

“I’m in a League of My Own”:  
A study on the rhetorical devices in Conor  
McGregor’s speeches

Bachelor’s thesis

Niko Ollikka

University of Jyväskylä

Department of Language and Communication Studies

English

Month 2018

## JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO

Tiedekunta – Faculty Humanistinen tiedekunta	Laitos – Department Kieli- ja viestintätieteiden laitos
Tekijä – Author Niko Ollikka	
Työn nimi – Title ”I’m in a league of my own.”: A study on the rhetorical devices in Conor McGregor’s speeches	
Oppiaine – Subject Englanti	Työn laji – Level Kandidaatintutkielma
Aika – Month and year Huhtikuu 2018	Sivumäärä – Number of pages 20
Tiivistelmä – Abstract <p>Vapaaottelu on kasvattanut suosiotaan tasaisesti viime vuosien aikana, minkä seurauksena ottelijat ovat alkaneet saada enemmän huomiota medialta kamppailuympäristön ulkopuolelta. Suosion nopean kasvun ja jatkuvasti laajenevan kannatuspohjan vuoksi, mainostamisesta on tullut liiketoiminnan avaintekijä sekä promoottoreille, että ottelijoille. Tämän lisääntyneen mediahuomion seurauksena, osa ottelijoista on alkanut ilmaisemaan itseään enemmän verbaalisesti haastattelutilaisuuksissa mainostaakseen otteluitaan. Tämän seurauksena haastatteluissa esiintyy erilaisia verbaalisia yhteenottoja, jotka sisältävät usein vastustajien taitojen väheksymistä sekä omien taitojensa suurentelua. Kaiken tämän käyttäytymisen keskellä on kieli. Kielen avulla ottelijat luovat erilaisia narratiiveja ja identiteettejä itselleen ja vastustajilleen.</p> <p>Retorisen analyysin avulla tässä tutkielmassa pyrittiin selvittämään minkälaisia retorisia keinoja irlantilainen vapaaottelumestari Conor McGregor käyttää puheissaan ja mitä tehtäviä niillä oli. Aineisto koostui 11 lehdistötilaisuudesta jotka litteroitiin. Litteroinneista identifioitiin retoriset keinot, joita McGregor käytti useiten, jonka jälkeen ne kategorisoitiin.</p> <p>Analyysi osoitti, että McGregor käytti neljää retorista keinoja useimmiten. Nämä keinot olivat apostrofi, esimerkki, toisto ja metafora. Yleisesti analyysi osoitti, että McGregor käytti edellä mainittuja keinoja herättääkseen tunteita vastustajissaan. McGregor myös hyökkäsi vastustajiensa identiteettejä vastaan luomalla heille uusia, vähätteleviä identiteettejä. Samanaikaisesti, hän myös pyrki osoittamaan dominanssinsa sekä oman ylemmyytensä.</p> <p>Mahdollisena jatkotutkimuksena voitaisiin toteuttaa tutkimus, jossa yksittäisten retoristen keinojen vaikuttavuutta testattaisiin laajojen testiryhmien avulla, jolloin keinojen ominaistehokkuutta pystyttäisiin monitoroimaan. Myös puhujan ominaispiirteiden vaikutusta pystyttäisiin paremmin rajoittamaan sekä tarkkailemaan.</p>	
Asiasanat – Keywords: mixed martial arts, rhetorical device, rhetorical analysis	
Säilytyspaikka – Depository JYX	
Muita tietoja – Additional information	

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# 1 Introduction

Mixed martial arts or MMA for short, is a combat sport that combines the elements of several martial arts such as wrestling, boxing, kickboxing and jiu-jitsu. In a contest, two willing participants are involved in an unarmed combat situation where the competitors are allowed to use virtually every form of strikes, throws and a variety of submission holds from chokeholds to joint locks. (UFC 2018) The biggest MMA organization is the UFC and the sport's growing popularity gives its biggest names increasing main stream attention. Promoting has become more important than ever before as the sport has evolved alongside with its fans. The attention is no longer only centered around fighting as it is about the story and the buildup for the fight as well. As the former middleweight contender Chael Sonnen stated: "We depend on fighters to tell the story. Why should I want you to win? Or, why should I want you to lose? Most importantly, why should I care about this match? And that's what the UFC does so well, they tell that story." The main stream exposure has made it so, that the fighters nowadays have to be involved in and out of the fighting stage in order to get recognition in the deep pool of fighters and to attract the paying customers to watch the fights. This study focuses on Conor McGregor, who is a fighter that has been able to do this verbal self-promotion exceptionally well in the last few year, rising to the top of the combat world as well as gaining more attention among the public.

