

Rhetoric on Language and Truth from Modernity to Postmodernity

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Abstract	Article Info
<p>In this article, I examine the changing perspectives on language and truth when rhetoric transitions from modernity to postmodernity, revolving around the perspectives of five thinkers: John Locke, Giambattista Vico, Friedrich Nietzsche, Jacques Derrida, and Michel Foucault. To do so, I synthesize the history of rhetoric, trace a conceptualization of modernity and postmodernity, and analyze the arguments of the five thinkers from a comparative perspective. The comparative analysis suggests that Locke distinguishes between the philosophical use of language and its rhetorical (ab)use, grounding truth in sense perception. Vico expands this notion by asserting that language communicates reason and imagination, positioning truth as a synthesis of both faculties. Nietzsche challenges traditional epistemologies by viewing language as inherently metaphorical and truth as an anthropomorphic illusion. Derrida deconstructs the idea of absolute truth, emphasizing the provisional and unstable nature of language, where meaning is always deferred. Finally, Foucault situates language within power structures, arguing that truth is constructed, institutionalized, and disseminated through discourse. By tracing these conceptual shifts, this study highlights the interplay between language and truth, demonstrating how rhetorical and philosophical perspectives shift and change over time (de)establishing the human way of thinking.</p> <p><i>Keywords:</i> rhetoric, modernity, postmodernity, language, truth</p>	<p><i>Email</i> purnachandra.bhusal@gmail.com</p> <p><i>Article History</i> Received: 2025, March 12 Revised: 2025, April 22 Accepted: 2025, August 10</p> <p><i>Cite</i> Bhusal, P. C. (2025). Rhetoric on language and truth from modernity to postmodernity. <i>Gipan</i>, 7(1), 5–17. https://doi.org/10.3126/gipan.v7i1.84231</p>

Introduction

The history of rhetoric has a complex trajectory from the Classical Greek-Roman times to the present. It encountered many transitions at different historical junctures: Greek to Rome, Classical to Medieval, Medieval to Renaissance or Early Modern, and modernity to postmodernity. In one of my articles, I have already tracked the debates and dialogues on the substance or essence of rhetoric in the Greco-Roman period by delineating the loss and recovery of the fundamental essence or substance of rhetoric

(Bhusal, 2023). In this article, I will discuss the philosophical-historical transition of rhetoric from modernity to postmodernity, navigating through the concept of truth and language. The primary texts discussed in the paper are Locke’s *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Vico’s *On the Study Methods of Our Time*, Nietzsche’s “*On Truth and Lies in a Nonnormal Sense*”, Derrida’s “*Signature Event Context*,” and Foucault’s *The Order of Discourse*. All these texts have been taken from the anthology *The Rhetorical Tradition*:

Readings from Classical Times to the Present (Bizzell & Herzberg, 2001).

A Glimpse of Western Rhetoric

The history of rhetoric in the West witnesses rises, ruptures, and revamps. At best, it is understood as the art of public speaking where the speaker or orator needs to possess all the virtues, morality, ethics, and goodwill, knowledge of history, philosophy, law, and statesmanship (Aristotle, 1954; Cicero, 1875; Quintillion, 2013). Therefore, Kennedy rightly remarks, “In its origin and intention rhetoric was natural and good: it produced clarity, vigor, and beauty, and it rose logically from the conditions and qualities of the classical mind” (2015, p. 3). For Sophistic (5th and 4th century BCE), rhetorical substance relied on arguing, influencing, and winning/succeeding skills. Later, such Sophists’ notion of rhetoric was completely negated and nullified by Plato (1864, 2002), who reduced it to misguiding, manipulating, deceiving, and using false and empty language. Plato argued that rhetoric or poetic use of language cannot communicate the ideal forms. In response, Aristotle (1954) took rhetoric as a counterpart to dialectic, the art of using available means of persuasion. In succession, Cicero (1875) included invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery as the canons of rhetoric, whereas Quintilian (2013) integrated wisdom, virtue, and eloquence. Consequently, the Platonic rupture of rhetorical substance was fully recovered (Bhusal, 2023). Again, the medieval (5th to 15th century) rhetoric lost its Greco-Roman substance but got its initial stylistic/formalistic substance through *dictamen*, also known as the rhetoric of letter-writing (Camargo, 2012, Chapter 2). Later, the early modern period (15th to 17th century) revived Greco-Roman rhetorical substance. Interestingly, the eighteenth-century re-enacted the Sophists-versus-Plato phenomenon on rhetorical substance: Rene Descartes versus Giambattista Vico. In the nineteenth century, Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Sigmund Freud ruptured the rhetorical substance built on human reasoning/

