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# We Shall Fight on the Beaches

## – A qualitative study about Winston Churchill's rhetoric and social reality

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## Abstract

This candidate thesis aims to identify the rhetorical strategies Winston Churchill employs in his speech ‘We Shall Fight on the Beaches’, focusing specifically on how Churchill’s speech attempts to shape social reality, rather than measuring its actual effects on the audience. Drawing on Aristotle’s concepts of ethos, pathos, and logos, the study analyses how Churchill establishes credibility, regulates emotions, and frames resistance as the only rational and moral course of action. In addition, a metaphorical discourse analysis is applied to examine how metaphors such as “we” versus “the enemy” shape collective identity and social norms under crisis.

The study further situates Churchill’s rhetoric within his literary background and rhetorical self awareness, drawing on his early essay The Scaffolding of Rhetoric to contextualize stylistic choices such as rhythm, repetition, accumulation of argument, and analogy. Influences from Shakespearean drama and historical narrative are shown to enhance the persuasive force and emotional resonance of the speech. By integrating classical rhetoric with theories of social reality, including perspectives from Boroditsky, Cassirer and Castoriadis the study demonstrates how political rhetoric functions not only as a tool of persuasion but as a mechanism for constructing social order, moral obligation, and collective resolve in times of crisis.

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## 1. Introduction

Political leadership during crises relies fundamentally on language. In periods of uncertainty, fear, and national instability, political speeches function as central tools for mobilising citizens and legitimising authority. Language is a primary instrument of power. Leaders govern not only through institutions and decisions, but through their ability to define situations, assign meaning and present certain interpretations as necessary and legitimate. This function becomes particularly crucial during crises, when established frameworks of understanding are destabilised and citizens seek orientation, reassurance, and moral clarity.

Language does not merely describe events, it actively shapes social reality by framing crises and guiding how societies interpret threats. Political rhetoric appeals to shared values and history to shape behavior, strengthen morale, and encourage coordinated action. By articulating who "we" are and who threatens "us," language creates symbolic boundaries that foster unity, shared responsibility, and social cohesion. At the same time, rhetoric establishes moral frameworks by defining what actions are acceptable or unacceptable. In addition, political language actively shapes emotional responses such as fear, hope, pride, and resolve. Wartime political rhetoric is crafted not only to mobilise the domestic population but also to signal strength and resolve to enemy states monitoring speeches and broadcasts. With the world today being so uncertain and conflicts and international tension increasing, the study of crisis rhetoric is highly relevant.

Winston Churchill's speech "We Shall Fight on the Beaches", delivered on 4 June 1940 following the evacuation of Dunkirk, exemplifies the power of crisis rhetoric. Although Churchill delivered many speeches as Prime Minister, this one stands out for its memorability, making it an ideal case for examining the rhetorical strategies that contribute to its lasting impact and attempt to shape social reality. At a time when public morale was uncertain and Churchill's position as Prime Minister not yet fully established, the speech reframed a military withdrawal into a narrative of courage and endurance. By influencing how the events were understood, Churchill was able to turn what might have been perceived as humiliation into a rallying point, fostering unity and determination while strengthening his political authority.

This thesis investigates the rhetorical strategies used in the speech to understand how political leaders use language to persuade audiences, unite audiences and create shared meaning in times of crisis. Using Aristotle's concepts of ethos, pathos, and logos, the study explores how the speech frames the war as both a moral and civilisational struggle. Yet, because classical rhetoric alone cannot fully account for how language establishes social norms and collective identities, the analysis is further supported by a metaphorical discourse approach, emphasizing symbolic distinctions such as "we" versus "the enemy."

The thesis focuses on how Churchill's speech attempts to shape social reality, rather than measuring its actual effects on the audience. Finally, the study places Churchill's rhetoric within his literary and intellectual background. As a writer, historian, later awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, Churchill developed a rhetorical style influenced by classical literature and Shakespearean drama. These influences contribute to the rhythm, structure, and persuasive force of the speech. By combining classical rhetorical analysis with discourse oriented perspectives, it contributes to a deeper understanding of how political language constructs social order, mobilises emotional commitment, and legitimises authority in times of crisis.

## 1.1 Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this thesis is not only to identify the rhetorical strategies Churchill employs, but also to understand the broader effects of these strategies Winston Churchill uses on social perception, moral judgment and collective behavior during times of crisis. By analyzing how Churchill's speech intended to shape social reality, this study highlights the ways political leaders can mobilize a nation and define shared values under extreme uncertainty.

Furthermore, this research addresses a gap in existing literature by combining classical rhetorical analysis with a metaphorical approach. While much scholarship has examined Churchill's persuasive abilities, less attention has been paid to how Churchill's rhetoric constructs social reality. This thesis seeks to bridge that gap by examining both the stylistic and social dimensions of his speech.

Finally, the study provides insights into the continuing relevance of crisis rhetoric. Understanding how language shapes perception, responsibility and national unity during historical crises can inform analyses of modern political communication, demonstrating the enduring power of rhetorical strategies to guide collective thought and action.

Accordingly, this thesis seeks to answer the following research question:

1. *What rhetorical strategies does Winston Churchill use in the speech "We Shall Fight on the Beaches" to legitimize his political leadership and strengthen national unity during World War II?*
2. *In what ways did Churchill's literary background and influences shape the rhetorical style and persuasive force of the speech?*
3. *How does the speech exemplify crisis rhetoric, and what role does language play in constructing social norms, public perception, and collective morale during wartime?*

## 2. Previous Research

Previous studies on Churchill have mainly focused on his leadership and rhetorical skill, highlighting how he used language to communicate complex political realities persuasively and emotionally (Patterson, 2021). This study will show that rhetoric does more than persuade, it also helps shape social reality, influencing how audiences understand their responsibilities, roles, and collective identity.

Maguire (2014) analysed the speech "We Shall Fight on the Beaches", but focused less on how it affected social reality, collective identity, and moral norms during a crisis. Research in cognitive linguistics, such as Boroditsky (2017), shows that language including metaphor and grammar can shape moral reasoning and perceptions of agency, threat, and responsibility, providing a useful lens for analysing Churchill's wartime rhetoric.

Other studies of rhetorical text demonstrate how ethos, pathos, and logos work as central tools of persuasion (Mårlind & Percival, 2013), while research on Churchill's oratory highlights the personal, historical, and stylistic factors behind his effectiveness (Adler, 2012). Beyond classical rhetoric, philosophical and social theories offer insight into the social effects of language. Cassirer, for example, shows how symbolic forms like language and myth help humans interpret and act in the world, and Castoriadis extends this idea to society, emphasizing that social norms and collective meanings are actively created. These perspectives suggest that rhetoric does more than persuade it helps shape social reality, identity, and moral frameworks (Rosengren, 2024).

