

## An Analytical Study of Rhetorical Questions in the English Speeches by Male Celebrities

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**Received:** May 1, 2023

**Revised:** July 18, 2023

**Accepted:** August 18, 2023

**DOI:**

### Abstract

Nowadays, celebrities have been expressing their viewpoints through various mass media outlets, including social media, interviews, and speeches. Giving speech is one strategy that can incorporate rhetorical question (RQs) into the contents. The objectives of this study were 1) to investigate the use of RQs in English speeches delivered by male celebrities featured on the English Speeches Channel on YouTube, and 2) to analyze the use of RQs in English speeches given by male celebrities. Data was collected through purposive sampling from 45 speeches delivered by male celebrities from 2018 to 2022. The study found that *Debating, Arguing or Questioning* was the most used, followed by *Evaluation and Functionality, A Series of RQs, A Question that is Immediately Answered*, and *Highlighting a New Subject* respectively. However, the *Combination of RQs* were the least frequently used. The research results demonstrated that the speakers employed RQs to encourage the audience to recognize and appreciate the importance of the message they intended to pass on in their speeches. Furthermore, using RQs strengthens the valuable speech.

**Keywords:** male celebrities, rhetorical questions, speeches

## Introduction

A rhetorical question (RQ henceforth) carries the illocutionary force and impact of asserting a viewpoint opposite to that presented by the question. An RQ functions as a rhetorical device in the form of a question that employs the language of persuasion without the expectation of eliciting a response from the listeners (Nakashima, 2018). Moreover, it encourages the listeners to reflect on what the implied response to the question. Employing an RQ represents the speakers' intention to affirm or negate points that are implied (Ranganath et al., 2016). Hence, it could function as a nuanced means of suggesting an idea that might be encouraged the audience to perceive the presentation directly (Abioye, 2011; Han 2002). For example, when a speaker gives a speech in front of people and states "What is the meaning of your life?" or "How do morals affect the ways of living?" the speaker does not expect to hear the answer. RQs are examples of speeches that differ from their intended functions. The function of questions like statements are used as an assertion instead. They are commonly referred to ask questions that do not aim to gather information or prompt a response. This type of questions presents distinctive characteristics that distinguish it in semantic and pragmatic analyses, which can be used to imply or seek information (Rohde, 2006).

The significance of RQs lies in their effectiveness in engaging the audience, capturing their attention, and prompting reflection on the discussed topic. The use of RQs can serve multiple purposes such as emphasizing key points, directing attention to specific ideas or messages, and highlighting the

importance of the subject matter which makes it more memorable for the audience (Salish, 2021; Zhuang & Riloff, 2020). Additionally, speakers can shape the thoughts of the audience and influence their perception of the topic more persuasively (Jameel et al., 2023). RQs possess the power to evoke introspection, encouraging the audience to reflect on their beliefs, experiences, and values. They invite the consideration of diverse perspectives, thereby fostering a deeper understanding of the subject matter. Therefore, RQs play a crucial role, engaging the audience, emphasizing key points, persuading, promoting reflection and introspection. In summary, rhetorical questions serve as a device to engage, emphasize, persuade, stimulate critical thinking, and enhance speech impact (Khamees, 2015).

Additionally, people ask questions for various reasons. For instance, people ask questions to seek for facts from information, request favorable actions, or fulfill potential needs for assistance. Speakers can incorporate the use of RQs across many fields such as entertaining speeches, demonstrative speeches, and persuasive speeches (Zhang et al., 2017). The questions can be classified into four types: questions that seek information, questions involving rhetoric, questions that examine the answer, and questions that make indirect requests. The main purposes of using RQs aim to request information. However, the purpose of this type of question is not to seek an answer, but it aims to give more information. Kluge (2018) illustrates that RQs are very common utterances in which the speakers are not expected to provide an answer. Moreover, the questions enable the speakers to proclaim their expectations and prospects without having to discuss them to intensify or strengthen a statement, or to raise an issue for discussion. RQs were utilised in the talks because they allow participants to exchange information. RQ, on the other hand, is a sort of query that goes beyond

mere information exchange. The surface form of a question can signal the intention and background of the person that you are asking. Furthermore, it also shows the nature of the relationship between the interlocutors (Jameel et al., 2023; Špago, 2016).