rationality. Nevertheless, in the twentieth century, Mikhail Bakhtin’s utterances, Chaim Perelman’s adherence, Kenneth Burke’s identification, and Lloyd Bitzer’s situation/exigence enthusiastically recovered and revamped rhetorical substance. In this article, I am navigating through the concept of truth and language vis-à-vis modernity and postmodernity. A question that may trigger the readers of my article is the connection between rhetoric, language, and truth. However, rhetoric has been a play of language and speech since its inception. Classical rhetoric is basically about the use of language. Nevertheless, the use of language alone cannot define the potential of rhetoric. The language needs to be charged with wisdom, knowledge, truth, virtue, ethics, and justice. Thus, the changing concepts of language and truth characterize the changes in the concept of rhetoric. In this article, I review the changing perspectives about rhetoric—language and truth—when Western history transitions from modernity to postmodernity.

Methodology: Comparative Review

This review essay employs a method of comparative analysis of five different texts presented in the introduction. While reading those selected texts, following the method of coding as theorized by Saldaña (2021), I tracked the most dominant and recurring words and concepts—knowledge, language, meaning, communication, idea, philosophy, oratory, audience, art, metaphor, context, conception, perception, and rhetoric—in the selected texts. The first coding was, thus, collective coding. Then, in the second coding phase, stepping on the patterns generated from the first cycle, I generated two themes: language and truth. Hence, two dominant themes of this article are “language” and “truth”. However, I cross-validated these two themes before starting the comparative analysis by reading the selected texts again. Once the themes were confirmed, I started reading all the texts in isolation until I generated the main argument of all those texts. It

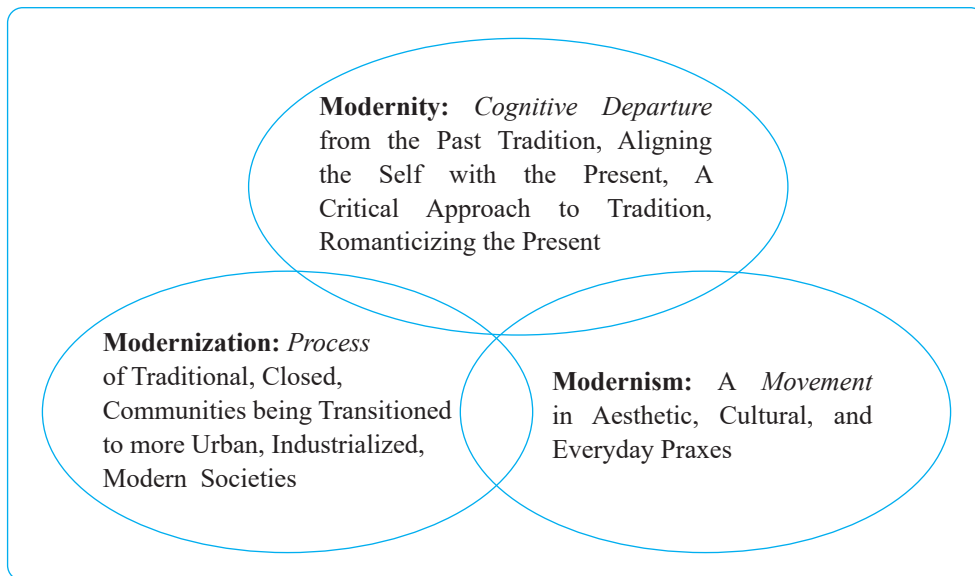
was the third cycle of coding to generate themes from individual texts. In the analysis section, all these themes of the selected texts have been presented as subtitles. Then, after generating those themes, I examined them from a comparative perspective. The comparative analysis informed me that the transition of rhetoric from modernity to postmodernity has been heavily influenced by the changing perceptions toward language and truth, the two themes generated collectively. I brought the analysis into full circle by reading, coding, and thematizing all the texts in isolation and as a corpus. Similarly, the theoretical perspectives in this article are modernity and postmodernity. In this article, I have discussed some basic tenets of modernity and postmodernity from a comparative lens and invited the readers to trace and track the transition of rhetoric from modernity to postmodernity during my analysis. Thus, this article is a comparative analysis of selected texts to trace the transition of rhetoric from modernity to postmodernity, hence the title “Rhetoric on Language and Truth from Modernity to Postmodernity.”

Conceptualizing Modernity: Narratives of Self, Truth, Reason, Progress

Modernity and postmodernity, in my understanding, are abstract conceptual frameworks or perspectives to look at the world and ourselves. There have been many discussions about the timeframe of modernity and postmodernity. However, in this article, my argument is more on conceptuality and less on temporality; I do not demarcate the period and timeframe of these two concepts as it is a never-ending debate. My primary objective in this paper is to navigate through some changing perspectives on language and truth with the transition of rhetoric from modernity to postmodernity. The historical transition of rhetoric from modernity to postmodernity marks a significant shift in perspectives, worldviews, ideologies, onto-epistemology, positionality, and subjectivity.