To attract viewers and to garner attention to themselves, some fighters, in the past and the present have opted to present themselves as formidable as possible prior to the fights. In addition, in the press conferences leading up to the fight events the more outspoken superstars insult their opponent's skillsets or evoke personal attacks against them in order to create emotional responses from them and to create the drama and interest for the fight. Although, language and its use is very much in the center of this phenomenon, very few studies have been conducted on the use of rhetorical devices in a mixed martial arts environment.

Most of the previous studies dealt with public figures and their oration. While conducting the present study only two studies featuring combat sport figures and their rhetoric were found. A study by Gorsevski & Butterworth (2011) dealt with a boxer, Muhammad Ali's rhetoric. The second study by Saira (2016) similarly to the present study also focused on MMA champion Conor McGregor's speeches but with the focus on his representations of dominant masculinity. Therefore, despite the studies examining the same person, the difference in focuses separates the present study from Saira's. The present study was conducted using rhetorical analysis with the data being gathered from 11 press conferences that took place prior to the fights. The main aim of the study was to identify the rhetorical

devices used by McGregor as well as providing an analysis on the usage of these devices in the context that they appeared.

The study is divided into six chapters as well as their supporting subsections. The next chapter explains the theoretical framework of the thesis and how it has been applied in the study. It also opens up the meanings behind the most significant concepts presented in the study as well as presenting the rhetorical studies that are centered in a combat sport environment. The third chapter introduces the research questions, the data and the methods of the present study. Chapter four is the analysis section where the data is analyzed and the research questions are answered. The final chapter is the conclusion, where the result of the study are summarized and possible new study suggestions are presented.

## **2 Rhetoric**

In this section, rhetorical analysis is presented as it is the most essential theory for the present study. Firstly, the concept of “rhetoric” is explained and described briefly. This is then followed by a short explanation on how rhetorical analysis is conducted. Finally, a short section that defines rhetorical devices follows together with the description of previous studies on rhetoric.

### **2.1 WHAT IS RHETORIC?**

This chapter offers a brief introduction into the history of rhetoric as well providing early on definitions for rhetoric as well. This chapter also opens some of the goals, uses and categorizations of rhetoric. This chapter focuses heavily on Aristotle due to him being one of the earliest impactful persons studying rhetoric.

In her book “thinking through communication”, Trenholm (2013, 2) states that the rise of democracy in ancient Greece brought up the rise of public communication. It was taught by philosophers to be used as an important problem-solving tool. Trenholm also states that “the available means of persuasion” or early rhetoric was a well-respected discipline and Aristotle was one of the more well-known philosophers of the classical period. Most rhetoricians regard Aristotle’s “Rhetoric” to be “the most important single work of persuasion ever made” (James et al, 2007). Therefore, it is not unreasonable to say that it forms a foundation to our modern view of rhetoric. From there on forward the Romans adopted the art of rhetoric where notable names like Cicero came up with the five canons of Rhetoric that were the first communication model.

(Trenholm 2013, 2) According to Trenholm (2013,6) The canons meant dividing communication into five different parts. These five parts were called style, invention, arrangement, memory and delivery each of them referring to a specific skillset of the orator. Style referred to the tone and the vocabulary that the orator was using to influence and evoke emotions in the audience. Invention meant finding the different ways or the grounds to persuade. Arrangement was about arranging ideas to form coherent arguments. Memory was related to being able to give believable speeches by memory instead of using notes. Finally, delivery referred to how the orator used voice and gestures and how they needed to match with the words being said.

After the Romans came the medieval period where academical thinking was heavily stifled by the church. Church focused on public speaking to improve preaching. (Trenholm, 2013, 2) Renaissance saw the focus shift towards issues of style in speaking situation. The enlightenment reawakened the classical approach as well as coming up with new approaches like relying on scientific and morale arguments as well as approach that focused on style and delivery. (ibid.) Finally, the public oration reached its current stage where all the phases through history are being studied and applied.

Garver (1994) shows how Aristotle mixed logic and virtue together in his work the "Rhetoric." Garver's main aim was to answer the questions whether there is a central civic art of rhetoric. He demonstrates how important Aristotle's "Rhetoric" is for the understanding of current philosophical problems, problems of practical reason, virtue and character. Garver treats "Rhetoric" as philosophy and connects its themes with similar problems in Aristotle's "Ethics and Politics". Garver's research puts rhetoric at the center of investigations when looking at practice and practical reason.

When discussing the goal of rhetoric, Garver (1994,32) also stated that Aristotle claimed that the essence of rhetoric is not in winning but in arguing. Garver (ibid.) further clarified that Aristotle placed arguments at the center of rhetoric because the enthymeme or the truth of proof is transmitted from speaker to hearer.