Research on Primacy and Recency Effects, originally introduced by Crowder (1976), describes how audiences tend to remember information presented at the beginning or the end of a sequence. While Crowder focused on memory in general, more recent research has explored its application in business contexts, showing how presentation order influences audience attention and recall (Murphy, Hofacker & Mizerski, 2017:523–524).

## 3. Theoretical Framework and Key Concepts

### 3.1 Classical Rhetoric

This analysis draws on Aristotle's concepts of ethos, pathos, and logos. Ethos refers to the speaker's credibility and trustworthiness, demonstrating to the audience that they possess knowledge and can be relied upon. Pathos concerns the emotional impact of the speech, showing how the speaker can evoke feelings such as hope, fear, pride, or determination. Logos emphasizes reasoning and logic, employing evidence, examples, and structured arguments to persuade the audience that the speaker's claims are rational and well-founded. These three work together: if the audience trusts the speaker (ethos), they are more likely to accept the arguments (logos), and emotions (pathos) make the message more powerful (Lutske & Henggeler, 2009; St. Louis Community College Writing Center n.d.).

For ethos, it is important to show both knowledge and concern for the audience. Aristotle called this goodwill. The speaker should demonstrate that they understand the situation and can make good judgements. They should also show that they care about the audience's wellbeing, including safety, freedom, and values that matter to them. Being ethical, honest, and courageous also helps build trust (Smith, C, 1998:80–82).

Pathos functions by creating an emotional connection between the audience and the subject matter. Things that are close to the audience, such as events that happen nearby, or affect them or their loved ones feel stronger. Using stories or vivid images helps people feel involved and care more about what is said. Aristotle noted that emotions exist in opposing pairs, like fear and confidence, or anger and calm. A good speaker guides the audience to feel the right mix of emotions, not too much to overwhelm them, but not too little either (Smith, C, 1998:83–88). Logos rely on clear reasoning. Speakers often start with specific examples and then draw general conclusions. They also use common patterns of argument, called topoi (Aristotle's word for established patterns of reasoning). Using clear and logical arguments helps the audience understand and accept the message, this makes arguments more persuasive (Smith, C, 1998:89–94).

Style and delivery are also very important. Style is about the words and how they are chosen using clear, simple, and correct language. Metaphors and comparisons make ideas easier to understand and remember, as long as they fit the point the speaker wants to make. Delivery is about how the speech is given: voice, tone, rhythm, and gestures help make the message clearer and more powerful (Smith, C, 1998:97–99).

A well constructed speech consists of four essential parts, each serving a distinct purpose in guiding the audience through the message. The introduction aims to capture attention and introduce the main ideas of the speech. This opening sets the tone and prepares the audience for what is to follow. Next, the narration provides context, outlines the case and makes the subject matter relevant to the audience. It situates the argument within a framework that listeners can understand and relate to. The argument section presents the pros and cons of the topic, employing appeals to ethos, pathos, and logos to persuade the audience effectively. Finally, the epilogue, or conclusion, reinforces the speaker's credibility and evokes the appropriate emotions. Using ethos, pathos, and logos together, with clear style and careful delivery, helps a speaker communicate clearly, persuade the audience, and make the message memorable.

## 3.2 Rhetorical strategy

A rhetorical strategy refers to the deliberate choices a speaker makes in order to achieve a persuasive effect. This includes the selection of linguistic devices, structural patterns, stylistic features and emotional appeals that work together to influence how an audience interprets a message. Rhetorical strategies may involve appeals to ethos, pathos and logos, metaphorical framing, repetition, contrast, rhythm, imagery, and narrative positioning. In rhetorical theory, strategies are understood not only as techniques for persuasion but also as tools that construct social meaning and guide how audiences understand political events (Ekeman et al., 2025). Rhetoric is everywhere and is not only informative or entertaining communication, rhetorical communication seeks to persuade. Rhetorical functions as a strategic tool for navigating uncertainty, shaping perception and influencing both self and others. By engaging emotion and decision making, rhetoric allows humans to cope with an irrational world and convey complex truth when logic alone is incomplete (Smith, C, 1998: 3-5).

## 3.3 Metaphors

Discourse analysis emphasizes the role of language in constructing reality, establishing norms, and shaping power relations. The focus here is on: social norms and categories: “we” vs. “they” (the enemy). Norms and common knowledge: which actions and values are perceived as self-evident. Possibility for alternative perspectives: how the speech limits pessimism and surrender: how language contributes to the nation’s self-image and history. This thesis will be using a metaphorical analysis to understand how Winston Churchill uses metaphors as “we” vs “the enemy” to shape the view on Nazi Germany (Svensson, P. 2019:62).

The analysis of metaphors can understand how Churchill shapes individuals to see themselves as different roles in the war and shape courage. With metaphors the thesis contributes to analyzing how Churchill, through his speech, constructs social order and legitimizes political leadership. Research on metaphor and cognition demonstrates that metaphors do not merely make language more vivid but actively structure how people think, reason, and make moral judgments (Boroditsky, 2017). By mapping abstract or complex phenomena onto familiar source domains, metaphors guide perception, agency and responsibility.

In crisis contexts, such metaphorical framing becomes particularly powerful, as it offers cognitive clarity under conditions of uncertainty. Rhetorical theorist Michael Osborn identifies three key features of archetypal metaphors. First, they are widely recognized and easily accessible to the general public. Second, they endure over time, passing from one generation to the next. Third, they are rooted in fundamental human experiences, such as life, death, or struggle, which gives them lasting resonance and meaning. In this way, rhetoric uses myths and metaphors to shape understanding and influence social reality. (Smith, C, 1998:22-23).

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) emphasize that metaphors are not merely linguistic embellishments but are fundamental to human thought and action. Metaphors exist within our conceptual system, which makes them expressible in language. For example, the conceptual metaphor argument is war demonstrates how we structure argumentation as a battle: we “defend positions,” and “attack weak points.” This framework shapes not only how we talk about arguments but also how we perceive and engage in them (Lakoff et al, 1980:3-9).

## 3.4 Social reality

Social reality is the reality that humans collectively create through their actions and interactions, where norms, structures, and roles emerge in coordination with others (Collin, 1997:16-18). Political rhetoric shapes this social reality by influencing how people perceive events, define shared goals, and organize themselves in times of crisis. Language thus becomes not merely a tool of communication, but an active force in constructing social order. Social reality is not simply the outcome of human actions, it emerges from patterns of interaction that become stable and acquire independent status as a social framework. Furthermore, it can be constructed through shared thought, discourse, and collective belief, as exemplified by concepts like money, whose value exists because people collectively accept it.

