POLILOG. STUDIA NEOFILOLOGICZNE
NR 15 SS. 259–270 2025

ISSN 2083-5485 https://doi.org/10.34858/polilog.15.2025.452

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Original research paper

Received: 27.09.2024
Accepted: 2.06.2025

'A GOOD FIGURE ILLUMINATES THE PAGE'. RHETORICAL FIGURES AS PERSUASIVE DEVICES IN SELECT 19TH-CENTURY GRAMMARS[1]

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Abstract

This paper investigates the use of rhetorical figures in six nineteenth-century English manuals on logic, rhetoric, elocution, style, and composition, examining how these instructional texts employed rhetorical devices not merely as ornamental features but as persuasive tools to enhance pedagogical effectiveness. Adopting a qualitative methodology that integrates close textual analysis and historical-contextual interpretation, the study categorises rhetorical figures into three principal groups: tropes, figures of word choice, and figures of thought. The analysis demonstrates that tropes clarify complex ideas through creative associations, figures of word choice emphasize key concepts via deliberate lexical and syntactic patterns, and figures of thought engage readers by drawing on shared cultural references and scholarly authority. Findings reveal that rhetorical figures were systematically interwoven with grammatical and compositional instruction in these manuals, blending expository and persuasive styles to improve student understanding and retention. By highlighting the pedagogical function of rhetorical figures in nineteenth-century English educational discourse, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the historical evolution of rhetoric in instructional contexts and offers a foundation for future research on rhetorical argumentation in grammar and composition textbooks from other periods.

Keywords: 19th century English grammars, rhetorical figures, tropes, figures of word choice, figures of thought

Introduction

[1] This research has been funded by the Plan Estatal de Investigación Científica, Técnica y de Innovación 2021–2023 of the Ministerios de Ciencia e Innovación under award number PID2021-125928NB-I00, and the Agencia Canaria de investigación, innovación y sociedad de la información under award number CEI2020-09. I hereby express our thanks.

This study explores and illustrates the occurrence of rhetorical figures in six handbooks from the nineteenth century devoted to logic, rhetoric, elocution, style, and composition. These manuals do not appear in Manfred Görlach's annotated bibliography of 19th-century grammars of English due to their hybrid character between proper grammar and schoolbook, but they are included in the appendix to this work [1998: 356]. The author further explains that they do not qualify for his bibliography since a grammar, in the strict sense, is defined as a book designed for use in schools that has 'a description of the structure of a language at least on the levels of spelling/punctuation and syntax (with the treatment of vocabulary, etymology, prosody and style as optional features)' [Görlach 1998: 4]. Such a book should contain definitions, rules, notes, and exercises, and can be divided into volumes devoted to grammar, exercises, key, and the teacher's manual; likewise, it should also be tailored to the student's age. Thus, Görlach [1998: 4] states that some so-called grammars may not fit this classification because they deal with one topic such as pronunciation or lexicology; they are devoted to style and good writing, discuss the language in expository or philosophical ways, explain the history of the English language, or teach English as a foreign language.

Other scholars, such as Ian Michael [1991: 14–15; 1997: 23–24], also regard the disagreements about what should be included in an English grammar. He asserts that an English grammar is 'a free-standing work, published in Britain, dealing with, at least, the parts of speech and, except in a few very elementary works, some aspects of syntax' [Michael 1997: 25]. However, some authors include metrics, spelling, and the figures of speech. William Woods [1985: 24], for his part, affirms that, in the nineteenth century, the command of grammar entailed the accomplishment of intellectual power. This scholar [1986: 4–6] also points out that the teaching of grammar in that century revealed attitudes pertaining to language and language teaching that influenced the pedagogy of rhetoric, composition, and literature. The general structure of these grammar manuals, until late in the century, was to place first the definitions at the beginning of sections in larger print and then introduce the additional explanations and examples in smaller print. The resolution of some points of grammar, the exception to the rules, and the inclusion of literary references or allusions were placed at the bottom of the pages or at the end of sections. The limited information available about English grammars is mainly bibliographic, and while the abundance of 19th century handbooks is considerable, there has been little scholarly interest in them. This lack of interest may be attributed to the restricted access to many works which, fortunately, has been addressed through the digitisation process of Google Books since the early 2000s [Anderwald 2016: 9].