In speeches, RQs have been approached from diverse linguistic perspectives and often embedded within the context of dialogue (Ioussef et al., 2021). Furthermore, the use of RQs analyzes the linguistic form of interpersonal communication. For example, the pragmatics study conveys the meaning of the RQs, and it shows the truth-conditional content of the interpretation of interrogatives from a pragmatic principle (Rexach, 1998). Furthermore, RQs exhibit a primarily answer-eliciting function to fulfil this function from the speakers to the listeners from the statements which arouse the listeners' interest from the diversified context from persuasive effect. In some cases of RQs, the speakers already know the answer (Wang, 2014). Speaking is one of the most crucial abilities in English that the language learners should develop. It allows people to communicate their knowledge, exchange essential messages, and demonstrate their abilities. Language learners must acquire high levels of speaking proficiency to have English communication abilities. Everyone can freely express their opinions, ideas, and thoughts via speaking. Speaking is as vital as the others, but it takes a lot of effort and practice to perfect (Neitsch et al., 2018; Schmidt-Radefeldt, 1977).

In using language, the spoken language holds the power and establishes a connection with the speech. For example, speech is human communication through spoken language. In terms of rhetoric and communication, it is the ability to use language effectively, and it is also the art of persuasion. Rhetoric concerns itself with language and how people use it (Derakhshani et al., 2021;

Rattanawaropas & Panthong, 2021). A good rhetorician had to be proficient in controlling arguments according to the rules of the art of persuading. In daily life, humans need to communicate with each other in everyday life. People always speak to each other, and every word that they speak produces various sentences that consist of meaning. For instance, people have a conversation with other people (Nahroji et al., 2020). The message of RQs could affect the listeners' minds by transferring their attention from the strong arguments, disputes or debates which enhance the language of persuasion (Ahluwalia & Burnkrant, 2004).

However, there are many pieces of research based on RQs such as the study of information-seeking of RQs from social media posts on Twitter (Zhuang & Riloff, 2020), the study of RQs' role in political discourse in the UK parliament. RQs and sarcasm in social media dialogue from Twitter (Oraby et al., 2017), a study of pragmatic in Shakespeare's Twelfth Night and Hamlet (Jameel et al., 2013). There has been no study on RQs analysing male celebrities. To explore the specific rhetorical strategies employed by male speakers within the context of public speaking holds significant importance in understanding the dynamics of public discourse by focusing on male English speeches as the subject of research. Analyzing speeches delivered by male speakers allows for an examination of the linguistic and rhetorical techniques utilized by this demographic, providing insights into the persuasive tactics, argumentation styles, and overall communication patterns employed in their speeches. This research aims to provide valuable insights into the linguistic, persuasive, and communicative techniques employed by male speakers, ultimately fostering a more nuanced understanding of rhetorical practices in public speaking.

As a result, it stimulates the researcher to investigate the usage of RQs in English speeches from celebrities to see whether it can be applied in speaking English, as well as recognise the utility of giving a speech more successfully in every situation for all speakers.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of this study were:

1. To investigate the prevalence of rhetorical questions in celebrity addresses in English
2. To analyze the usage of rhetorical questions in celebrity addresses in English

### **Research Method**

#### **Samples**

In this study, the samples selected for analysis were obtained through purposive sampling from transcripts of English speeches delivered by male celebrities, resulting in a total of forty-five transcripts. Male English speeches facilitate an exploration of gender communication norms and power dynamics within public speaking by analyzing how male speakers employ rhetorical questions in their speeches and the overall impact of persuasive communication. This research does not include female speeches as the focus is not on a specific demographic within the broader context of rhetorical studies. The study includes forty-five male celebrities, comprising eighteen actors, six politicians, four businessmen, four singers, three writers, two programmers, two motivational speakers, one comedian, one director, one basketball player, and one navy. The

data was collected by analyzing the dialogues from forty-five delivered English speeches in English, which underwent both qualitative and quantitative analysis.