Garver (1994, 53) also stated that "Rhetorical arguments are so related to their purposes—that is the key to Aristotle's success—that it is hard to see how they can be formal." His statement shows the basic premise of rhetorical arguments, the fact that there is always a purpose for the argument and that to some extent arguments are always somewhat informal.

Aristotle divided rhetoric into three different sections: deliberative, juridical and demonstrative. Garver (1994, 53) criticized this categorization as he states that many situations do not fall under this classification. He in turn suggests a way of differentiating through their purposes, ends, and their practical and conventional context and by the methods they usually employ to accomplish those ends.

## 2.2 RHETORICAL ANALYSIS

Willihnganz (2008) defines rhetorical analysis as an examination where the focus of the analysis is to identify how we are being persuaded. Willihnganz (2008) continues by establishing that the focuses of the analysis are on identifying how a text communicates and what strategies are being employed to persuade the audience. He finishes his definition by noting that in the rhetorical analysis one should not just state *what is said*, but rather *what strategies* are being used to communicate effectively.

Short (2007) offered an example on how the process of rhetorical analysis can be conducted. Firstly, she recommended to familiarize oneself thoroughly with the material being analyzed. As a next step she recommended to form a thesis statement which was then followed by the arrangement of all the rhetorical strategies that were identified. For the last steps she emphasized the importance of providing analysis on the strategies instead of simply summarizing and remembering to check grammar and fluidity of the text.

The strategies of persuasion mentioned by both Willihnganz (2008) and Short (2007) can commonly be likened to different rhetorical devices. When defining the term rhetorical device, the emphasis of the definition lies in defining rhetoric. Merriam Webster's online dictionary defines rhetoric as follows: "the art of speaking or writing effectively" or "the study of writing or speaking as a means of communication or persuasion." Understanding the meaning of rhetoric is in the core of the term "rhetorical device" as it contains the themes of effective communication and persuasion. The word "device" in the term "rhetorical device" is not as important to define one as it is fairly self-evident in its meaning of being an object of some action and in different sources such as Merriam Webster's dictionary, the device part has been replaced with "a mode" or "a type" Therefore, rhetorical devices can be more loosely defined as different modes of persuasion and effective communication.

Harris (2013) describes the use of rhetorical devices as follows: "By learning, practicing, altering, and perfecting them, and by testing their effects and nuances for yourself, these devices will help you to express yourself better." Harris' also lists some of the purposes of these devices including helping to pay attention, helping to understand one's points, helping to make claims more believable and finally helping to be remembered. Harris's (2013) "A handbook of rhetorical devices" consists of a collection of 60 rhetorical devices with their descriptions and examples on each of the devices. Harris' along with Trenholm (2013) offered the definitions to all the rhetorical devices found in the present study thus helping with the identifying and categorizing of the devices.

The rhetorical devices analyzed in the present study are called apostrophe, exemplum, repetition and metaphor. These devices are further explained and analyzed in chapter four.

## **2.3 PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON RHETORIC AND PUBLIC ORATION**

Few previous studies have been done that focus on public oration and the study of rhetoric. When considering the previous researches on public oration, a clear categorization could be made between the background of the people the studies have focused on.

The first study focuses on public oration with the focus being on the place of their speech rather than on the orators themselves. Even though the focus of her study is not entirely relevant for the present study, Curelariu (2006) offered valuable insight to the characteristics of public orators and to the successfulness of speeches. Curelariu (2006, 86) stated that there are different elements that affect whether a speech is successful or not. The elements she has listed are fame of the orator, their charismatic attitude and pleasant appearance. Curelariu (ibid.) also places emphasis on the importance of the first words the orator utters in front of their listeners. She offers a clear definition of persuasion as “Influencing people’s thought, behavior and actions.” (ibid.) She also mentions that inciting people always requires that people should be sympathetic with the speaker as well as they should be attentive and receptive to the speech.

A common focus in previous studies was on the speeches of political figures such as presidents or other political leaders. Alkiomäki (2013) analyzed the debates between Mitt Romney and Barack Obama on their appeal to women. Results of the study indicated that Obama used more argumentation strategies, whereas Romney used strategies that were based on reason. (Alkiomäki 2013, 68) Räsänen (2015) studied how the conservative politician Sarah Palin represented herself in Twitter. The study showed that Palin forwarded her political agenda as well as blatantly promoted herself in her Tweets. Additionally, it was noted that she addressed her audience in several ways both praising and inducing guilt in them. (Räsänen 2015, 66) Finally, Mettomäki (2017) compared how President Obama represented himself in his inauguration speech in comparison to the current President Trump. Mettomäki (2017, 21) found that both Obama and Trump used metaphors but for different purposes. Obama used them to encourage unity and positive connotation toward foreign nationalities. Trump, on the other hand, created division between different social and national groups with the use of metaphor. According to the findings, Trump was also more distant whereas Obama was more one with the people.