This aligns with the social construction of reality proposed by Berger and Luckmann (1967), in which social relations and knowledge are inseparable from the cognitive and linguistic frameworks through which they are produced and maintained (Collin, 1997:18-20). Social facts differ fundamentally from natural facts in that they depend on human intentionality, meaning beliefs, desires, goals, and shared understandings directed toward the world. Unlike natural facts, social facts are not produced by isolated individuals but emerge from coordinated actions and interactions among multiple social agents. Social reality is therefore constructed collectively through intentional practices rather than through physical causation alone.

According to Searle (1995), social reality consists of institutional facts that depend on collective intentionality rather than on brute physical facts. Such facts are created through shared recognition and linguistic practices, expressed in the formula “X counts as Y in context C.” Social facts, including rights, obligations, and monetary value do not have a direct physical form but exist through relational and normative structures. This demonstrates that social reality is maintained through collective agreement and the use of language, rather than material objects alone. Political rhetoric plays a key role by shaping how people interpret events and organise collective action (Smith, 1998:23).

## 3.5 How the theories complements each other

Aristotle's ideas on rhetoric and metaphor approach political speech from different angles, but together they offer a more complete way of understanding how such speeches work. When combined, they enable a deeper understanding of both the persuasive techniques used in the speech and the broader social meaning created through language.

Aristotle’s concepts of ethos, pathos, and logos examine the ways a speaker can persuade an audience. This framework allows us to identify the strategies Churchill employed to establish credibility, appeal to emotions, and construct logical arguments in a time of crisis. At the same time, classical rhetoric primarily addresses the principles of persuasion and does not fully explain how language can shape social norms, collective identities, or social reality itself.

A metaphorical analysis broadens the perspective by exploring the metaphors that influence how people understand and emotionally relate to events, such as the distinction between “we” vs “them.” Through metaphors, Churchill transforms abstract political events into emotionally meaningful narratives, making the war comprehensible and morally charged for the public. Metaphors do not merely describe reality; they shape how people perceive, feel, and act. As Gergen (1999:31) suggests, metaphors can be seen as invitations to play and experiment with new ways of thinking and interacting (Svensson, 2019:64).

When Aristotle's rhetoric is combined with metaphor analysis, we see that rhetorical strategies are not only tools for persuasion but also mechanisms for constructing social reality. Political rhetoric shapes how people collectively perceive events, define shared goals, and organise themselves in response to crises. By appealing to emotions, authority, and logic, a political leader structures how people should feel, whom they should trust, and what actions are considered legitimate or illegitimate. In this sense, rhetoric actively participates in the creation and stabilization of social order.

This theoretical perspective is crucial for understanding Churchill's wartime speech. In "We Shall Fight on the Beaches," rhetoric not only mobilises emotional strength and national unity but also constructs a particular social reality: one in which Britain is morally right, existentially threatened, and collectively responsible for resistance.

Churchill creates a clear division between “we” and “the enemy,” a metaphorical boundary that shapes how the British population interprets both themselves and Nazi Germany. Through this construction, courage becomes a social norm, surrender becomes unthinkable, and resistance is framed as the only option.

# 4. Method

## 4.1 Research Design and Qualitative Approach

This thesis is designed as a qualitative case study, using Winston Churchill's speech as the main empirical material and applying both rhetorical and discourse analysis as the primary methods. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the aim is to understand the strategies, functions, and effects of language use, rather than to measure or quantify its impact. The rhetorical analysis will focus on ethos, pathos, and logos, while the discourse analysis will examine how language constructs social order, norms, and collective identity.

## 4.2 Material

According to Teorell and Svensson (2007:92), qualitative studies do not need to rely on interviews or questionnaires. Other types of material can be analysed, such as speeches, documents, public texts, statistics, or previous research. Based on this, Winston Churchill's speech "We Shall Fight on the Beaches" (Churchill, 1940) constitutes the central empirical material of this thesis.

In addition to the primary speech, both primary and secondary sources are used to provide historical, rhetorical, and biographical context. Primary sources also include Churchill's own writings and autobiographical works (e.g., My Early Life), which provide insight into his self-perception, stylistic development, and reflections on political events.
Secondary sources consist of research literature on classical rhetoric, discourse analysis (Svensson, 2019), and biographical accounts (e.g., Liljegren, 2014), which together offer a deeper understanding of Churchill's leadership, rhetorical strategies, and the political circumstances surrounding the speech.

To complement these, literature discussing Churchill's family background, particularly biographies on his father, Lord Randolph Churchill are included to provide context on potential influences shaping Churchill's rhetorical voice and political identity.

Furthermore, one relevant document published by the International Churchill Society is used, as it offers direct insight into Churchill's rhetorical thinking: The Scaffolding of Rhetoric (Churchill, 1897). The sources support the analysis of Churchill's stylistic techniques such as repetition, rhythm, metaphor, and imagery. Historical background material on the Dunkirk evacuation and the wartime context is also included to interpret how the speech's discourse functioned at a moment of crisis.

In addition, theoretical literature from cognitive linguistics and social philosophy is used as an analytical framework rather than as empirical material. Works by Boroditsky (2017), Cassirer, Castoriadis (Rosengren, 2024) and Collin (1997) are employed to interpret how language and metaphor contribute to the construction of social reality, collective identity, and moral frameworks within the speech.

References clarify the type of materials used (primary/secondary, published/unpublished, and online sources) and acknowledge certain limitations of the dataset

## 4.3 Selection and Procedure

The analysis is conducted in three interrelated stages, combining classical rhetorical analysis with metaphor-based discourse analysis.
First, the speech is examined using Aristotle's rhetorical framework in order to identify appeals to ethos, pathos, and logos. This involves close reading of the speech to identify how Churchill establishes credibility, evokes emotional responses, and presents logical arguments in relation to the wartime situation.

Second, a metaphor-oriented analysis is applied. Particular attention is given to recurring metaphorical constructions and categorizations, especially the distinction between "we" and "the enemy". These linguistic choices are analysed as discourse strategies that construct social norms, moral boundaries, and collective identity. The analysis focuses on how courage, resistance, and unity are framed as self-evident and morally necessary, while surrender and pessimism are illegitimate.

Third, the rhetorical strategies identified are interpreted in relation to their broader social and political function. Drawing on perspectives from cognitive linguistics and social theory, the analysis examines how language not only persuades but also contributes to the construction of social reality, collective morale, and political legitimacy during crisis situations.