Scholars argue that the root of modernity goes back to the Cartesian cogito or thinking

subject (cogito ergo sum), Kantian self-reasoning (sapere aude), and the Hegelian self (Zima, 2015). Habermas (1997), one of the influential theorists of modernity, argues that modernity is a project formulated by the philosophers of the Enlightenment in eighteenth-century Europe relying on objectivating sciences, universalistic foundations of morality and law, and autonomous art. Here, terms like objectivity, universality, and autonomy sound to be the founding principles of modernity. Sometimes, what confuses people is the difference between modernity, modernism, and modernization. *Modernity* is a sense, a consciousness, a reflection that has a sense of the present. This consciousness departs from traditional norms, values, and experiences, aligning itself with novelty and newness happening at *the present*. Nevertheless, *modernization* is a process of changing or transforming traditional lifestyles and communities by utilizing scientific and technological innovations, industrialization, and urbanization. Thus, modernity is a condition of social existence that differs from all past forms of human experience, while modernization means transitioning traditional communities to modern societies (Shilliam, 2017, November 30). Here lies the nexus between modernity and modernization: “Modernity refers to social, political and economic conditions and experiences that result from modernization and capitalism” (Jerath, 2021, p. 32). In addition, another term, modernism, needs to be understood while discussing modernity. Modernism, unlike modernity and modernization, is a movement in literature, art, music, painting, culture, fashion, and the everyday life of people as a response to modernity and modernization: “the term modernism arose mainly in reference to all the artistic and cultural movements that arose primarily in response to wide-scale changes in the society on account of industrialization in nineteenth and twentieth centuries” (Jerath, 2021, p. 34). Hence, modernity, modernization, and modernism can be conceptualized as shown in the figure below:

Figure 1*Modernity, Modernization, and Modernism*

Hence, modernity, modernization, and modernism share borders even though they are conceptually different.

Conceptualizing Postmodernity

It is understood that the rhetoric of modernity started with the Enlightenment philosophy, which had confidence in sense perception and direct observation, and the reliability of the individual human subject pursuing truth. In contrast, postmodernity started a philosophical interrogation of Truth and Reality, rejecting “the notion of autonomous self as a sociolinguistic construct” (Herrick, 2009, p. 248/49). Hence, modernity and postmodernity are two distinct conceptual frameworks. Postmodernity, unlike modernity, is more liberatory, pluralistic, and polyvocal. Modernity seeks to define the self in relation to the present, thereby assuming the possibility of unity, coherence, and totality of the self. However, postmodernity is the perspective that de-establishes such coherent imagination. Hence, the rhetoric of modernity “ascribed unity, coherence and homogeneity to the concept of identity and, in this way, it ignored the heterogeneity and disparities of a number of social groups and individuals”

whereas postmodern rhetoric dismisses the universality, coherence, and equality by exposing “the particularity and contextual embeddedness of truth” (Ivic & Lakicevic, 2011, pp. 397-98). For postmodernity, coherence and unity are the grand narratives, the meta-narratives, which try to homogenize the idiosyncrasy, indeterminacy, and pluriversity of truth, identity, and language. Lyotard (1984), one of the prominent thinkers of postmodernity, writes:

Simplifying to the extreme, I define post-modern as incredulity toward metanarratives. ... the crisis of metaphysical philosophy ... The narrative function is losing its functors, its great hero, its great danger, its great voyages, its great goal ... [wherein] we do not necessarily establish stable language combinations, and the properties of the ones we do establish are not necessarily communicable (p. xxiv)

Hence, for Lyotard, postmodernity is an assimilation of doubting and interrogating the traditional notions of the communicability of Truth through language. For Lyotard, modernity is also a version of postmodernity in its episteme of

doubting and questioning the tradition. Seen in this light, postmodernity is not an age but an ethos of doubting and skepticism:

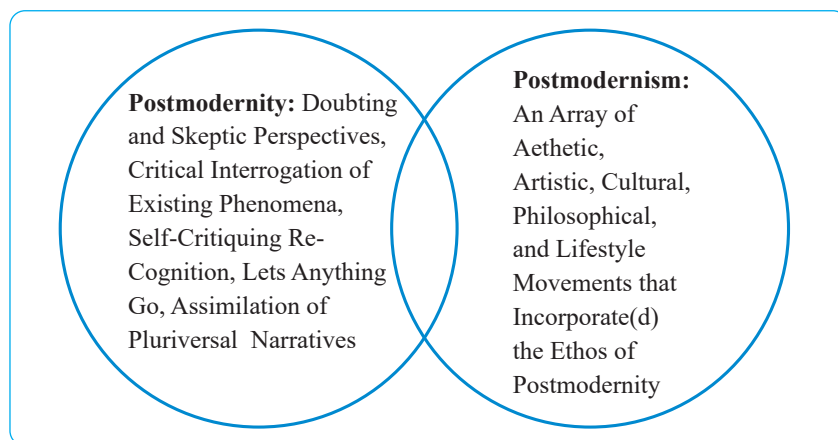
... the heart of postmodernity is doubt regarding any claims to having The Truth, then postmodernity is not a brand new phenomenon. In important respects, it is merely the latest version of skepticism. The lineage of skepticism in Western civilization goes back at least as far as the ancient Greeks (who produced the first Skeptics) and to the world weary Ecclesiastes of the Hebrew Scriptures. (Stackhouse, 2002, p. 22)

Hence, postmodernity carries the spirit of questioning, critiquing, doubting, and interrogation. Nevertheless, conceptual borderlines have been drawn between modernity and postmodernity: "Postmodernity refers to the view that institutions and ways of living characteristics of Modernity have been replaced to such a profound extent that our society is fundamentally different to the 'modern' society. In contrast, post-modernism is a term that refers to new ways of thinking about thought"

(Jerath, 2021, p. 39). It implies that the transition of rhetoric from modernity to postmodernity is a transition from absolute Language to provisional language and absolute Truth to plural truths. Like in modernity and modernism, there lies a conceptual difference between postmodernity and postmodernism. "Postmodernism is the collective array of responses to postmodernity that accept its view of things and then attempt to construct a view of the world, and perhaps an entire way of life, on that basis" (Stackhouse, 2002, p. 29). That is when the ethos of postmodernity gets articulated in various forms as a movement, that is postmodernism. It encompasses various artistic, literary, and critical practices that question established notions of truth, objectivity, and grand narratives. The tenets of postmodernity, such as doubting and skepticism, can appear in any moment of history, but postmodernism, as a movement, appeared in the mid-twentieth century. The difference between postmodernity and postmodernism can be visualized as shown in the figure below.

Figure 2

Postmodernity and/versus Postmodernism



In this context, this article attempts to track the transition of rhetoric from modernity to postmodernity with a historical and philosophical perspective, focusing on the notion of language use and truth.

From Modernity to Postmodernity: Shifting Perspective Toward Language Use

The concept of 'language' is one of the references that marks the transition of rhetoric from modernity to postmodernity. Some modern

rhetoricians criticized the rhetorical use of language almost in a Platonic way, asking for the pure or philosophical use of language. In contrast, some others took the rhetorical use of language as art. However, postmodernity takes language as a provisional tool where the binaries between use and misuse become problematic and invalid.

Thinkers at a Glance

This paper reviews the texts of five thinkers: John Locke, Giambattista Vico, Friedrich Nietzsche, Jacques Derrida, and Michel Foucault. Their discussion on the rhetoric of language and truth reflects the distinct contexts of their philosophy and time. John Locke (1632-1704) was a prominent English philosopher, physician, and political theorist. As an empiricist, he argued that the human mind is a blank sheet of paper, an empty pitcher at birth, that acquires knowledge through real, sensuous experience. Giambattista Vico (1668–1744) was an Italian philosopher and rhetorician who criticized rationalism and the Cartesian idea of thinking and doubting human self. Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) was a German philosopher whose philosophy shows a radical critique of truth, language, and meaning, paving the way for perspectivism, a genealogical critique of religion and Christianity. Jacques Derrida (1930–2004) was a French Algerian philosopher who developed the philosophy of deconstruction that challenged the logocentric or center-seeking tradition of Western philosophy, the nature of meaning, and linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure. Michel Foucault (1926–1984) was a French philosopher who primarily addressed the relationships between truth and knowledge as discursive constructions of power. It shows that these philosophers' ideas of rhetoric on language and truth have been shaped by their philosophy. At the same time, the texts of the four philosophers, except that of Locke, were not written in English but were translated into English. I acknowledge the limitations of my review of their translated texts.