The second category of public oration studies deals with figures of culture or popular culture. Girén (2009) examined how “The American Dream” was shown in the lyrics of Bruce Springsteen. The study showed that Springsteen does not really romanticize the United States as he often sang about poverty and offered criticism on war and racial prejudice. (Girén 2009, 108-109) However, in some of his immigrant songs Springsteen offered more romantic views as he sang about the dreams of better life as well as freedom and possibilities. Another study on a cultural influencer was Iivari’s (2014) rhetorical analysis on Joel Osteen’s sermons in the light of the US culture and values. In this thesis, Iivari (2014) studied the sermons of a minister called Joel Olsteen and analyzed the rhetorical devices he used. Iivari (2014,100) discovered that the rhetorical device being used the most was repetition. The parts repeated were those filled with emotion and sentences that created a pleasant atmosphere.

The last category is the most influential one for this thesis as it is about sport figures. Butterworth and Gorsevski (2011) conducted a study on how the rhetoric of a famous African-American boxer Muhammad Ali influenced the civil-rights movements. Butterworth and Gorsevski (2011, 69) found out that the rhetoric Ali used in the sport environment mirrored the rhetorical content of civil-right activists such as Martin Luther King and Malcom X. The main finding of the study was that Ali used the *ethos* of boxing violence to promote nonviolent social change. Another study dealt with a Mixed Martial Arts champion Conor McGregor, the object of analysis in this thesis as well. Saira (2016) studied how dominant masculinity is featured in Conor McGregor’s speeches and discovered that McGregor used several linguistic devices to portray his dominant masculinity. These devices mentioned by Saira (2016, 20) included salient word choices, metaphors and word repetition. Saira’s thesis provided a lot of structural help for the present study due to the similarities of the two studies.

Finally, a study focusing on rhetorical devices in two newspapers with different geographical locations was conducted by Farrokhi and Nazem. (2015) The papers viewed were New York Times and The Australian. The rhetorical devices focused on were metonymy, hyperbole and metaphor. The most important aspect here is not only which devices were used the most but also the reasons behind the usage. Farrokhi and Nazem (2015, 160) introduced the results as follows: metonymy was the most used and it enabled writers to use one identity to represent another. Example of metonymy was using geographical locations like Washington or Moscow when referring to the government. Second most used was the hyperbole. Hyperbole was used to make a claim that was quite impossible or unreal. The purpose of hyperbole was to enhance the importance of something. Metaphor was the least used device and it was used by the editorial writers to illustrate their own opinions on the matter in question instead of the reality of the news events.

## **3 The present study**

### **3.1 AIM OF THE STUDY**

Mixed martial arts is a physical sport by its nature. Due to the focus being on the physicality the other aspects of the sport such as the linguistic side usually go largely unnoticed. There are very few studies conducted on linguistic devices that occur in the oration of a mixed martial arts figure. Therefore, the aim of this study is to provide a research that is targeted on rhetorical devices utilizing previous research on public oration as well as the theories on rhetoric's. Specifically, this study focuses on the Irish UFC champion Conor McGregor and the rhetorical devices that he uses in his speeches. This study was conducted with the following research questions in mind:

1. What rhetorical devices are featured in Conor McGregor's speeches the most?
2. For what purpose were the rhetorical devices used in the context they occurred?

### **3.2 DATA**

The data consists of 11 press conferences featuring Conor McGregor, collected from different mixed martial arts channels from Youtube that post footage from press conferences as well as other news regarding mixed martial arts. The channels in question were MMAFightingonSBN, UFC ON FOX, Submission Radio, MMA TV and UFC - Ultimate Fighting Championship. The chosen press conferences were promoting either upcoming championship fights or other marquee fights. Altogether, the press conference material amassed over four hours and 18 minutes of spoken material, the earliest sample being from 2015 and the newest being from 2017.

### **3.3 METHOD OF ANALYSIS**

Rhetorical analysis was chosen as the research framework as its focus is on the analyzing of the different persuasive strategies. The method of analyzing the data consisted of transcribing the spoken interviews into written text and then analyzing them for their rhetorical devices. For the analysis the handbook by Harris (2013) was used as a primary tool in identifying the rhetorical devices. Moving forward the focus was to see which rhetorical devices occurred the most in all the data and evaluated those methods even further, focusing on the reasons behind their usage. As the focus of this study

was solely on Conor McGregor, only his speech was translated to text. Once the rhetorical devices were recognized and narrowed down, the purpose of their usage was analyzed and described in detail. It should also be noted that there is always a possibility for error when transcribing spoken interviews into written text, therefore, authenticity or accurate representation of the interviewees' speech cannot be fully confirmed.