### **Data Collection**

To address the research questions, the forty-five transcripts were collected from the English Speeches channel on YouTube as the dataset of this study because it is widely watched by people all around the world with over 4.01 million subscribers. Moreover, it is also used as a good source for teaching and learning English, particularly, for listening and reading skills. In addition, all transcriptions were spell-checked transcripts. These discussions were made up of 45 speeches totalling 194 pages. The transcripts were organized into a table to investigate the usage of RQs through quantitative analysis, involving statistical measurements to determine frequency and percentage.

To ensure the credibility of the framework, the researcher extensively reviews relevant literature and consults with field experts. This establishes a reliable basis for analysis and findings by ensuring accurate representation of the research's conceptual underpinnings and enhancing the framework's credibility. The examination of forty-five transcripts of English speeches, focusing on five selected RQ strategies, enables a more comprehensive analysis while managing time and resources effectively. This selection allows for an in-depth exploration of each transcript, facilitating an understanding of the employed RQ techniques. Through this approach, the research provides valuable insights into persuasive communication in English speeches.

In order to approach these research questions, the framework to structure the functions and use of RQs base on the rhetorical functions as follows:

1) identify prevalent question phrasing patterns, 2) extract recurring surface forms

by analyzing question structures, 3) categorize question types based on intuitive identification, and 4) analyze the utilization of RQs within speech.

### **Data Analysis**

To facilitate retrieval of frequently asked questions, Abioye (2009) manually developed a typology of surface questions form to complement this line of work. The dataset description covered questions from 45 different celebrities. For each speech, it was extracted all RQs and analysed qualitatively from the frequency use of RQs relevant to the theoretical framework. The results and discussion were derived from the scores obtained from the dialogues in the speeches.

### **Theoretical Framework for Data Analysis in this Study**

The theoretical framework in the study was employed from Abioye (2009: pp.5-6) that demonstrates the typology of RQs in eight types including 1) Evaluation or Functionality, 2) Series of RQs, 3) Highlighting a New Subject, 4) Debating, Arguing or Questioning, 5) Response to a Previous Question, 6) Empty RQs, 7) A Question that is Immediately Answered, and 8) Commands. In this study, the decision was made to employ only five specific rhetorical strategies out of the eight strategies.

The researcher chose only five strategies: *Evaluation and Functionality*, *A Series of RQs*, *Highlighting a New Subject*, *Debating, Arguing, or Questioning*, and *A question that is Immediately Answered*. Furthermore, the researcher included *Combination of RQs* as one of the study's strategies. The selection of these five strategies was a result of careful consideration and aligning them with

the research objectives and scope of the study. Each strategy was chosen based on its relevance and potential to effectively address the research questions and contribute to the overall analysis. By focusing on a subset of strategies, the study aimed to maintain a targeted and concise approach, allowing for a deeper exploration of the chosen aspects. Moreover, employing a smaller number of strategies facilitated a more in-depth examination of each one, enabling a comprehensive analysis within the given research constraints.

