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Language: The bridge over the barrier

*You know that feeling of goosebumps you get when you listen to something that just hits... the chills you get when it resounds in your head... words so true it could bring tears to your eyes.* This is what I think of when I read or hear a message that uses language to transfer emotion and passion to a listener or reader. Language as described by writer Edward Sapir is that, "It seems as natural to man as walking, and only less so than breathing" (Sapir). It's so interesting how something so simple and ordinary can become so impactful. For example, Martin Luther King and his I Have a Dream speech. When you listen to this powerful oration, the things coming out of his mouth aren't just words. They hold weight, a weight that hits you like a vivid experience. They hold truth. This landmark speech that took place on August 28, 1963 on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial is one of the most influential and impactful displays of the power of language in history. It and other demonstrations lead to the changing of many laws and the introduction of legislation such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 along with the change in attitudes of many Americans. This is described in Eric J. Sundquist's book *King's Dream*, "King's greatness, as well as the greatness of his speech, lay in his ability to elevate the cause of civil rights and the cause of America at the same time"(Sundquist). Language is so important because we can all relate to it. It is more often than not, our common connection. A way to reach other people who maybe don't see eye to eye with us. Some of the most influential writings and speeches use credibility, logic, and emotion or

Ethos Logos and Pathos. Through these devices, people like Martin Luther King are able to create extremely powerful language. Now I know you probably wanted me to find a lesser known figure and example of language, but I feel like this speech was so momentous and impacted so many that it is important to analyze it.

Before King even says a word concerning what is at hand, his credibility elevates him and puts meaning behind his words. He is someone who was born in the South. Someone who has seen and experienced the wrath of vicious racists. That he has been to jail for this cause, he has been in the marches. He has spoke with fiery tongue many times to rally others behind him. King states that “In a sense we have come to the nation's capital to cash a check” (King). This essentially shows how King and his followers have been through a process and have come to reap what they have sown. That he has been through and with them for every part of the journey and he has come to be the first to walk up the stairs and knock on the doorstep. These traits have allowed for him to speak from his soul, and people can really believe what he says. They feel his strength through his language. As is a figure. A symbol. An Icon.

When King puts the logic behind his words it allows him to preach to the people who may not necessarily be swayed through credibility or emotion. For example, when he points to the founding documents of this nation. That all men are created equal. He only simply displays that we should live up to this self-professed creed. King points to all of the things Blacks have done for the country especially in spite of how they have been treated. For example, how through their toil, America became an economic superpower and during times of conflict they have shown nothing less of allegiance to their nation. He asks southern leaders to not give preference but equal rights, the rights that belong to all Americans, to Black Americans. This is only fair, only natural. A simple request that pertains to simple changes.

Lastly and the most impactful part of his speech is how it appeals to emotion. Sundquist once again reiterated this fact, “There is no substitute for hearing King or, better, watching and listening to him”(Sundquist). His ability as an orator is unmatched. The fiery passion in which he speaks makes it seem that he is talking to everyone in the country but at the same time talking to you as an individual. Calling upon you and the country to make a choice. Going side by side with that is his connection and references to the bible. Which often connects him to Blacks and Whites alike. As we know, Christianity holds a very important position in the Black community, going back to slavery and how our faith gave us hope. To also connect with the masses, he includes his children in his speech. With his famous words of “I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character” (King). This is powerful because a lot of people can relate to having children. That wouldn't they want for their children to be looked at equally? Another appeal of this is to the innocence of children. That they have done nothing bad in the world. However, because these children are Black they seem to have done something wrong because of the color of their skin. Through the rhetorical skills of appeal to credibility, logic and emotion that Dr. King possess, he uses them to, speak to us as a whole, as well as individually. He pushes the American people and its government to move, move in the direction of justice. A movement that is far overdue. In the way he orates and gets the message to the audience. He uses language as a bridge over a barrier.

Sundquist, Eric J., and Mark Crispin Miller. *King's Dream : The Legacy of Martin Luther King's I Have a Dream Speech*, Yale University Press, 2009. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/howard/detail.action?docID=3420526>.

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