## **4 Analysis**

It became apparent from the data, that Conor McGregor did have some rhetorical devices that occurred more frequently than others. In this analysis section those rhetorical devices will be introduced and described. They will also be further analyzed for their usage and for their purpose in Conor McGregor's speeches. The rhetorical devices featured in this analysis section will be apostrophe, exemplum, repetition with its different forms and metaphor.

### **4.1 APOSTROPHE**

Apostrophe was the rhetorical device that appeared the most in the data. Apostrophe is defined by Harris' (2013, 45) as something that "interrupts the discussion or discourse and addresses directly a person or personified thing, either present or absent. Its most common purpose in prose is to give, vent to or display intense emotion, which can no longer be held back."

The analysis showed that in more than one occasion McGregor refused to directly address his opponent by his name and instead referred to them by their nationality or other characteristic. There is a slight contradiction due to McGregor not addressing his opponents directly with name, however, his addresses always contain information that leaves very little doubt to who he is addressing. The excerpts also contain other elements such as intense emotion therefore, fulfilling the definition of apostrophe. Excerpt 1 was taken from March 20th, 2015 press conference in Rio de Janeiro where Conor McGregor was on a world tour promoting his upcoming Featherweight championship title fight with Jose Aldo, who is a Rio de Janeiro native himself. Excerpt 2 was taken from a press conference that took place on February 24th, 2016. At that time, McGregor was promoting a fight between himself and Nate Diaz.

Excerpt 1

“Look into my eyes little man, you Brazilian, tu vai morrer, you got nothing to say face to face, give me that spit shine that!”

McGregor is seemingly conveying a lot of emotion directly towards Aldo even though he never calls him by his name. McGregor refers to Aldo by *little man* and *Brazilian* and then says in Portuguese “tu vai morrer” that roughly translates into ‘you are going to die.’ By making this kind of direct threat, McGregor is showing his intensity as well as his intention to hurt Aldo. It could be assumed that threatening Aldo’s life is done to instill fear into him. By avoiding calling Aldo directly by his name McGregor is showing that in his mind Aldo is not worthy enough to be called to by his name. In a Washington post article Russell (2014) describes how a person’s name is the greatest connection to their identity and individuality. She also adds that it is a sign of courtesy and a way of recognizing them. In Excerpt 1 the fact that McGregor does not call Aldo by his name, he is effectively not recognizing Aldo as a person or as a threat. Aldo’s professional identity is being the champion and being known for being one of the best fighters in the world, his name is supposed to have value. By diminishing this value, McGregor is able to assert himself higher and to show Aldo he does not recognize him in the way many other opponents prior to him have.

Instead of the name, McGregor refers to Aldo by belittling him for his size, calling him a “little man” for McGregor is physically the larger man of the two. By attacking Aldo’s physical stature, McGregor is aiming at asserting himself as the physically dominant individual. He also refers to Aldo by his nationality again, to interact with Aldo without saying his name. The nationality is also a factor due to the press conference taking place in Brazil, therefore McGregor’s addressing of Aldo as Brazilian could be intended as a sign on contempt or as an attempt to rile up Aldo and the crowd in their home country.

In addition, that McGregor tells Aldo to spit shine the belt suggests that McGregor is confident that he will be winning the belt and he wants Aldo to make sure it is shiny when he wins it. All in all, in this excerpt McGregor gets personal with Aldo in order to make him emotional and angry prior to their fight and also to instill fear and doubt into Aldo’s mind with his intense words and delivery.

## Excerpt 2

“I like Nick’s little brother, I do, I honestly like Nick’s little brother you know what I mean, how can you not like him.”

Similarly, to excerpt 1, McGregor avoids or refuses to address Nate Diaz directly by calling him by his name. Even though, the emotion in McGregor is not as intense as it was in excerpt 1, the excerpt fulfills the definition of apostrophe as McGregor is directly addressing Diaz once again by using characteristics instead of a name and conveying some emotion towards him while doing it. Once again, McGregor addresses Diaz without saying his name, instead referring to him through his older brother Nick, who is also a well-known mixed martial artist. By doing this McGregor downplays Nate's popularity and success, as it can be argued that his older brother is the more successful one of the brothers. Doing this also allows McGregor to show how in his mind Nate Diaz is not relevant enough to be addressed directly, where as his brother would be. McGregor makes it look like Diaz is relevant only through his older brother, treating him as an extension of his brother's fame. Essentially McGregor implies that Diaz is "nobody", instead of treating him as an individual person. McGregor does this to place doubt into Diaz's head as well as trying to manipulate the audience into believing that Diaz truly is only relevant due to his brother instead of his own merit.