Boroditsky, Cassirer, Castoriadis and Searle integrate perspectives from cognitive linguistics and theories of social reality. Rather than treating these theories as illustrative references, they are used as analytical tools to explain how Churchill's rhetoric structures perception, moral judgment, and collective norms.

In addition, Churchill's early essay The Scaffolding of Rhetoric is used as a supplementary analytical lens to contextualize his stylistic choices. Concepts such as correctness of diction, rhythm, accumulation of argument and analogy are employed to interpret how Churchill's rhetorical practice aligns with his own theoretical understanding of effective oratory.

Together, these analytical steps make it possible to examine both the persuasive techniques used in the speech and their role in shaping social meaning, national unity, and political authority.

## 4.4 Winston Churchill's background

Winston Churchill was born in 1874 in England and was educated at Harrow School and the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst (Winston Churchill Organisation, n.d.). After a brief military career, he entered Parliament in 1900 as a Conservative Member of Parliament. Over the following decades, he held several high-ranking positions in both Liberal and Conservative governments. At the outbreak of the Second World War, Churchill was appointed First Lord of the Admiralty which is the office he held in the beginning of WW1 (1911-1915), and in May 1940 he became Prime Minister and Minister of Defence, a position he held until 1945 and later again between 1951 and 1955.
In addition to his political career, Churchill was a writer. His first book, The Story of the Malakand Field Force, was published in 1898, marking the beginning of a lifelong engagement with writing, history, and narrative construction.

His literary achievements were later recognised when he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1953 where the reason statement was "for his mastery of historical and biographical writing and for his outstanding oratory in defence of human values".

Churchill's rhetorical development was shaped by both personal background and deliberate self training. He was strongly influenced by classical literature, particularly Shakespeare, as well as by historical narratives and contemporary writers such as H.G. Wells.

His political worldview was also influenced by his father, Lord Randolph Churchill, a prominent but ultimately unsuccessful politician. In his biography of his father, Churchill reflects on Lord Randolph's dramatic rise and fall, interpreting it as the logical outcome of his character, political contradictions, and uncompromising positions (Churchill, 1906:199–200). These experiences contributed to Churchill's acute awareness of political success, failure, and public perception.

Churchill did not regard rhetorical ability as a gift you got but as a skill developed through effort, discipline, and preparation. A formative incident early in his parliamentary career illustrates this view. As a young and inexperienced Member of Parliament, Churchill once spoke spontaneously in the House of Commons without a prepared manuscript. During the speech, he lost his train of thought and was forced to sit down in embarrassment. This failure became decisive for his future rhetorical practice.
From that moment onward, Churchill never delivered a speech without preparation. He began writing his speeches in full, word for word, developing a personal manuscript technique in which pauses, emotional emphasis, rhythm, and even humour were carefully marked. Line breaks were used to indicate rhythm, and speeches were rehearsed extensively. Writing thus became an integral part of Churchill's rhetorical craft. Churchill's rhetorical effectiveness was the result of deliberate practice, intensive study of exemplary speakers, and systematic preparation rather than natural talent alone. He consciously reused expressions, stylistic devices, and argumentative structures that he had previously found effective.

One well known example is the formulation "Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few," a rhetorical figure inspired by Shakespeare's Henry V (Adler, 2013:25–27). Such examples illustrate how Churchill adapted literary and historical sources into modern political rhetoric.

Despite his later reputation as a master orator, Churchill’s rhetoric did not always achieve immediate success. At various stages of his career, public mistrust limited the persuasive power of his speeches, partly due to his controversial political actions, including changing parties twice. This demonstrates that rhetorical effectiveness is contingent upon historical context and political credibility, not only on linguistic skill. Nevertheless, Churchill’s ability to articulate ideas through striking metaphors and memorable formulations played a crucial role in his political comeback in the 1920s and later in mobilising British and American resistance during the Second World War.

Although Churchill became one of the most rhetorically accomplished political speakers of the twentieth century, there is little evidence that his rhetorical development was grounded in formal study of classical rhetorical theory. In his own writings, he rarely refers explicitly to figures such as Aristotle or to systematic rhetorical doctrine (Adler, 2013:101). Instead, his engagement with rhetoric was primarily practical. He learned through extensive reading of historically significant speeches, observation of political practice, and continuous refinement of his own style.

Nevertheless, Churchill's rhetorical practice aligns closely with classical rhetorical principles. His speeches display structured argumentation, repetition, accumulation of arguments, metaphorical framing, and rhythmic balance.

### 4.4.1 The Scaffolding of Rhetoric

This convergence becomes explicit in his early essay The Scaffolding of Rhetoric, written when he was twenty-two years old which was more of a checklist for Churchill when he conducted a speech. Although unfinished and unpublished during his lifetime, the essay outlines core elements of effective rhetoric, including correctness of diction, rhythm, accumulation of argument, analogy, frontier wars and a tendency to wild extravagance of language. In the unpublished essay Churchill mentions the importance of oratory, Churchill assumed that mastery of oratory conferred a power exceeding even greater than that of a great king (Chrchill, 1897).

### 1. Correctness of Diction

Churchill emphasizes that the choice of words must be precise and convey the exact meaning intended. He argues that rhetoric relies on "the best possible word" to express thoughts clearly and fully. Short, familiar words can have deep emotional impact because they are deeply rooted in shared language and experience, making them immediately understandable to a wide audience.

## 2. Rhythm

Churchill describes how oratory benefits from a rhythmic quality: long, sonorous sentences balanced phrasing almost like music. This rhythm engages the audience's attention, makes phrases memorable, and intensifies emotional effects.

## 3. Accumulation of Argument

Churchill argues that the most effective speeches present facts and images in a series that builds. Each part of the argument builds on the previous one, gradually leading to a clear conclusion. Each element adds momentum, guiding the audience to a point where agreement feels inevitable.

## 4. Analogy

Churchill sees analogies as among the most "formidable weapons" of rhetoric because they connect complex or abstract ideas to familiar ones, making them more comprehensible and persuasive.

## 5. Frontier wars

Churchill draws on his experiences from the British colonial wars, particularly in India and the Northwest Frontier. He analyzes the rhetoric used during these conflicts to demonstrate how speech and narrative techniques can highlight courage, moral authority, and strategic action. Through these examples, he illustrates principles of effective argumentation, dramatic presentation, and persuasive language, which later influenced his political speeches

## 6. A tendency to wild extravagance of language

Churchill notes that English oratory often uses exaggerated, emotionally charged language to express intense feelings and principles. Examples include Pitt's speech on the freedom of Englishmen and Bryan's "cross of gold" speech. Such language channels audience enthusiasm, turning phrases into symbols of collective identity, while the speaker's own passion maintains balance. Effective oratory, Churchill argues, combines rhythm, vivid imagery, and accumulation of arguments in a way few can master. This shows how emotional intensity and stylistic flourish in speeches can unite audiences, legitimize authority, and shape social norms.