Although the books considered for this study do not cover all the prescriptive content that has been mentioned so far, they are worth analysing since they follow the same structure: definitions and longer explanations appear in larger print at the beginning of the sections, and further examples and comments come immediately after in smaller print. The preface and introduction sections of the selected books have been excluded, as they pertain to a different discourse type with a rhetorical organisation

of their own. The manuals primarily present an instructive text-type focused on rule-based grammar exposition; however, they also incorporate numerous rhetorical arguments and figures designed to convey the pedagogical value to the reader. In this vein, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca [1969: 169] argue that a rhetorical argument entails reasoning aimed at persuading and engaging the audience it addresses. These authors claim that a rhetorical figure is argumentative only if it transmits a change of perspective on the addressee; otherwise, it is simply ‘an embellishment, a figure of style’. Conversely, other scholars, such as Tindale [2004: 63], think that a rhetorical figure is a strategy employed by grammar writers to make their thought more effective. Some rhetorical figures can facilitate the argument proposed by the writer and, in some cases, they constitute the argument itself. Thus, figures serve the argumentative function of ‘strengthening or weakening presence, that is, the salience of an idea or topic’ [Van Eemeren 2009: 121]. Similarly, rhetorical figures are characterised as those linguistic structures intended for having persuasive effect on the audience, with their primary objective being its communicative power [Fahnestock 2011: 12]. This interpretation reinforces the notion that figures are not merely stylistic embellishments added to enhance discourse; rather, they are integral to the structure of argumentative discourse and can transfer acceptability from premises to conclusions [Tindale 2004: 73; Plantin 2009: 336].

This paper is structured as follows: the next section briefly categorises rhetorical figures into two recognised groups. Following this, the corpus and methodology used for this research are described. The longest section focuses on analysing rhetorical figures within three main categories: tropes, figures of word choice, and figures of thought. Lastly, some concluding remarks are presented.

Classification of rhetorical figures

Rhetorical figures can be organised according to various taxonomies, including the classical system, which groups figures into three major categories [Fahnestock 1999: 10–11]. Tropes, involving the transference of meaning, belong to the first group. Quintilian defined a trope as ‘a change, with strength, of a word or phrase from its proper signification to another’ [Fahnestock 2011: 100]. A core group of four tropes emerged in the main manuals from the 16th-century reformers of rhetoric: metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony [Fahnestock 2011: 101]. Figures of speech (or schemes), forming the second group, contain devices of word choice that primarily involve phonological or orthographical variations, which create significant effects for persuasion. They also exploit aural similarities among words and make wording explicit. Altogether, these word forms convey the rhetor’s argument [Fahnestock 2011: 127]. Finally, the third group comprises figures of thought, which represent interactional gestures between, in this case, grammar writers and their readers. Figures of thought were already present in Quintilian’s *Institutio Oratoria* (1920). These are defined as gestures or figures of speaker-audience construction intended to be marked in speech or in written texts, facilitating interaction among participants to favour the speaker’s goals. Examples include apostrophe, frankness

of speech (or *licentia*), and rhetorical questions [Fahnestock 1999: 10; 2011: 291, 302–303]. These figures can also be interpreted as strategies within the functional dimension of language [Carillo 2010: 383].

This tripartite distribution significantly influences the classification of rhetorical figures proposed by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca [1969: 172–178] in their treatise on argumentation, which categorises them into choice, presence, and communion. Figures of choice refer to the effect that a specific selection of words may have on the reader. Tropes such as simile, metaphor, and analogy are included in this category, alongside devices such as oratorical definition and prolepsis. Figures of presence function by vividly foregrounding certain ideas or topics, thereby amplifying their significance to the audience. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca include figures of word choice, as well as devices that express amplification, synonymy, and imaginary direct speech, as part of the personification device. Figures of communion, on the other hand, aim to establish a shared understanding or connection between the writer and the audience. They foster a sense of unity by invoking common values, shared traditions, or a collective past. Some figures of communion comprise classical figures of thought, such as apostrophe and rhetorical questions, as well as allusion, quotations, maxims, and proverbs. They also encompass enallage of person, which involves shifting grammatical categories, particularly pronouns, whereby 'I' can be replaced by 'we' to bring about 'a verbal "merging" of the speaker and audience' [Graff, Winn 2006: 60–61].