As one of Cicero's five canons of rhetoric was delivery (Stoner 2016), it should be mentioned that McGregor's tone played a substantial part in this statement. The statement in its transcribed form does not convey any sort of malicious intent or contempt. Where as in the press conference, the audio clearly shows McGregor's tone to be mocking and contemptuous thus changing the meaning to opposite.

## **4.2 EXEMPLUM**

The rhetorical device being analyzed in this section is called exemplum. Harris' (2013, 49) defines exemplum in his handbook as "citing an example, using an illustrative story, either true or fictitious."

Excerpt 3 crosses over with excerpt 2. It was taken from the same press conference that took place February 24th, 2016. In this excerpt, McGregor provides an illustrating story about Nate Diaz as an addition to the sarcastic notion illustrated in excerpt 2. Excerpt 4 is from a press conference that was held January 20th, 2016 and it was promoting a match between Conor McGregor and Rafael Dos Anjos. The fight was for the UFC lightweight championship. The most notable in McGregor's use of exemplum was that he used it to attack his opponent's defining character traits.

### Excerpt 3

"He's like a little cholo gangster from the hood, but at the same time, but at the same time he coaches kids jiu-jitsu on a Sunday morning, and goes on bike rides with the elderly, he makes gun signs with the right hand and animal balloons with the left hand. So I-I, you're a credit to the community. He's alright, Nick's so proud of you."

In excerpt 3, McGregor starts off by derogatorily calling Diaz a “cholo gangster.” Merriam Webster defines the word “cholo” to be often disparaging and meaning of “a man or boy of Mexican descent” or “a Mexican-American youth who belongs to a street gang.” McGregor most likely uses this word due to Diaz’s Mexican-American family background as well as for the fact that he knew Diaz would understand its meaning, maybe better than most of the audience. He then proceeds to carry out his exemplum as he forms a story mixed with facts and fiction. He fabricates an image of Diaz living almost a double life. Diaz’s reputation among the fans in the fight community, is that of a thuggish, no nonsense gangster. Therefore, as McGregor mentions in his fabricated story that Diaz is not only helping the kids but the elderly as well thus creating contradictory images of Diaz. In addition, McGregor even states that Diaz makes balloon animals, which is often linked to something that clowns or jesters would normally do.

By doing this McGregor is effectively breaking Diaz’s character in front of the audience. Diaz’s main defining characteristic being his street charm. McGregor is not purely saying that Diaz does all these good deeds for his community, deeds that effectively, for the lack of a better word, lessen his street credibility. He is also implying that even the gangster- like behavior that Diaz does can be considered as nothing but child’s play. This can be noticed from the fact that McGregor specifically used the word “cholo” which refers to “Mexican-American youth” or “a boy of Mexican decent.” Both definitions refer to the young age of the “cholo” person. McGregor also strengthens this narrative by stating that Diaz makes “gun signs with his hands” instead of saying that he is actually using a live firearm. Therefore, a case could be made that making gun signs or gun gestures with one’s hand can be likened to childlike behavior that could be seen from a playing child. Lastly, McGregor states that Nate’s older brother Nick is proud of him, which also strengthens the image of Nate’s childlikeness as his brother is almost placed in the position of a proud parent. McGregor also clearly states that Diaz is “a credit to the community”, effectively hammering the point of his exemplum in. McGregor did not only strip Diaz of his personal identity of a man from the streets, but he also fabricated a new, opposite identity of a young boy who is a credit to his community and those around him.

#### Excerpt 4

“Answer to the Brazilian people, why we have to book you a hotel in your own home country, why your kids names are Bob, your kids names are Bob and Donald. Why are you raising American children, why don’t you trust in your own people. So, you’re going back to Brazil to answer that question, while you stay in a hotel we have to pay for you because you don’t have a home over there.”