Philosophical Use versus Rhetorical Use: John Locke

Locke establishes the hierarchy between the philosophical and rhetorical use of language, where he thinks that the former communicates the truth, but the latter does not. According to Corbett (1981), “Locke is quite unequivocal here in his denigration of an ornate, tendentious, ambiguous style for certain kinds of discourse” (p. 431). This means that Locke favors the philosophical use of language over the rhetorical use. Rhetorical use of language, for him, is the abuse (rather than use): “To make words serviceable to the end of communication, it is necessary, as has been said, they excite in the hearer exactly the same idea they stand for in the mind of the speaker” (Bizzell & Herzberg, 2001, p. 818). This shows that Locke is looking to communicate ideas through the philosophical use of language. Locke mentions some reasons behind the abuse of words: the gap between the words in the mouth and the ideas in the mind, the use of common words for uncommon ideas, and the unsteady use of language to change meanings or ideas. Locke argues that the rhetorical use of language contains all these defective uses of language where pure communication is never possible. Here, Locke disfavors the ornamented, metaphorical, and rhetorical use of language. Therefore, for Locke, all the artificial and figurative applications of words and eloquence “insinuate wrong ideas, move the passions, and thereby mislead the judgement” (Corbett, 1981, p. 431). Thus, Locke's perspective toward the rhetorical use of language is Platonic in nature. Like Plato, Locke was against the rhetorical use of language.

Rhetorical Language Entails Wisdom and Imagination: Vico

Unlike Locke, Vico is very positive towards the rhetorical use of language. According to Vico, poetic wisdom or rhetorical wisdom, through the creation of the imaginative universals, paves the way for the “future cultural and intellectual development of the gentile nations: ethics, morals, metaphysics, economics, geography, navigation,

politics, rhetoric, as well as mathematics and the physical sciences: that is, the arts and sciences in general". (Fontana, 2017, p. 89). Vico understands rhetorical and poetic language as a part of social epistemology; it is not an abuse, as argued by Locke. Vico further argues that the human mind has two faculties or drives: rational and imaginative. For Vico, the rhetorical use of language is a domain where imagination can flourish and champion the fullest development of the human mind. He writes: "I may add that in the art of oratory the relationship between speaker and listeners is of the essence . . . It was exactly by those points he [Cicero] was able to dominate the law courts, the Senate, and (most important of all) the Assemblies of the people" (Bizzell & Herzberg, 2001, p. 869). Locke's argument that rhetorical use of language does not appeal to the meaning or objects in the minds of the audience and therefore fails to communicate anything substantial becomes invalid in Vico. Vico argues that even rhetorical language communicates the essence and meaning thereby making changes in the outer world, referencing Cicero's oratory. In addition, for Vico, the rhetorical use of language triggers volition and activism in the audience: "The role of eloquence is to persuade; an orator is persuasive when he calls forth in his hearers the mood which he desires. Wise men induce this condition themselves by an act of volition" (p. 873). Vico further writes that a one-sided emphasis on science and reason does not produce a balanced culture: "let us equal the Ancients in the fields of wisdom and eloquence as we excel them in the domain of science" (p. 875). Hence, Locke's binary between use and abuse of language comes to be problematic in Vico. Vico validates the rhetorical use of language.

Language—Philosophical or Rhetorical—is Metaphor: Nietzsche

The Locke-Vico debate on the rhetorical use of language comes to an attack in the hand of Nietzsche. Nietzsche takes language as a metaphor, and it cannot become the vehicle of truth. According to Lisiecki (2015), "Nietzsche questions the referential stability of language by

positing that a lost 'primitive world of metaphor', the world of myth and art, has been displaced by modern, ossified metaphors that proclaim truth" (p. 256). It means the metaphoric aspect of language gets silent after it has been used for a long time. It directly responds to Locke's call for the proper use of language for communicating ideas. According to Nietzsche, the essence of language is metaphoricity, absence, and forgetfulness. Nietzsche argues that if language could communicate the truth, there would be only one language: "The various languages placed side by side show that with words it is never a question of truth, never a question of adequate expression; otherwise, there would not be so many languages" (Bizzell & Herzberg, 2001, p. 1173). Likewise, for him, language comprises "metaphors which correspond in no way to the original entities" (p. 1174). Here, the very nature of language does not distinguish whether it is the philosophical or the rhetorical use of language. Here, Nietzsche departs from Locke's call for philosophical use and aligns with Vico's validation of rhetorical use. Nevertheless, for Nietzsche, language, by its nature, is the congelation and coagulation of metaphors, a mobile army of metaphors, and an anthropomorphized metaphor, regardless of philosophical or rhetorical use. Therefore, Nietzsche marks a transition from modernity to postmodernity by questioning the nature of language.