Corpus of study and methodology

I have selected the six handbooks listed in the table below, including the date, the name of the author, and the abbreviation used in the examples provided. Two of these manuals were authored by Adams Sherman Hill, in 1878 and 1893. As can be observed, not all the titles specify the exact contents of each book, especially in the case of *Elements of English Composition* (1836) and *English Composition* (1881), which only display a succinct phrase pointing out the aim of the book.

The methodology employed is strictly qualitative, as I have read each book and manually identified numerous excerpts containing rhetorical figures found in the two classifications of figures mentioned above. Some of these figures are examined as illustrations for the analysis in the following section.

Year	Title	Author	Abbreviation
1822	Grammar of Logic and Intellectual Philosophy, on Didactic Principles, for the Use of Schools and Private Instruction	Alexander Jamieson	GOLIP
1832	A Grammar of Elocution containing the principles of the Arts of Reading and Speaking; Illustrated by Appropriate Exercises and Examples, Adapted to Colleges, Schools and Private Instruction: The Whole Arranged in the Order in which it is taught in Harvard University	Jonathan Barber	GOE

Year	Title	Author	Abbreviation
1836	Elements of English Composition	David Irving	EOEC
1878	The Principles of Rhetoric and their Application	Adams Sherman Hill	POR
1881	English Composition	John Nichol	EC
1893	The Foundations of Rhetoric	Adams Sherman Hill	FOR

Analysis of rhetorical figures

Tropes

A simile is typically defined as a form of comparison that, unlike metaphor, emphasises the distinct identities of both the source and target domains. This trope is figurative because it juxtaposes elements that are generally perceived as incomparable, requiring the creation of vivid or surprising imagery to establish connections between them [Lanham 1991: 140; Israel, Harding, Tobi 2004: 124]. In the following example, simile is employed to elucidate the precise meaning of grammar for the reader:

> Grammar, in the widest sense of the word, though readily distinguishable from Rhetoric, is its basis. He who has mastered the mechanics of language has a great advantage over one who cannot express himself correctly, as a painter whose pencil rarely has a great advantage over one who cannot draw correctly [POR: 13].

In this other excerpt, the simile highlights the pernicious effect of using unnecessary long words, which ‘give an air of magnificence to the petty or the mean’, on the reader: ‘I give a few of them as showing their tendency, all the more dangerous that their effect, like that of some poisons, is insensibly cumulative, and they are sure at last of effect among a people whose chief reading is the daily paper’ [FOR: 176–177]. Conciseness of thought is similarly underscored in the following passage, where the writer remarks that ‘whatever we have to say the more briefly it is said the greater’. Again, simile is employed to illustrate that ‘concentration of phrase is like a burning glass, which adds to the brightness and the heat of the rays it gathers into a focus’ [EC: 93]. Here, the burning image is compared to “the brightness and the heat” of condensed expression.

Metaphor, in the following example, is used to liken a writer employing synonymous words to a painter, once again drawing on the realm of art to establish a parallel between language and painting. Like simile and analogy, metaphor serves as an argumentative strategy, forming part of the arguer’s toolkit [Tindale 2013: 528]. As Lakoff and Johnson describe it, metaphor involves ‘understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another’ [1980: 5–6]:

> [Synonymous words] are like different shades of the same colour, an accurate writer can employ them to great advantage, by using them so as to heighten and to finish the picture which he gives us. He supplies by the one what was wanting in the other, to the force, or to the lustre of the image which he means to exhibit [EOEC: 46–47].