Whereas in excerpt 3 McGregor attacked Diaz's identity through his behavior, in Excerpt 4 McGregor attacks Dos Anjos's through his nationality. McGregor implies that Dos Anjos betrayed his home country of Brazil by moving away and having a family in the United States. McGregor claims that his team had to book a hotel for Dos Anjos in Brazil as he was not welcomed by his own people and had no other home to stay in. Brazilian fighters have in the past been very proud of their nationality most notably when a American fighter called Chael Sonnen raised the ire of the Brazilian fans as well as a fellow Brazilian fighter Anderson Silva, by badmouthing the country of Brazil. Therefore, McGregor most likely realized to attack that part of Dos Anjos's identity as it had worked for other fighters in the past. McGregor brings up in his fabricated story that Dos Anjos is raising his kids in the United States. McGregor also comes up with made up names Bob and Donald, for the kids as those names are perceived to be very American. By referring to Dos Anjos to be more American than Brazilian, he is stripping Dos Anjos of his identity as a proud fighter representing Brazil. He then replaces it with an identity of a person who left his home country and essentially through assimilation gave up his own culture and became more of an American than Brazilian.

### **4.3 REPETITION**

This section focuses on the rhetorical device called repetition and both its forms used by McGregor. The forms of repetition that were found from the data were epizeuxis and epistrophe. Two excerpts are used to illustrate these different forms of repetition. Excerpt 5 is taken from UFC's Go Big Press Conference that took place on September 4th, 2015 that featured all the participants of the upcoming UFC 194 event. Excerpt 6 is taken from January 20th, 2016 press conference where McGregor promoted the lightweight championship fight between him and Dos Anjos.

#### **Excerpt 5**

“All I know is that I will be there, December 12th, Like I always am there, people are always saying about the talk, and I talk, and I talk and I talk but guess fucking what! I back it up! I back it up!”

In excerpt 5 the form of repetition in question is epizeuxis. Harris' (2013, 48) defines epizeuxis as “the repetition of one word (for emphasis.)” McGregor uses repetition here in few different occasion but the epizeuxis in this excerpt is towards the end where McGregor repeats the word “talk” four times to emphasize that particular word. McGregor is implying that “people” are often accusing him of being all talk. In this statement, “people” most likely refers to McGregor's critics as there is a distinct negative tone in the context where the act of talking is brought up. Therefore, the reasoning behind McGregor's emphasis of the word “talk”, is his desire to take the words of his critics and state

that his talking antics are the only critique he receives from them. He then goes on to say towards the end of his statement that he “backs up” all the talk, thus essentially rendering the critique insignificant.

#### Excerpt 6

“2015 was my year, 2016 is also my year, every year is my fucking year.”

In excerpt 6, the form of repetition is epistrophe. Harris (2013, 18) defined epistrophe as “a counterpart to anaphora, because the repetition of the same word or words comes at the end of successive phrases, clauses, or sentences.” McGregor’s statement starts off with him claiming that the previous year of 2015 was his. He then goes on to claim that he also owns the year 2016, the year when the interview took place. He then proceeds and claims that, not only does the years of the past and present belong to him, so does every forthcoming year as well. In this excerpt McGregor repeats the word “year” in the end of every clause, because he wants to emphasize a concept or an idea. The concept that McGregor wants to emphasize is the dominance that he sees himself having year after year. Each repetition of the word “year” adds an emphasis on the previously mentioned word “year” effectively enhancing the idea of his perceived dominance.

The background knowledge during the time of the interview would suggest that McGregor’s claim is not necessarily purely fabricated. Statistics offered by Tapology.com illustrate that McGregor’s fight against Jose Aldo at the end of 2015, was the highest bought Pay Per View in the history of UFC at the time, bringing in 1, 200 000 dollars’ worth of revenue. Tapology.com also provided the information that McGregor had never been defeated in the UFC during the time the interview took place with the record of 19-2, where the two losses had happened prior to his UFC career. During the time of the interview, McGregor was also the featherweight champion and was going to fight for the lightweight championship against Dos Anjos. This meant that McGregor had the opportunity to make history by being the first fighter in UFC history to be a champion of two different weight divisions simultaneously. Additionally, it could be argued that the high revenue numbers also offer proof of his popularity and his appeal among the fans. Even though, the statistical success of the year 2015 does not directly prove that the following years would be equally successful they still partly offer evidence for his claimed dominance. Therefore, McGregor’s use of epistrophe brought forth the idea of his continued dominance. Knowing the statistics, it can be assumed that McGregor knew that they would only strengthen his claims.

## 4.4 METAPHOR

In this final section, the rhetorical device being analyzed is metaphor. Metaphor is defined by Harris' (2013, 33) as something that "compares two different things by speaking of one in terms of the other." Excerpt 7 is from Aldo vs McGregor World Tour. The press conference took place on March 26th, 2015, in New York.

### Excerpt 7

"It's like in the jungle. One king gets old. He starts getting sloppy. He starts stagnating. Then a young gorilla comes up and kills him and takes everything he owns. That is what is happening here."