The following are the RQs typology based on Abioye's (2009) work: 1) A claim and a leading inquiry that expresses or provokes indignation, shock, disappointment, scorn, or outrage. are examples of *Evaluation and Functionality*. It can impact cognition or beliefs that demonstrate dread, anxiety, or concern when individuals use it as a claim. It can also go into emotion, 2) *A Series of RQs* depicts the order of inquiries in a conversation or text. This sort of inquiry generally elicits elaborate responses. They demonstrate the relevance of ideas or emotions that communicate powerful sensations. Strong sentiments can be expressed by expressing satisfaction, boredom, or stupefaction. It boosts the abundance of repetition. The benefit of using a succession of RQs is that they may be formatted into a paragraph or a notion, 3) *Highlight a New Subject* is to draw attention to the new issue or topic so that listeners or readers understand its significance. In debates, disputes, or discussions, it is always used to develop or provoke, 4) *Debating, Arguing or Questioning* allows the speaker to investigate the audience's minds and also reveal their understanding. It helps the speaker to identify the important things that are open for revision or correction. It is always used in pleadings, 5) *A Question that is Immediately Answered* is one that the speaker responds to shortly after their query. The questions are posed, and the speaker and the audience both respond promptly, and 6) *Combination of RQs* are

created by the researcher by adding one more strategy because in the speeches the speakers used more than one strategy in their speeches. The *Combination of RQs* was from *A Series of RQs*, and *A Question that is Immediately Answered*. The researcher realizes the importance of this strategy and that the speaker uses more than one strategy. Therefore, it is also used throughout this research. The examples of the RQ strategies used in this study along with the example of each strategy are as follows:

1. *Debating, Arguing or Questioning*: “What happens to other students at kindergarten after the mass shooting?”

2. *Evaluation and Functionality*: “How can the criminals kill the victims?”

3. *A Questions that is Immediately Answered*: “...So, what should we do to protect our young innocent students? My answer is to enact a new strict law.”

4. *Series of RQs*: “What is going to happen to kindergarten students in our country? What will the government do to solve the mass shooting around Thailand? What will be the next law to protect our younger generation? What should we do to protect this kids?”

5. *Highlight a new subject*: “Do you think the present president can give us sustainable development for our life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? So, what I want to tell you is that I strongly believe that he can’t....”

6. *Combination of RQs (A Series of RQs, and A Question that is Immediately Answer)*: “There are many problems we want to solve regarding this shooting. Do we need to work together? Do you want this problem to end? Do you want to stop this problem? Do you want the kids to grow and become the main labor force in our country? Is it an argent problem? Yes, it is.”

## Results

This study obtained significant findings that contribute to the understanding of “An Analytical Study of Rhetorical Questions in English Speeches by Male Celebrities.” Overall, the study revealed that there is still the use of RQs in English speeches given by male celebrities. These findings provide valuable insights into the analysis of RQs in speeches and public speaking. In the following sections, the study explores the specific details and analyzes each research question, providing a comprehensive understanding of the research outcomes.

### The Occurrence of RQs in the English Speeches by Male Celebrities

In Table 1, the results are illustrated the frequency and percentage of RQs based on the framework of RQs typology employed from the work of Abioye (2009) in five strategies including the *Evaluation and Functionality*, *A Series of RQs*, *Highlighting a New Subject*, *Debating, Arguing and Questioning*, *A Question that is Immediately Answered*, and *Combination of RQs*. However, the researcher added the *Combination of RQs* in the research which includes *A Series of RQs*, and *A Question that is Immediately Answered*. The data was collected from 45 dialogues from English speeches on YouTube that were delivered by male celebrities.

**Table 1***Typology of RQs Used in Male Celebrities' English Speeches*

<b>RQs Strategies</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1. Evaluation and Functionality	76	27.74
2. Series of RQs	51	18.61
3. Highlight a New Subject	14	5.11
4. Debating, Arguing or Questioning	93	33.94
5. A Question that is Immediately Answered	36	13.14
6. Combination of RQs	4	1.46
<b>Total</b>	<b>274</b>	<b>100</b>

With regard to Table 1, it presented that the highest percentage was for *Debating, Arguing and Questioning* (33.94), followed by *Evaluation and Functionality* at 27.74%, *A Series of RQs* at 18.61%, *A Question that is Immediately Answered* at 13.14%, *Highlighting a New Subject* at 5.11%, and the least used was *Combination of RQs* at 1.46%.

