: King translates protest into prophecy, Mandela translates diplomacy into moral dialogue. Each uses rhetoric as a performative act of justice, one through the rhythm of moral revelation, the other through the grace of reconciliation.

Table 7
Comparative Pragmatic and Rhetorical Findings: Nelson Mandela vs. Martin Luther King Jr.

Analytical Category	Martin Luther King Jr.	Nelson Mandela	Shared/Contrastive Features	Key References
Contextual Purpose	Mobilise the U.S. Civil Rights movement; moral renewal of the nation.	Legitimise post-apartheid democracy; secure reconciliation and support.	Both employ moral discourse to reframe national identity.	Josiah (2015); Fairclough (2001).
Politeness Strategies	Positive politeness through solidarity (“we,” “our”); negative politeness via restraint and civility.	Positive politeness through inclusivity (“compatriots”); negative politeness via diplomacy and indirect critique.	Both manage to sustain authority and empathy.	Brown & Levinson (1987); Leech (1983).
Speech Acts	Directives (“Let freedom ring”), commissives (“I have a dream”), expressives (faith, gratitude).	Directives (“Let us renew our pledge”), commissives (commitment to democracy), expressives (gratitude).	Both use performatives to enact moral action.	Austin (1962); Searle (1969).
Ethos	Moral preacher; prophetic integrity.	Statesman; humble liberator.	Ethos grounded in moral credibility and service.	Aristotle; Washington (1993).
Pathos	Religious imagery and emotional	Emotional unity and forgiveness; empathy and pride.	Emotional persuasion aligns with moral duty.	Charteris-Black (2018);

	appeal; hope and sacrifice.			Naqeeb (2018).
Logos	Rational critique of inequality ("bad check" metaphor).	Logical arguments for democracy, peace, and economic justice.	Logic is used to validate moral reasoning.	Faris et al. (2016); Chilton (2004).
Metaphor & Imagery	Biblical, natural, and dream metaphors to evoke moral clarity.	Construction, journey, and reconciliation metaphors to signify rebuilding.	Metaphors convert political goals into a shared vision.	Lakoff & Johnson (1980); Charteris-Black (2005).
Power Construction	Moral power through faith and collective strength.	Diplomatic power through humility and ethical reciprocity.	Both redefine power as ethical persuasion.	Foucault (1980); Holmes (1995).
Audience Design	Addresses the oppressed, allies, and oppressors simultaneously.	Balances domestic, international, and parliamentary audiences.	Both adapt discourse to multi-layered listeners.	Bell (1984); Fairclough (1995).
Face Management	Upholds the dignity of both speaker and audience; avoids humiliation.	Honours adversaries while affirming justice; mitigates face-threats.	Strategic politeness reinforces legitimacy.	Brown & Levinson (1987).
Religious/ Moral Appeals	Christian eschatology of justice and redemption.	Universal humanism and moral reciprocity.	Moral persuasion transcends religion.	Darsey (1991); Mandela Foundation (1993).
Rhetorical Rhythm	Sermonic cadence and anaphora ("I have a dream").	Balanced prose with diplomatic emphasis and repetition.	Rhythm amplifies moral emotion.	Charteris-Black (2018); Corbett (1990).
Tone and Register	Prophetic, urgent, emotionally elevated.	Diplomatic, reflective, inclusive.	Different tones, same persuasive dignity.	Wodak (2009).
Discourse Goals	Transformation through nonviolence and faith.	Reconstruction through reconciliation and equity.	Both seek peace through persuasion.	Fairclough (2001); van Dijk (2008).
Outcome / Effect	Mobilized moral consciousness; global symbol of justice.	Institutionalised democracy and racial harmony; international support.	Both turned rhetoric into historical change.	Charteris-Black (2018); Al Jazeera (2024).

Conclusion

The comparative analysis of Nelson Mandela's and Martin Luther King Jr.'s speeches indicates that the use of language by both was a moral and pragmatic tool for transformation, combining politeness, power, and persuasion in the sense of ethical leadership. King derived

power from prophetic conviction, faith, and emotional resonance, and his rhetoric transformed civil resistance into a universal call for justice. Mandela's political discourse, rooted in diplomacy, reconciliation, and inclusivity, redefined political authority through humility and collective empowerment. While King confronted racial segregation in mid-twentieth-century America, and Mandela guided South Africa during its democratic rebirth, both used strategic politeness and rhetorical coherence to bring divided societies together under shared ideals of dignity, equality, and peace. Their speeches move beyond the boundaries set by politics to prove that persuasive power issuing from moral integrity and human compassion remains the most indelible force for social change.

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