## 4.5 Usage of Artificial Intelligence

Artificial Intelligence has been utilised as a supplementary tool throughout the writing process, primarily for the purpose of receiving feedback and suggestions related to linguistic accuracy, structural coherence, and overall clarity of the text.

## 4.6 Validity and Reliability

This thesis will contribute by using some references from Winston Churchill's own books. These sources are critically examined, as Churchill's writings reflect his personal perspective. It is important to note that Churchill was often quite self-confident, which may influence how events and opinions are presented in his works.

Additionally, this study will use books about his father. These sources may also be biased, as author`s interpretations and perspectives can influence how historical events and personal characteristics are portrayed. To address these limitations, Churchill's own writings are not treated as objective accounts of historical reality, but as rhetorical and self representational texts. They are therefore analysed in relation to external historical research and secondary sources in order to identify consistencies, contrasts, and rhetorical positioning.

Similarly, biographical works concerning Lord Randolph Churchill are used primarily to provide contextual background rather than definitive psychological explanations. By comparing multiple sources and interpretations, this study seeks to reduce the influence of individual author bias and strengthen the analytical reliability.

# 5. Analysis of Churchill's rhetoric

Political rhetoric in crisis situations thus functions on two levels simultaneously. On the rhetorical level, it persuades through ethos, pathos, and logos. On the discourse level, it shapes collective identity, moral frameworks. Churchill's speech exemplifies how linguistic strategies can create a shared worldview that unites a population, stabilises public morale, and legitimises political authority. His speech does not only instruct the population what to do, it establishes who they are as a nation defined by endurance, sacrifice, and unbreakable resolve. Winston Churchill's speech "we shall fight on the beaches" was delivered in parliament June 4th 1940. The speech is divided into 20 sections, and in the references there will be an indication which section is being cited.

## 5.1 Coding of rhetorical elements

### 5.1.1 Analysis of Ethos

Winston Churchill faced significant challenges in establishing ethos at the time of delivering the "We shall fight on the beaches" speech. He had only been prime minister for a few weeks, and many in Parliament and the public were initially skeptical of his leadership, partly because he had switched political parties twice before and was not the first choice for the role. This meant that his personal reputation and prior political achievements provided limited immediate credibility. In a crisis situation it is more important to show legitimacy through shared responsibility. To overcome this, Churchill positioned himself not merely as an individual leader but as a representative of the nation's collective resolve. By using the inclusive "we" in statements like

"*We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender*," (Churchill, 1940:20)

In ethos it is also important to have wisdom, this establishes your authority even more. Churchill is famous for double checking his statistics to see that the right information contained in the speech, which helps with Churchill's ethos because it establishes that Churchill has a good knowledge and judgement for the situation.

This aligns with logos as logos reinforces the logical foundation of his arguments. By combining moral character and goodwill with rational evidence, Churchill appears not only courageous, but also competent and trustworthy.

This fusion of ethos and logos strengthens the persuasive force of the speech, as audiences are more likely to accept emotional appeals when they are supported by credible reasoning and factual reliability. Once ethos was established, it allowed his logical and emotional appeals (logos and pathos) to resonate more powerfully, enabling the speech to unify and mobilize both Parliament and the public.

### 5.1.2 Analysis of Pathos

Churchill establishes pathos and begins the speech by emphasizing the seriousness of the situation at Dunkirk, evoking fear to justify the decision to withdraw and evacuate. However, this fear is carefully managed and gradually transformed into hope and determination. Churchill frames resistance as both possible and necessary. Through emotional appeals Churchill mobilizes courage, resilience and national pride. Statements such as these heighten the sense of danger but are immediately counterbalanced by language that presents resistance as both inevitable and morally required. By combining rhythmic repetition with clear calls to action, Churchill prevents fear from becoming overwhelming and channels it into collective resolve. Churchill turns anxiety into courage and motivates the nation to unite in the face of crisis.

### 5.1.3 Analysis of Logos

Although Churchill's speech is emotionally charged, it also demonstrates clear logical reasoning. Churchill establishes logos by framing resistance not just as a moral duty.

Through repeated statements of determination, such as

"*We shall fight on the beaches… we shall never surrender*" (Churchill, 1940:20),

Churchill constructs a logical argument in which surrender is presented as both impractical and unacceptable.

The structure of Churchill's argument reinforces this reasoning: He outlines the growing threats, contrasts British determination with the enemy's power, and highlights Britain's resources and allies. By presenting the crisis, shortages, and enemy strength, Churchill makes resistance appear as the only choice.

Churchill begins the speech by presenting the facts of the situation in Dunkirk and the broader Allied context. For example:

"*…However, the German eruption swept like a sharp scythe around the right and rear of the Armies of the north. Eight or nine armoured divisions, each of about four hundred armoured vehicles of different kinds, but carefully assorted to be complementary and divisible into small self-contained units, cut off all communications between us and the main French Armies. It severed our own communications for food and ammunition…*" (Churchill, 1940:2)

By providing these detailed facts, Churchill justifies the retreat as a strategic necessity rather than a failure and prepares the audience to accept and support a difficult decision. This accumulation of evidence aligns with what is described in The Scaffolding of Rhetoric: Persuasive speeches combine facts and images to guide the audience to a clear conclusion.

### 5.1.4 Analysis of Logos and Ethos

At the same time, Churchill combines logos with ethos and goodwill. For example:

"*Every morn brought forth a noble chance, and every chance brought forth a noble knight, deserve our gratitude, as do all the brave men who… continue ready to give life and all for their native land*" (Churchill, 1940:13).

This passage highlights the honor and sacrifice of soldiers, positioning Churchill as a leader who acknowledges and concerns the audience. This aligns with goodwill. It also implicitly appeals to logos, showing that these sacrifices are rationally justified: the survival of the nation outweighs individual loss. Churchill's use of statistics and factual details reinforces both the moral and logical legitimacy of his decisions.

In combining emotional appeals with logical reasoning and moral authority, Churchill's speech persuades the audience that resistance is both the ethical and rational choice, strengthening his leadership and uniting the nation under a shared sense of purpose.