Language Is a Provisional Communication Tool: Derrida

Derrida deconstructs the nature of language, arguing that language is the provisional tool of communication. For him pure communication is never possible; even the word 'communication' cannot 'communicate' its final meaning: "If communication possessed several meanings and if this plurality should prove to be irreducible, it would not be justifiable to define communication a priori as the transmission of meaning" (Bizzell & Herzberg, 2001, p. 1475). Here, Locke's binaries of the philosophical and rhetorical use of language come to be invalid, and Vico's call for appealing to imagination and wisdom through the rhetorical use

of language gets further expanded and extended. For Derrida, language functions through difference and deferral, meaning it is a tool but not a means of communication. Derrida further questions J.L Austin's speech act theory that locates the meaning of language in its context. Derrida writes that there is no empirical context; context changes: "Is there a rigorous and scientific concept of context?" (p. 1476). Moreover, Derrida argues that language is a mode of representation: "The representational character of the written communication—writing as picture, reproduction, imitation of its content—will be the invariant trait of all progress to come" (p. 1477). Here, if language is representation, it cannot communicate abstract ideas that exist in the human mind; it works provisionally whether it is philosophical or rhetorical. Therefore,

As any dictionary will show, the current use or meaning of a word like "sinister" has grown out of past uses, often in other languages, traces of which are still to be found in present English usage, although the present meaning often differs significantly from the original. Derrida insists that no one can help but import this multiplicity of meanings from the past when she uses the word. (Zuckert, 1991, p.337)

In this sense, language does not give final meaning whether it has been used by philosophers or by rhetoricians. Hence, Derrida's deconstructive notion of language challenges Lock's hierarchy between philosophical and rhetorical uses of language and further expands Vico's imaginative use and Nietzsche's metaphorical use. Since language is no other than a tool provisionally working with difference and deferral irrespective of context and communicative purpose, there is no valid reason to debate over its use and misuse.

Language is Embedded in Power and Discourse: Foucault

Language comes to be a discursive and cultural construct in the hand of Foucault. Foucault critiques Lock's empirical notion of language use and expands the idea of Vico, Nietzsche, and Derrida. The former three thinkers theorize

language as an independent tool of communication, but Foucault drags language to the social, cultural, and political world. Foucauldian concept of language "challenges the rationalism and realism that structuralism continues from positivism with its faith in scientific method and progress" (Basley, 2015, p. 1439). His idea of language is more concerned with the worldly aspect of it. Language is never neutral, and it is characterized by the will to power and will to knowledge. He writes:

In every society, the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized, and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality. (Bizzell & Herzberg, 2001, p. 1461)

Here, language falls victim to the discourse. A person who uses language has the purpose of reiterating the discourse: "a will to know which imposed on the knowing subject . . . a certain position, a certain gaze and a certain function" (p. 1463). All societies and their languages possess narratives: "There is scarcely a society without its major narratives, which are recounted, repeated, and varied" (p. 1464). Hence, for Foucault, the discursive nature of language never makes it neutral and objective; it is imbued with politics and power. In this way, the transition of rhetoric from modernity to postmodernity marks a transition in perspective to look at language and its use. The rhetoric of modernity made a distinction between the philosophical and rhetorical use of language, whereas the rhetoric of postmodernity takes language as a provisional, discursive, and non-neutral tool.

From Modernity to Postmodernity: Shifting Perspectives on Truth

The concept of truth is one of the transitional markers of rhetoric from modernity to postmodernity. The rhetoric of modernity is preoccupied with the concept of single truth (Truth) whereas postmodern rhetoric is the rhetoric of plurality and contingency of truths.

Perception Leading to Conception is Truth or Knowledge: Locke

Locke's concept of truth is guided by his empirical philosophy of knowledge. As Pandey (2024) writes, Locke "posits that language serves as a medium for expressing thoughts formulated through individual experiences" (p. 11). Locke believes in the knowledge perceived by senses; it is true knowledge; it is the Truth. Locke argues that "we have to attune our senses so that they will absorb, at a maximum level, the data transmitted by the big buzzing world out there" (Corbett, 1981, p. 427). It means the knowledge that comes through our sense organs is valid. Locke's distinction between philosophical and rhetorical use of language, which we discussed above, is guided by his idea of Truth. Locke believes that there exists true knowledge and ideas that can be communicated through the proper or philosophical use of language:

By philosophical use of words, I mean such a use of them as may serve to convey the precise notions of things, and to express in general propositions certain undoubted truths, which the mind may rest upon, and be satisfied with its search after true knowledge. (Bizzell & Herzberg, 2001, p. 817)

It means since empirically induced ideas exist in the human mind, language is there to communicate them. For Locke, "to make words serviceable to the end of communication, it is necessary, as has been said, they excite in the hearer exactly the same idea they stand for in the mind of the speaker" (p. 818). Locke's concept of truth gets further articulated when he argues that rhetorical use of language lacks communicating truth and ideas in various ways: complex ideas without specific names; use of words without any distinct ideas in mind; no use of the same sign for the same idea; use of words from different languages; imagining ideas that do not exist in real-world (p. 825/26). Here, Locke's concept of 'ideas in mind' has been guided by his belief that there exists Truth and Reality and, unlike the philosophical use, the rhetorical use of language cannot communicate

it. Therefore, Corbett (1981) rightly remarks "the imagination did not figure prominently in Locke's epistemology" (p. 428). That is, Locke favors reason (philosophy) over imagination (rhetoric). Hence, the empirically perceived ideas in mind and their communication through the proper use of language is the Truth for Locke.