In excerpt 4.1 McGregor uses metaphor to illustrate that the UFC is a jungle where Aldo, is the current featherweight champion, making him the king. McGregor then states that not only has Aldo gotten old, he has also gotten sloppy and is stagnating. He then proceeds to liken himself to a young gorilla who kills the king and takes all of his possessions.

McGregor uses metaphor here to not only convey his vision of how the future fight is going to play out, but to also simplify the narrative of the fight for the audience. By using this sort of metaphor McGregor is pushing his own narrative of the triumphant rise of the new and young contender, instead of the narrative of an old king defending his position. McGregor wants to offer his narrative to the audience as the only logical one. McGregor does this when he likens the UFC to a jungle. He offers the audience a familiar scene in nature, where old leader of the pack is usually replaced by a younger one, who eventually offsets the old leader. In nature, this scene is usually inevitable, it is part of the cycle. McGregor makes his narrative seem as the only logical conclusion there is.

Excerpt 8 was taken from January 20th, 2016 press conference promoting the fight between McGregor and Dos Anjos. In this excerpt McGregor retorts to Dos Anjos' comment about McGregor not having any respect and that he (Dos Anjos) is just one tool in Jesus' hand.

### Excerpt 8

"Me and Jesus are cool, I'm cool with all the Gods, Gods recognize Gods."

McGregor's metaphor in excerpt 8 is a controversial one, as McGregor states him being in good terms with Jesus as well as likening himself to a God. McGregor uses this metaphor to achieve two things. Firstly, he retorts to Don Anjos' claim of not having any respect toward people or their religion. McGregor's metaphor of Godship allows him to retort and dismiss Dos Anjos's claim in manner that

shows the audience his wit and his unwavering confidence. Secondly, by likening himself to a God and stating that he has favorable relations with Gods, also furthers on the mind games McGregor is inflicting on Dos Anjos whose nationality and now religion are both being insulted. Therefore, even though controversial as it may, the use of metaphor here simplifies the idea of McGregor's own perceived greatness. Due to the exaggerated nature of the metaphor it also emphasizes the idea of said greatness which allows him to further affect his opponent in the process.

## **5 Conclusion**

The aim of this study was to research what kinds of rhetorical devices were featured in the speeches of the Irish mixed martial arts champion, Conor McGregor. Additionally, the study aimed to offer explanations for the purposes of using the rhetorical device.

The analysis showed that McGregor used four rhetorical devices more than the others. Those four were apostrophe, repetition, metaphor and exemplum. It was clear from the examples that McGregor's motivation for using these devices was to try to attack the character of his opponents by trying to evoke emotion in them as well as raising himself above them in the process. Apostrophe was exceptional of all the rhetorical devices featured in this study as it does not appear very often in argumentative writing due to its informal nature. (Harris 2013, 45) Each of McGregor's persuasive means featured in this study lacked the aspect of formality that is usually attached to persuasiveness in written argumentation. Therefore, based on the findings of this study it can be said that in a physical environment such as the UFC where formality is not a primary concern, McGregor's informal, emotion driven approach to argumentation, does not only work but it has become a key element in his success both professionally inside and outside of the fight business.

The sport of mixed martial arts has grown significantly during the years and has slowly achieved main stream coverage. The sport of mixed martial arts has come a long way from its original past of being perceived as purely a blood sport. By analyzing arguably, the most popular name in mixed martial arts now, Conor McGregor, this study can further contribute to the positive rise of MMA. The results help to illustrate that intelligent and capable talkers can surface from this physical environment. The results show that even in a physical contact sport environment, good oratory skills and mastering rhetoric can give one a significant advantage in their competition performance as well as their popularity. These results in general, can offer some insight to public speaking and argumentation in an informal setting. The study offers knowledge on rhetorical devices as well as some examples of how to properly apply them. Overall, this study emphasizes the importance of good rhetorical skills as even in the most unusual environment they provide an advantage.

Due to the limited length of this study, it cannot provide a truly extensive look into the usage of these devices. Also, basing the study only around one person cannot really offer information on the pure effectiveness of the devices in themselves as some of the effectiveness inevitably is attached to the person using them. Finally, the process of transcribing does not necessarily guarantee that the text form fully conveys the emotion or intention behind the original orator.

For a future suggestion, a study looking for the purely most efficient rhetorical device could be conducted with a group of people testing out certain devices and seeing the responses they receive with them. Doing this test with different people without a celebrity status, removes or lessens the impact of an external influencer as well as allows gathering more data. Hopefully, this study can provide more knowledge on the expanding field of rhetorical criticism and help future researchers to gather more knowledge on the possibilities of rhetorical devices.

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