**The Use of RQs in the English Speeches by Male Celebrities**

Research objective 2 is focused on analyzing RQs used in speeches delivered in English by male celebrities. The results of the study show that the RQs strategies used in the speeches are *Debating, Arguing or Questioning, Evaluating and Functionality, A Question that is Immediately Answered, A Series of RQs, Highlighting a New Subject, and Combination of RQs*. Moreover, *Combination of RQs* added by the researcher found that there was one more

combination of RQs which consists of *A Series of RQs* and *A Question that is Immediately Answered*. The following RQ samples were utilized in this study:

### 1. *Debating, Arguing or Questioning*

#### Excerpt 1

“But changing the world can happen anywhere and anyone can do it. So, what starts here can indeed change the world, but the question is — what will the world look like after you change it?” (Speech 1)

Excerpt 1 above shows the use of *Debating, Arguing or Questioning* strategies in the speeches given by the male celebrities. The speaker encourages the listener to think of a way to develop or change the world into a better place. Furthermore, the speaker promotes the listeners to help together so that people can work and help everywhere. As a result, they require everyone's help. The speaker then persuades the audience to consider how to alter the world. This indicates that the speaker not only communicates to effect a significant change in the world but also provides the audience with guidance to contemplate how everyone can contribute to making the world a better place.

### 2. *Evaluation and Functionality*

#### Excerpt 2

“So we began our work in the same way that anyone else would. We asked: ‘How could the world let these children die?’ ” (Speech 6)

For the strategies of *Evaluation and Functionality*, it shows that the speaker used this strategy to evaluate and function their speeches by giving

powerful language to convince the listeners to think and believe in them. They asked, “How could the world let these children die?”. This sentence inspires all listeners to think critically about how to spend their work more effectively so that people can begin working.

### 3. *A Question that is Immediately Answered*

#### Excerpt 3

“I read a lot about the terrible things that people have done to each other. You just cannot even imagine it. It's so awful. So, you don't want to be someone like that. Now, do you have a reason to be? Yes! You have lots of reasons to be!” (Speech 22).

*A Question that is Immediately Answered* represents the way that a speaker asked a question and responds immediately by themselves. This strategy arouses the listeners to listen, catch up and think directly from the contents provided by the speakers. In excerpt 3, the question is “Do you want to have a meaningful life?” and the answer is “Everything you do matters”. It shows that there are many reasons to be resentful about the existence of life.

### 4. *Series of RQs*

#### Excerpt 4

“Who here wants to be great in life? And how does greatness come? Does it come with money? Does it come with fame? What does it come with? How does it come?...” (Speech 17)

*A Series of RQs* is a strategy in that a speaker usually forms a stronger feeling or ideas in the speech into a concept or a paragraph to show their intention to emphasize the question to the audience. In excerpt 4, it consists of six questions and it arouses the listeners to think about their lives.

### 5. *Highlighting a New Subject*

#### Excerpt 5

“Have you ever wondered why nobody cares about ‘global warming’? Even though it’s a very serious issue, it could kill all of us, because when you go home and you flip on the TV and you see a scientist trying to talk about global warming, it goes something like this.” (Speech 29)

*Highlighting a New Subject* occurs when a speaker begins a new topic during a speech by employing RQs at the beginning of their speeches. In extract 5, the speaker wants the listeners to consider the reason for global warming, which is a severe environmental concern for all people, and he feels that it is not only the responsibility of scientists but also people all over the world.

### 6. *Combination of RQs*

Apart from the five selected strategies based on the framework of Aboiye’s (2009) work, the researchers also added one more strategy in the research which is a combination of RQs because the speakers provided some sentences in the speeches that contain more than one strategy. The *Combination of RQs* consists of *A Series of RQs* and *A Question that is Immediately Answered*.

### Excerpt 6

“How sick is that? Imagine if I get pulled over by the cops? Can I have your driver’s license, please? Yeah, but, it’s over there; you’re going to have to get it.” (Speech 31)

To detect the employment of the two tactics extracts above, it will be addressed using a series of RQs and an immediate answer question. As seen in Exhibit 6, the speaker utilised a series of RQs for three questions and answered them all by himself.