Besides Sense Perception, What We Imagine is Valid and True: Vico

Like in the concept of language, Vico's epistemology is a reconciling epistemology: "Vico's thought is an attempt to discover a method, that is, a new science, whereby rhetoric and philosophy, politics and knowledge, would complement and inform one another (Fontana, 2017, p. 82). Unlike Locke, Vico sees truth and reality not only in reason but also in imagination. According to Vico, both reason and imagination are equally important for the fullness of human existence; both of them are truths: "I think young men should be taught the totality of sciences and arts, and their intellectual powers should be developed to the full; thus, they will become familiar with the art of argument, drawn from *ars poetica*" (Bizzell & Herzberg, 2001, p. 870). Here, Like Locke, Vico also believes in intellectual or rational truth, but he does not negate human imaginations: "The rational part in us may be taken captive by a net woven of purely intellectual reasonings, but the passionate side of our nature can never be swayed and overcome unless this is done by more sensuous and materialistic means" (p. 873). Therefore, rhetoric, for Vico takes wisdom and eloquence as the necessary mode of knowledge and truth: "let us equal the Ancients in the fields of wisdom and eloquence as we excel them in the domain of science" (p. 875). In this sense, Vico believes in the rational truth without negating the world of imagination, the domain of rhetoric.

Truth is an Anthropomorphic Illusion: Nietzsche

It is in Nietzsche that rhetoric makes a transition from modernity to postmodernity in terms of the concept of truth. Nietzsche does not believe in the rational truth and coherent

subjectivity of human life. According to Lisiecki (2015), Nietzsche theorizes “subjectivity as a dynamic and mutable fiction and his resistance to the abstraction of subjectivity into a fixed, stable, and limitless concept as promoted by Christianity” (p. 256). It means if human subjectivity is fiction, so is the case with the truths created by those human subjects. Thus, in the hand of Nietzsche, Locke’s Truth and Vico’s distinction between Reason and Imagination has also been dismantled. Nietzsche believes that there are truths rather than Truth. Seeking truth is possible only by employing forgetfulness and absence: “It is only the means of forgetfulness that man can ever reach the point of fancifying himself to possess a truth” (Bizzell & Herzberg, 2001, p. 1173). Moreover, truth for him, is always changing and contingent: it is “a movable host of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms” (p. 1174). What philosophers call truths are illusions for Nietzsche: “Truths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions” (p. 1174). Here, the Nietzschean version of rhetoric dismantles the concept of Truth which paves the way for the rhetoric of postmodernity.

Truth is a Play of Absence and Presence: Derrida

Derrida marks a shift of rhetoric from modernity to postmodernity as he questions all forms of metaphysical Truth. For Derrida, as Zuckert (1991) writes, “Every-thing exists internally divided, and hence constantly, if gradually changing in time. All forms of existence are, therefore, essentially unstable, and ‘totalization’ in the form of complete mastery or totalitarian politics is fundamentally impossible” (p. 352). For Derrida, truth claims are changeable and unstable. ‘Truth’, in its absolute form, does not exist: “There is no concept that is metaphysical in itself. . . . Deconstruction does not consist in moving from one concept to another, but in reversing and displacing a conceptual order with which it is articulated” (Bizzell & Herzberg, 2001, p. 1490). Moreover, Derridean deconstruction advances the history of rhetoric to postmodernity as it questions all form of human understandings and intentions: “since every sign, whether in the

language of action or in articulated language (before even the intervention of writing in the classical sense), presupposes a certain absence (to be determined)” (p. 1479). Here, the absence of meaning is the absence of truth. According to Derrida, truths exist in language, and language cannot offer us final meaning. Therefore, the concept of Truth is challenged by Derrida; there are plural and linguistic truths for him: “All writing must, therefore, be capable of functioning in the radical absence of every empirically determined receiver in general” (p. 1480). Derrida believes that absence and rupture are the essential features of truths: “as far as the internal semiotic context is concerned, the force of rupture is no less important” (p. 1481). Therefore, truth, for Derrida, is “the irreducible absence of intention or attendance” (p. 1488). In this sense, Derrida deconstructs all forms of binaries between Truth and truths, reason and imagination, presence and absence. He not only negates the Lockean version of truth and knowledge but also adds to the deconstructionist insights of Vico, and Nietzsche.