The semantic transference that occurs in metaphor is also present in comparison or analogy. Analogy has been defined as reasoning or arguing from parallel cases [Lanham 1991: 10] and as 'structural similarity', since the notion of iconicity established between language and reality is analogical [Itkonen 2005: 7]. In this context, an analogy explicit in its four terms is identified. A full analogy can serve as a powerful argumentative device and belongs to the same category as metaphor, simile, and allegory, as it shares the same novel and persuasive qualities [Fahnestock 2011: 110–111]. Thus, in the sentence 'Old-fashioned words give stateliness to poetry, as brocades and knee-breeches give dignity to a ceremonial' [POR: 13], 'old-fashioned words' are to 'poetry' what 'brocades and knee-breeches' are to 'a ceremonial'. Analogy is also present in the example below, where the author describes the importance of vocal exercise in achieving correct articulation: 'Exactness and grace go together in other gymnastic exercises, in fencing, in riding, in boxing; why should they not also be the result of the nobler gymnastics of the voice' [GOE: 45]. A complete analogy is again shown, as vocal exercise is to articulation what gymnastic exercise is to the mastery of certain sports.

As to prolepsis, it is a device typically characterised as the forecasting and foreseeing of objections in different ways [Tindale 2004: 53; Lanham 1991: 120; Quintilian 1920, 9.2: 16–18]. This definition is just one of several related meanings that this figure possesses: for Mehlenbacher [2017: 234], prolepsis can be identified both as a rhetorical figure and as an argument strategy in that it 'aids the construction of some future event or moment in present-minded, concretised items, a kind of foreshadowing or predicting'. This figure also involves an argument from (negative) consequences, as can be observed below, because if practitioners did not use 'general words', some disastrous effects would take place:

> Without general words, natural science would be a heap of detached observation, law a pile of unclassified cases, history no longer teaching by example, but a mere chronicle of events. If we were unable to arrange books under general heads, – e.g., History, Travels, Literature, – a library would be chaos. If general orders could not be issued, an army would be a mob [FOR: 187].

Figures of word choice

The grammars under consideration include a variety of figures of word choice, which are linked to syntactic arrangement in forms such as the similar length of segments in syllables or words, similar stress pattern, similar grammatical structures, and repetition. In the case of repetition, its use is connected to the speaker's effective delivery of their thought and 'the degree of intensity or conviction behind it' [Fahne-

stock 1999: 20]. Thus, the repeated occurrence of the same term or phrase can generate rhetorical force if it becomes a marker of prominence for the speaker.

For example, anaphora is defined as the repetition of the same word or words at the beginning of multiple clauses or verses [Lanham 1991: 11]. As illustrated below, the writer stresses the importance of using specific words rather than general ones to describe ‘a moment’ in time that will never return:

> None of these words have, however, the freshness that they had when they first came into the language of landsmen. There is a moment when words that have passed from professional into good use have become intelligible but are not yet stale, – a moment in which, being at once definite and alive, they are especially serviceable. That is the moment which a great writer makes his own [FOR: 191].

In another example, anaphora is employed to demonstrate the characteristics of a good sentence. The reiteration of the phrase ‘in the effort to’ emphasises the challenges involved in using ‘proper words in proper places’:

> In the effort to be grammatically correct, an inexperienced writer may become obscure or weak or clumsy; in the effort to be clear, he may become diffuse or stiff; in the effort to be forcible, he may become obscure or harsh; in the effort to acquire ease, he may become flippant, or weak and wordy; in the effort to make every sentence a unit, he is in danger of becoming artificial, and of sacrificing substance to form; in the effort to succeed in all respects, he may fail in all, for he may forget his subject in himself [FOR: 201–202].

The section concludes with antimetabole, a figure in which words or phrases are repeated in reverse order to create contrast or highlight an idea [Fahnestock 2011: 233–234]. In this instance, the writer advises the reader on how to approach writing and revision effectively: ‘It is wiser to write with fury and correct with phlegm than to write with phlegm and correct with fury’ [FOR: 202]. The rhythmic structure of the figure illustrates how the interaction of contrasting elements can create a memorable construction. Thus, it can be said that good sentences arise from the balance between energy and originality, combined with careful and measured revision.