Winston Churchill starts the speech discussing the situation at Dunkirk, detailing the challenges faced by the British and French armies. Churchill concludes the speech with what is now widely remembered as the iconic declaration: "*We shall fight on the beaches… we shall never surrender.*" Research on the Primacy and Recency Effects shows that audiences are most likely to remember information presented at the beginning or the end of a sequence (Murphy et al., 2017:523-524). By placing this declaration at the ending of the speech called recency effect, Churchill ensured that it would leave a lasting impression.

## 5.2 Analysis of metaphors

On a discourse level, Churchill uses metaphors and categorization to construct social reality. The distinction between "we" (the British) and "the enemy" (Nazi Germany) establishes a moral and existential boundary between good and evil. "We" are presented as brave, united, and responsible, whereas the enemy represents threat and aggression. Winston describes Nazi Germany as "*enemy*" ten times in "*We shall fight on the beaches*". This strategy is common in crisis or wartime, this metaphor strategy is used to try and influence people's moral compass. Wartime often challenges our moral inner compass. By framing the opposing country as seen as "the enemy" we can facilitate the immoral actions. This metaphor draws on a familiar image associated with harvesting and death, transforming military movement into an almost natural catastrophe. As Boroditsky (2017) argues, such metaphorical mappings structure how agency and responsibility are perceived. By portraying the enemy as an impersonal or unstoppable force, Churchill simplifies moral judgment and reinforces the necessity of resistance.

Metaphorical expressions such as "*we shall never surrender*" transform abstract wartime events into a morally charged narrative framework. This not only influences emotions but also shapes how individuals perceive their roles: courage becomes a social norm, and passivity or fear is morally unacceptable.

”…*The grip of gestapo…”* (Churchill,1940:20)

Though a grip is something physical the metaphor here is that the grip is something controlling and oppressive, this highlights that Nazi Germany is something that oppresses and tries to control Europe.

”*...We shall go to the end…*” (Churchill,1940:20)

The end is not specified but demonstrates a total endurance and soldiers capability.

”*...Defend our lands, whatever the cost may be…*” (Churchill,1940:20)

Churchill highlights that the land stands for freedom, self independence and the British identity. The cost that Churchill talks about is death of soldiers, human suffering and sacrifices. Churchill demonstrates that the cost is necessary to retain freedom from Nazi Germany.

”…*Ride out the storm of the war...*” (Churchill,1940:20).

Here, the storm metaphor emphasizes the chaos and danger of war, while suggesting the need for controlled resilience.

As Boroditsky (2017) highlights, language structures how people perceive responsibility and group identity, demonstrating how Churchill's rhetoric actively constructs social reality rather than merely describing it. Rather than describing military movements in technical or strategic terms, he repeatedly frames them through familiar and embodied imagery. One of the most striking examples is the description of the German advance as “*a sharp scythe*” cutting through Allied forces. This metaphor draws on associations with death and inevitability, converting an abstract military maneuver into an almost natural catastrophe. In doing so, the enemy’s actions are presented as both ruthless and destructive, while also appearing impersonal and relentless.

By portraying the enemy as a natural or mechanical force rather than a rational actor, Churchill simplifies the moral landscape, leaving little room for ambiguity or negotiation. In this context, resistance is no longer merely one possible course of action; it is framed as the only morally defensible response to an overwhelming and destructive threat.

Resistance is no longer framed as one political option among others, but as the only morally legitimate response to an overwhelming and destructive force.

The Shakespearean influence is most visible in Churchill's use of elevated, archetypal metaphors and moral dualism. Shakespeare often portrays conflict as an existential struggle, exploring how characters grapple with moral choices, personal duty, and the consequences of action in moments of crisis (Pandey, 2023). Similarly, Churchill's repeated imagery of struggle, endurance, and unyielding resistance transforms the war into a moral drama rather than a series of military events.

Expressions such as "we shall never surrender" function less as strategic statements and more as performative declarations of identity, echoing Shakespearean soliloquies in which language itself creates resolve and character. The use of rhythmic repetition and parallel structure further reinforces this dramatic quality, turning resistance into a matter of honor and moral destiny (Britland et al, 2019).

In contrast, some of Churchill's metaphors echo themes found in H.G. Wells' writing, where modern warfare and technological power are often depicted as impersonal and overwhelming forces. Wells emphasizes scale, machinery, and inevitability, portraying conflict in a mechanized, almost dehumanized way. Similarly, Churchill uses metaphors such as the German advance as "a sharp scythe" and references to armoured divisions and air power, which convey the enormity and relentlessness of the threat. While Wells writes fictionally, Churchill's language draws on a comparable sense of overwhelming force to communicate the severity of the situation to his audience (Baxter, 2007). The enemy is framed not as a collection of individuals but as a vast, mechanical force, aligning with Wells' vision of industrialized war as a threat to civilization itself.

## 5.3. How Churchill's rhetoric strategies reshape social reality

As established in the social reality framework, social reality is not a given but is collectively constructed through shared meanings, discourse, and coordinated action (Collin, 1997). Political rhetoric plays a central role in this process by shaping how events are interpreted, which goals are perceived as legitimate, and how individuals understand their roles during times of crisis. Churchill's "We shall fight on the beaches" speech exemplifies how rhetoric actively constructs social reality rather than merely describing wartime events. Churchill uses his language to shape how people see right and wrong, setting expectations for action. The repeated use of collective pronouns such as "we" constructs a shared national identity and positions resistance as a collective obligation rather than an individual choice.

In line with Berger and Luckmann's (1967) view that reality is produced and maintained through shared discourse, Churchill's speech creates a stable interpretive framework in which courage, endurance, and sacrifice become taken-for-granted social norms. The speech also demonstrates how social facts differ from natural facts. The threat posed by Nazi Germany is not presented merely as a military situation but as a moral and existential condition that demands a particular response. By framing resistance as necessary and surrender as unacceptable, Churchill constructs a social fact in which continued fighting "counts as" moral duty within the wartime context.

Searle (1995) describes institutional facts as meanings that people collectively recognize and uphold through language and shared understanding. Churchill's narrative framing further demonstrates that identical events can be interpreted in different ways depending on the discourse surrounding them. Although the evacuation from Dunkirk might have been perceived as a defeat, Churchill's rhetoric redefines its meaning by pointing out discipline, sacrifice, and future resolve. In doing so, the speech shows that social reality does not emerge solely from actions themselves, but from the narratives that give those actions significance (Smith, 1998). Churchill's rhetorical strategies help people understand the crisis in a shared way, which allows them to act together and keep society functioning even in a very uncertain time. Cassirer's theory suggests that language helps us make sense of the world, turning experience into something we can understand and find meaning in.