Truths are Constructed and Disseminated as Discourse: Foucault

Foucault’s critiquing of Truth proceeds with his concept of discursive rationality and constructed-ness of human subject/mind/reason. As Besley (2015) writes, Foucault’s interest is in the construction of truth concentrated “not to a thought, mind or subject which engendered it, but to the practical field in which it is deployed” (Besley, 2015, p. 1441). It means Foucault believes that conditions of the production of discourse and truths are more detrimental than the truths themselves. It is because the conditions and situatedness of truths give us ways to analyze the complex but changing nature of the invention of truths. Foucault questions the discourse or truth about rationality versus madness: “It is curious to note that for centuries in Europe the speech of the madman was either not heard at all or else taken for the word of truth” (Bizzell & Herzberg, 2001, p. 1461). When rationality and madness have been dragged on an equal horizontal footing,

the concept of Truth gets challenged because it was/is the construction of human rationality or human madness. In addition, for Foucault, truth is constructed discursively by the people holding power; they are neither true nor false: “The division between true and false is neither arbitrary nor modifiable nor institutional nor violent” (p. 1462). When the discourses have been constructed, they have been systematically distributed and circulated in society: “The discipline is a principle of control over the production of discourse. The discipline fixes limits for discourse by the action of an identity which takes the form of a permanent re-actuation of the rules” (p. 1467). Foucault believes that the philosophical truths and speculations have no final beginning and origin; they are socio-culturally and politically constructed: “Thus, in a philosophy of the founding subject, in a philosophy of originary experience, and in a philosophy of universal mediation alike, discourse is no more than a play, of writing in the first case, of reading in the second, and of exchange in the third” (p. 1470). Here, the truths are in constant play. Despite their playfulness, truths have been made functional by disseminating them “according to strict rules, and without the holders being dispossessed by this distribution” (p.

1468). Hence, the Foucauldian version of rhetoric challenges all forms of binaries: Truth versus truths, Reality versus realities, Philosophy versus Rhetoric, and Reason versus imagination. It is where rhetoric bloomed in the world of postmodernity. Lock’s empirical knowledge, Vico’s imaginative wisdom, Nietzsche’s metaphoric illusion, and Derrida’s indeterminacy have been dragged to power dynamics of society, history, and culture in the hand of Foucault.

Rhetoric in Transition: A Comparative Perspective

Language and truth are two aspects of rhetoric since the Greek-Roman period. The role of orators or rhetoric was to use language to create truths or counter-truths. Therefore, tracing the transition of the concept of language and truth in Western theoretical and philosophical traditions is to delineate the history of rhetoric. Based on the discussions made above, I have synthesized the changing notions of truth and language as the Western intellectual traditioned from modernity to postmodernity. The transition of rhetoric from modernity to postmodernity can be visualized as shown in the table below:

Table 1

Language and Truth in Transition

Thinkers	Rhetoric of Language	Rhetoric of Truth
Locke	Philosophical use versus rhetorical abuse.	Conception through sense perception.
Vico	Communicates both reason and imagination.	Both reason and imagination are truths.
Nietzsche	Language, regardless of its philosophical or rhetorical use, is a metaphor.	Truth is an anthropomorphic illusion.
Derrida	It is a provisional tool of communication.	Transcendental Truth never exists; absence and rupture are unavoidable.
Foucault	Language is never neutral, but discursive and political.	Constructed, institutionalized, and disseminated by power.

Hence, the history of rhetoric, while traveling from the eighteenth century to the nineteenth century to the twentieth century, makes important departures and transitions in terms of the concept of language use and truth.

Conclusion

The history of rhetoric has been through different historical transitions, and the transition from modernity to postmodernity is one of the significant transitions. This transition marks one

of the turning points in the history of rhetoric because it heralds a change in perspectives to look at language and truth. The rhetoric of modernity takes language either as philosophical or as rhetorical. John Locke favors philosophical use, thinking that it communicates the Truth whereas Vico seeks to strike a balance between both the use of language giving equal value to rational and imaginative faculties of the human mind. However, Nietzsche takes language as a metaphor and truth as an illusion. Likewise, Derrida questions the communicability of language thereby questioning 'Truth'. Moreover, Foucault historicizes language and truths interpreting them as discursive constructs influenced by power. Hence, the change in perspective to look at language and truth in the history of rhetoric brought significant changes in perspective and interpretative paradigms. It was the shift or transition of rhetoric from modernity to postmodernity that opened the possibilities for the historiography of rhetoric from feminist, indigenous, African American, Arabian, and non-Western perspectives expanding the history and domain of rhetoric.

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