Regarding polyptoton, it is a rhetorical device that repeats a word derived from the same root but with different endings [Lanham 1991: 117]. In the example below, the writer discusses the importance of linguistic clarity. The verb ‘understand’ appears in multiple verbal forms within a conditional sentence, highlighting the writer’s obligation to make himself ‘understood’. The varied verbal tenses underscore the significance of this linguistic principle of ‘judgement’: ‘In the case of language, there is only one sound principle of judgment. If to be understood is, as it should be, a writer’s first object, his language must be such as his readers understand, and understand as he understands it’. [POR: 5]

Another rhetorical figure involving repetition is epanalepsis, which consists of repeating at the end of the sentence the same word or phrase with which it begins [Lanham 1991: 67]. In the instance provided below, the noun ‘invention’ appears both

at the beginning and end of the sentence, creating a circular definition. The second occurrence of the term takes on a new meaning not possessed by the first. In this case, we can also observe ploce, a figure that involves the reiteration of a word or a name with a new meaning after the intervention of another word or words [Lanham 1991: 116]: 'In all Invention there must be some end in view; and *Sagacity* in finding out the road that leads to that end, is, properly speaking, what we call *Invention*'.[2] [GOLIP: 139]

The next passage demonstrates parison, a figure characterised by the parallel arrangement of sentences or phrases [Fahnestock 2011: 225; Lanham 1991: 93]. In this instance, the repetition of the structure 'of + noun + and + noun' creates a rhythmical sequence of reasons in politics. Furthermore, the terms in the paired phrases reflect contrasting meanings. Thus, the contrasts existing in political reasoning is highlighted through antithesis, which is defined as 'conjoining contrasting ideas' [Lanham 1991: 16]:

> In politics we reason, for the most part, from analogy. The constitution of human nature is similar in different societies, or commonwealths; hence we conclude, that the causes of peace and war, of tranquillity and sedition, of riches and poverty, of improvement and degeneracy, are much the same in all [GOLIP: 36].

Likewise, another example of parison and antithesis can be found in the following phrases, where the author defends the use of simplicity in language and opposes 'plain things' to 'technical terms': 'If plain words are best for plain things, technical subjects are appropriately discussed in technical terms' [EC: 47]. Additionally, the repetition of 'plain' and 'technical' at the beginning and end of each sequence can also be interpreted as epanalepsis, emphasising the idea that 'when we use common words in scientific senses, seldom fail to perplex and mislead us.' [EC: 47]. A different type of figure, antanaclasis, appears in the following excerpt, where the author repeats the same orthographical or phonological word with different meanings as a form of wordplay or pun [Fahnestock 2011: 134]: 'The preceding remarks on style and its different species, have by no means exhausted the subject, though they may very probably have exhausted the patience of many readers' [EOEC: 247–248]. In the example, the past participle 'exhausted' is used with two different meanings, adding wit to the notion of tiring the reader in discussing the use of 'affected style' in writing.

Figures of thought

Although traditionally these figures were intended for addressing someone directly in oral interactions, they have an analogous mode of presentation in written texts [Fahnestock 1999: 10]. In either case, their use reflects a need to interact with the audience in a way that serves 'the rhetor's goals in the course of the speech or text' [Fahnestock 2011: 291]. Numerous occurrences of figures of thought are found in the six manuals, particularly in the form of quotations that the writers use to illustrate their explanations. These quotations may also include the name of the authority

[2] Italics in the original.

to whom they are attributed, as in the following example: ‘Or a sentence or period, various definitions have been given. According to Aristotle, it is “a quantity of sound which bears a certain signification according to its combination, and of which some detached part is also significant”’ [EOEC: 53].

Similarly, Quintilian is cited to remind the readers of the importance of clarity in writing: ‘We should not be left to grope for the meaning among a maze of words, nor be left in doubt between two meanings. Quintilian says, “Care should be taken, not that the reader may understand if he will, but that he must understand whether he will or not”’ [EC: 44]. However, when discussing the order of words, the same author inserts an unattributed citation: ‘As far as is consistent with good grammar and perspicuity, we should endeavour to “arrange the elements of a proposition in the order in which the ideas represented by them naturally suggest themselves to the mind”’ [EC: 98].

On other occasions, the writers of the grammars cite authorities to convey the prestige associated with them, even when they do not quote their words. This is evident in the following passage, in which Macaulay is referenced as a paradigm for ‘clearness’: ‘Such certainly, for example, were the conditions under which Macaulay wrote his “History”. He was not hampered by originality of thought or breadth of view; what he saw at all he saw distinctly; what he believed he believed with his whole strength’ [POR: 65]. In a similar vein, the orator Daniel Webster is praised for the force of his speech:

> Of all the merits of strong writers, none is more conspicuous than the merit of making every word tell, – a merit which Daniel Webster, whose style is a model of force, secured, it is said, by striking out of his writings every syllable that could possibly be spared [FOR: 241].