Cassirer argues that humans do not encounter reality directly but through symbolic systems such as language, myth, and narrative, which organize experience and assign value. Cassirer argues that the whole system of human activity argues that it is because of meaning making as a signal. In this sense, Churchill's rhetoric provides a symbolic frame that structures how the war is perceived: not as a contingent political conflict, but as an existential struggle between endurance and collapse. This symbolic framing is further illuminated by Cornelius Castoriadis's concept of social imaginary significations, which holds that societies actively create their own norms, values, and collective meanings. Social order is sustained not primarily through coercion, but through shared beliefs about what is natural, necessary, and morally obligatory. Churchill's speech contributes to this process by redefining the social imaginary of wartime Britain. According to Cornelius Castoriadis`s concept of the CIS (social imaginary significations), societies actively create and sustain a network of meanings that shapes what is perceived as real and possible within that social life. In Churchill's speech, he participates in this process by framing resistance, courage, and national unity as moral duties, effectively shaping the British social imaginary so that continued defiance against Nazi Germany becomes perceived as both necessary and inevitable.

To understand how Churchill's rhetoric shapes social reality, the analysis can be structured around five themes that organize and influence social perception (Rosengren, 2024):

1. Biological: Churchill engages the audience's embodied experience, evoking fear, courage, and endurance through vivid descriptions of danger and sacrifice. For example, his repeated use of "we shall fight" channels both anxiety and determination, appealing directly to the audience's emotional and physiological responses.

2. Technological: Churchill frames the enemy as a mechanical and overwhelming force, such as in his description of the German advance as "a sharp scythe" cutting through Allied forces. This aligns with the technological theme, portraying the enemy as impersonal and unstoppable, which heightens the sense of threat and the necessity of resistance.

3. Symbolic: Churchill constructs a shared social reality using metaphors and symbols. Recurrent imagery like “we shall never surrender” transforms abstract wartime events into morally charged narratives, positioning courage, resilience, and resistance as central social norms.

4. Radical: Churchill elevates the moral and existential significance of the conflict through imaginative and sophisticated language. His rhythmic phrasing, repetition, and references to collective heroism (e.g., “every noble chance brought forth a noble knight”) turn military events into a drama of human duty and endurance, emphasizing the stakes beyond mere strategy.

5. Autonomy and Creation: By guiding the audience through language and rhythm rather than force, Churchill reduces doubt and fosters collective adherence to social norms. At the same time, he shapes the creation of societal myths and values, defining courage, endurance, and national unity as moral imperatives. This illustrates how his rhetoric actively constructs a social framework in which resistance becomes both expected and morally necessary.

Through repetition, metaphor, and collective identification, courage, sacrifice and endurance become shared values, while surrender feels morally impossible. By repeatedly declaring “we shall fight” and “we shall never surrender,” Churchill does more than express determination. Churchill establishes resistance as a social norm and transforms capitulation into a symbolic impossibility. In Castoriadis’s terms, the speech reshapes the social imaginary by instituting a normative horizon. Churchill’s rhetoric shows that language does more than reflect social reality, it actively shapes it, turning courage into a shared duty and contributing to the preservation of social order during moments of profound uncertainty.

Lera Boroditsky’s research on linguistic relativity shows that language doesn’t just describe reality, it also shapes how people understand cause and effect, make choices and how the blame may shift through linguistics. Lera points out that metaphors and grammar shape the way we habitually think,

especially in times of uncertainty or strong emotions. During wartime, this way of using language has a strong effect, influencing how people see threats, what they feel responsible for, and how they act together.

Churchill's use of metaphors such as and the repeated framing of resistance through collective action "we shall fight" exemplify how language structures thought. By portraying the enemy as an overwhelming, almost natural force, Churchill simplifies complex political and military dynamics into cognitively accessible categories of threat and survival. This metaphorical framing reduces moral ambiguity and directs attention away from doubt or alternative interpretations, reinforcing the perception that resistance is both necessary and inevitable.

In line with Boroditsky's argument, Churchill's rhetoric shapes collective cognition by guiding how agency is distributed: the enemy appears as an impersonal force of destruction, while the British people are positioned as unified moral agents whose only rational response is endurance. Through this linguistic construction, abstract wartime realities are transformed into shared mental models that regulate emotion, judgment, and behavior, illustrating how language functions as a tool for shaping social reality rather than merely reflecting it.

Winston Churchill highlights the sacrifice of the soldiers who had lost their lives on Dunkirk, the morale to try and retreat and save the others, and show through statistics that they didn't stand a chance. This supports Boroditsky's and Cassirer's arguments that language structures how individuals interpret causality, moral judgment, and meaning.

According to Searle (1995), social reality consists of institutional facts that depend on collective intentionality rather than on physical facts. Such facts exist because people collectively recognise them and use performative language, often expressed as "X counts as Y in context C." In Churchill's "We Shall Fight on the Beaches" speech, he presents resistance, courage, and national duty as both moral and social obligations; surrender is framed as unacceptable, while fighting is portrayed as honorable.

By repeatedly declaring "*we shall fight… we shall never surrender*," Churchill uses language to establish social norms, shape a collective identity and guide perceptions of what is morally and

practically necessary. This shows how political rhetoric actively creates social reality rather than merely reflecting it (Smith, 2003).

Winston Churchill's literary background played a significant role in shaping the rhetorical style and persuasive force of his wartime speeches. Deeply influenced by English literary tradition, particularly Shakespeare and H.G. Wells, Churchill developed a sensitivity to rhythm, phrasing, and dramatic structure that is clearly reflected in We shall fight on the beaches. Churchill's speeches display carefully constructed rhythmic patterns that echo Shakespearean oratory. Rhythm functions as a central component of what Churchill himself described as the "scaffolding of rhetoric." Through long, sonorous sentences balanced by repetition and antithesis, Churchill creates a quality that sustains attention and reinforces meaning.

The famous sequence

"*we shall fight on the beaches… we shall fight in the fields and in the streets… we shall never surrender*" (Churchill,1940:20)

It demonstrates how rhythm and parallel structure intensify emotion and guide the audience toward a shared understanding. Each phrase builds on the last, creating a sense of momentum and making resistance feel both inevitable and morally significant. The rhythm and repetition help make the argument more persuasive by connecting both the audience's thinking and their emotions.

According to Smith (1998:95–97), effective style and delivery make a speech both clear and emotionally compelling. Churchill's mastery of phrasing allows complex political realities to be communicated with clarity while simultaneously producing a strong emotional impact.