### Discussions

According to the first research objective, it focuses on studying the RQs used in English Speeches given by male celebrities. Moreover, it was found that there were six strategies of RQs found in the study. The five RQs strategies employed by Abioye (2009) were *Debating, Arguing or Questioning, Evaluation and Functionality, A Series of RQs, A Question that is Immediately Answered*, and *Highlighting a New Subject* respectively. Additionally, the *Combination of RQs* which was added by the researcher was also found in the study.

For the second research objective, the results of the study showed the use of English speeches from the speakers that want to give the message to the listeners. When considering the factors that influence the use of RQs in speeches, it was discovered that the speakers wanted to embed RQs as a strategy to bring more persuasive language to the audiences to believe and trust in them. The usage of RQs demonstrates that the speakers' intentions in utilising RQs were in the same direction, which is to encourage the listeners to believe in them. This is supported by Neitsch et al.'s (2018) study which illustrate that RQs could help the

speakers to strengthen their message using these strategies. In addition, the highest use of RQs was *Debating, Arguing or Questioning* which is because the speaker wants to debate, argue and question the listeners. This is in line with the study of Wang (2014) that the strategy of RQs is also persuasion which affects the listeners' minds. It arouses the listeners with a persuasive effect. Rhetorically, the speakers also used *Evaluation and functionality* to persuade the listeners to believe in them. This strategy is that the speaker that the listener can believe in them. Besides, it was related to Nakashima's (2018) study which reported that RQ is a figure of speech that forms a question persuasively towards the listeners without the expectation to get a reply. Furthermore, *A Series of RQs* is a strategy in which speakers use many questions in speeches, some of which are used at the beginning of the speeches and some of which are embedded in the speech. During their speeches, the speakers asked numerous questions to demonstrate their intent to persuade the audience to believe in their messages. According to Nahroji et al (2020), all words, phrases, and utterances that speakers seek to deliver to audiences comprise of meaning that they intend to express to the listeners. Furthermore, it conveys to the listeners not only the message but also good meaning.

*A Question that is Immediately Answered* is used by many speakers. They begin their discourse with a question, to which they also respond too. This strategy is one of the RQs that the speaker mostly used in giving speeches in many places. For example, the politician used this strategy in election speeches to help them to achieve their election campaign. In addition to this, the use of RQs that immediately answer to the listener is related to the study of Ahluwalia and Burnkrant (2004) that the question is information seeking that is in semantic and pragmatic. For example, the speaker asked "What does the meaning of life?" to

the listeners in the hall. This question seeks information semantically and pragmatically to the listener to think more about the meaning of their life while listening to the speaker in their mind. Additionally, *Highlighting a New Subject* is one strategy that the speaker uses to emphasize interesting questions to the listeners which brings more interesting ideas. The research results are consistent with the earlier research of Aboiye (2011) and Rohde (2006) which indicated that the role of RQs could be insinuating ideas from the speakers which challenges the audiences to declare their message directly. Besides, the *Combination of RQs* is added by the researcher who found new mixed strategies of RQs including *A Series of RQs* and *A Question that is Immediately Answered*. This echoes the works of Kluge (2018) and Aboiye (2009) that RQs are common utterances in which the speaker does not expect the answer from the listener. Without having a discussion, the above strategies of RQs showed that the functions of RQs go beyond the simple information exchange between the speaker and listeners.

### **Limitations of the study**

This study concentrated on only six RQ techniques. Given the limitations of RQs, this study may benefit by gathering English speeches. Another strategy of RQs or frameworks should be used in this research for future research.

### **Recommendations for further study**

1. More English talks should be studied and analysed in the future. It might be comparative research analysing talks from different genders.

2. In this study, the researcher simply used Abioye's (2009) work as a framework. There might be a follow-up study that uses a different framework, typology, or research methodologies.

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