Maxims are also found in the handbooks examined. The following example emphasises the idea that for a sentence to be strong, it ‘ought to be divested of all redundant words’. The grammar writer states: ‘It is an invariable maxim, that words which add nothing to the sense, or to the clearness, must diminish the force of the expression’ [EOEC: 84]. Another maxim highlights the importance of prudence in linguistic usage:

> It appears also, that the fundamental maxim of prudence, and of all good morals – *That the passions ought, in all cases, to be under the dominion of reason* – is not only self-evident, when rightly understood, but is expressed according to the common use and propriety of language[3] [GOLIP: 152].

The personification of abstractions is likewise present in the grammars. For instance, in the following excerpt, human senses are attributed to ‘the passions, the affections, and the will’, which do not appeal to ‘the understanding’ but instead respond to ‘the language of nature’:

[3] Italics in the original.

> Artificial signs signify, they do not express; they speak to the understanding, as algebraical characters may do, but the passions, the affections, and the will, hear them not; these continue dormant and inactive, till we speak to them in the language of nature, to which they are all attention and obedience [GOLIP: 166].

Some examples of ecphonesis, a figure used to express emotion [Lanham 1991: 61], or exclamation, appear in the instruction books, though they are not frequent. In the passage below, the author seems amazed by the variety of ideas contained in the lengthy quote he has just included to illustrate the unity required in the structure of sentences: 'How many different facts, reasoning, and observations, are here presented to the mind!' [EOEC: 76].

In a related manner, oratorical or rhetorical questions, defined as questions that require an answer from the audience [Fahnestock 2011: 298], are also uncommon in the handbooks. In the following example, the writer reflects on good style and the challenges of achieving 'careful and tasteful composition'. Although he provides an answer, it is not intended as a definitive solution: 'I am pretty sure to compose correctly if I follow approved models. But why are they approved? An author may be famous for political or moral influence, or even for the strength of his imagination, and yet be far from a model of style' [EC: 15–16]. In another example, the author similarly ponders the difficulty of defining the meanings of 'knowledge' and 'truth':

> What is knowledge? and, What is truth? We are familiarised with these words, and are not disposed to suspect any mystery in their meaning. Their meaning, however, is not so obvious as is generally supposed; and it is of so much importance in our present inquiry, that we cannot proceed without attempting to ascertain it [GOLIP: 223–224].

In the answer provided, the enallage of person from 'I' to 'we' is identified, thereby joining the grammar writer and their reader in a collective 'we'.

Conclusions

This paper has examined the occurrence of rhetorical figures and their auxiliary role in the instructive prose of 19th-century English handbooks on logic, rhetoric, elocution, style, and composition. These manuals, while primarily designed for educational purposes, utilise various rhetorical devices not only as ornamental features but as persuasive tools to engage their audience and enhance their pedagogical effectiveness. The analysis identified three primary categories of rhetorical figures: tropes, figures of word choice, and figures of thought, all of which serve to reinforce the authors' arguments and make the instructional material more enlightening and appealing.

As a result, tropes such as simile, metaphor, analogy, and prolepsis function as tools for both clarification and persuasion, bringing a sense of novelty to support the author's arguments. The figures of word choice demonstrate how various patterns of syntactic arrangement and the repetition of words and phrases can generate rhetorical force, drawing the reader's attention to key concepts within the material. These

include devices such as anaphora, antimetabole, polyptoton, and parison. Moreover, figures of thought emphasise the importance of supporting instruction by incorporating quotations from authoritative sources and maxims as a means of invoking a common cultural tradition.

All in all, this study contributes to a broader understanding of how rhetorical argumentation was interwoven with grammatical instruction during this period, suggesting that these manuals sought to adopt a more persuasive approach in their teaching. Future research could expand this analysis by exploring the use of rhetorical figures in a broader range of 19th-century grammars, including more canonical works, and by comparing them across different historical periods to trace the evolution of rhetoric in educational discourse.

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