By using techniques from Shakespearean drama, like elevated language and rhythmic repetition, Churchill makes his rhetoric more persuasive. These literary elements not only shape the style of the speech but also help inspire the audience, bring them together, and strengthen public morale. The speech's rhythm reinforces key ideas and turns political determination into a shared emotional experience. Using rhythm as a rhetorical framework, Churchill transforms language into a tool that aligns audience attention, emotion, and judgment into a cohesive and compelling experience.

The speech is delivered in the middle of a crisis, shaped by what has already been lost and by what may still come. Recent defeats and political tension form the background. Blame and internal

disagreement are not explored. That belongs to another time. In the present moment, the task is different. The nation must be held together. Too many alternatives, too many doubts, would weaken resolve when unity matters most. By limiting what is open to interpretation, uncertainty is reduced. Little room is left for hesitation.

The future is not described in detail, but the direction is clear: continued resistance whatever the cost. What remains unsaid allows people to move forward without being overwhelmed by fear or complexity. Silence becomes part of the message. It connects past loss, present danger, and future determination, showing how rhetoric shapes reality not only through words, but through restraint.

Equally important to Churchill's rhetoric is what he chooses not to say. Churchill avoids discussing alternative strategies, internal political disagreements or the long-term human and material costs of war. This silence is not accidental, but part of Churchill's rhetorical strategy. Crisis rhetoric depends on decisiveness and moral direction. By limiting what can be interpreted, Churchill reduces uncertainty and keeps doubt from taking hold.

In this way, silence becomes meaningful. By leaving out other perspectives, Churchill creates a sense of stability at a time when national division would have been especially dangerous. The speech does not offer the whole picture of the war. Instead, it provides a moral framework that people can act upon. This shows how rhetoric shapes reality, not only through what is said but also through what is intentionally left unsaid.

### 5.3.1 The Scaffolding of Rhetoric

A central part in what the scaffolding of rhetoric mentions and of We Shall Fight on the Beaches is Churchill's careful choice of words. He consistently uses simple, familiar language that is easy to understand, yet emotionally powerful. Expressions such as "*we shall never surrender*" and "*we shall defend our Island, whatever the cost may be*" are short and direct, but they carry deep moral meaning. Because the language is rooted in everyday speech, the message reaches a wide audience and feels shared rather than imposed. The clarity of Churchill's diction leaves little room for doubt and resistance is not presented as symbolic or optional but as absolute.

Another important element in the scaffolding of the speech is analogy. Churchill often explains complex military situations through vivid and concrete images. When he describes the German advance as "*a sharp scythe*" cutting through Allied forces, he turns an abstract military movement into something visual and immediately understandable. The image evokes associations with death and destruction which makes the threat feel both real and urgent. As Churchill himself argued, analogy is one of rhetoric's most effective tools and here it helps listeners grasp the severity of the situation without technical detail.

Taken together, these elements show how The Scaffolding of Rhetoric works in practice. Persuasion is not achieved through a single technique, but through the combined effect of clear diction, vivid imagery, and controlled emotional build-up. Churchill uses language to create structure and stability in a moment of uncertainty. In doing so, the speech not only persuades its audience but also helps shape shared values and a collective understanding of courage, duty and endurance during wartime. Churchill therefore uses his unpublished essay years later.

## 6. Conclusions

The aim of this thesis was to explore the rhetorical methods Winston Churchill used in his speech "We Shall Fight on the Beaches," focusing on how he establishes ethos, pathos, and logos and how his rhetoric shapes social reality during a crisis. Churchill's speech does more than persuade the public. It also helps people see themselves, understand what is right and recognize their duties and courage. By repeatedly using "we," along with rhythm, vivid metaphors and striking images, Churchill shows that resisting the enemy is not only right but necessary. This strengthens national unity and reinforces his role as a leader in a time of great uncertainty.

The study set out to show how Churchill uses ethos, pathos, and logos while constructing a social reality in which resistance, unity and moral duty feel natural and inevitable. The research asked:

*What rhetorical strategies does Winston Churchill use in the speech "We Shall Fight on the Beaches" to legitimize his political leadership and strengthen national unity during World War II?*

*In what ways did Churchill's literary background and influences shape the rhetorical style and persuasive force of the speech?*

*How does the speech exemplify crisis rhetoric and what role does language play in constructing social norms, public perception, and collective morale during wartime?*

The analysis shows that Churchill's speech works on multiple levels. Churchill legitimizes his leadership and unites the nation by combining ethos, pathos, and logos: he demonstrates credibility and moral authority, turns fear into courage and determination, and frames resistance as both rational and necessary. His literary influences, especially Shakespeare and H.G. Wells, shaped the speech's style through rhythm, parallel structure, and vivid metaphors. These techniques make the speech dramatic, memorable, and morally compelling. Churchill provides a clear moral framework, emphasizes collective responsibility, and reduces uncertainty in a moment of crisis.

Through language, he defines social norms, collective identity, and public expectations, showing courage, endurance, and sacrifice as moral duties, while presenting surrender as unacceptable. In doing so, his rhetoric does more than describe events; it shapes how the British people understood their role and their nation.

Churchill's rhetoric operates on two interconnected levels. On the rhetorical level, he builds trust, guides emotions like fear and pride, and structures logical arguments that make resistance seem inevitable. On the discourse level, he constructs a shared moral and social order. His repeated distinction between "we" and "the enemy" creates clear moral boundaries and stabilizes norms centered on courage, endurance, and sacrifice.

By using metaphors, rhythm, and literary techniques, Churchill turns military events into a story that unites the nation and boosts morale. This supports the idea that language does more than describe reality; it actively shapes shared meanings, social norms and institutional facts. Combining rhetorical and discourse analysis provides a deeper understanding of how political language functions during existential threats. The findings also suggest that similar strategies are still central in political communication during crises today.

It is important to acknowledge limitations. This study focuses on one speech and may not capture all of Churchill's rhetorical strategies. Audience interpretation can vary, and a full picture of how people actually received the speech would require additional research.

Still, this thesis clearly shows how Churchill used language to shape ideas of courage, duty, and national identity. Churchill's use of metaphors, rhythm, and repetition demonstrates how rhetoric can influence moral norms, public perception, and collective behavior in times of crisis. While some interpretation is subjective, the study confirms that Churchill's speech not only persuades but also actively constructs social reality, achieving the goals of this research.

The study of crisis rhetoric is not only of historical interest. With rising political tensions and global uncertainty today, Churchill's example can help us analyze how leaders use language to influence public perception and action. While there is ongoing research on the role of rhetoric in shaping public perception during crises (Örebro University, n.d.), the thesis contributes by providing a detailed analysis of Winston Churchill's speech "We Shall Fight on the Beaches."

Furthermore, the findings presented in this thesis can serve as a reference or foundation for further studies in this area.

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