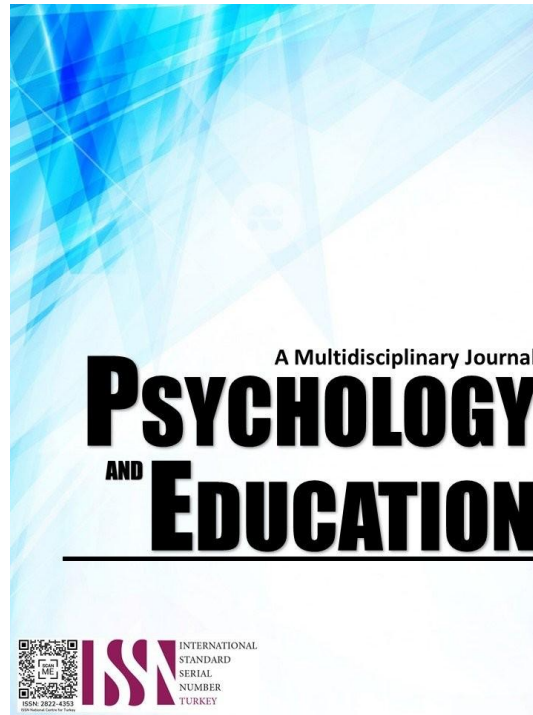


**THE PERSUASIVE LANGUAGE IN RELIGIOUS DEBATES EMPLOYED
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PREACHERS: A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS**



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The Persuasive Language in Religious Debates Employed by Catholic Faith Defenders and Protestant Preachers: A Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

The art of persuasion is central to religious debates, where proponents seek to defend their doctrine and appeal to their audiences. Examining the specific rhetorical frameworks employed in these discussions reveals the common ground and strategies shared among different theological groups. This mixed-methods study aims to investigate the rhetoric of persuasion in religious debates between Catholic Faith Defenders and Protestant preachers, utilizing the strategies employed in Aristotle's rhetorical triangle. Moreover, quantitative research, specifically the chi-square test, is used to determine differences between these two debate groups. The 21 analyzed corpora were gathered from Fr. Darwin Gitgano's YouTube channel, Punto por Punto, and other international pages featuring religious debates. The study also included 10 individuals who served as interview participants. The result revealed that the 21 video corpora comprise the different strategies under logos, pathos, and ethos. Moreover, the Chi-square test showed no significant difference in the use of rhetorical appeal between Catholic Faith Defenders and Protestant Preachers, indicating a shared rhetorical framework. Additionally, religious debates were found to enhance language learning by enriching vocabulary, improving discourse coherence, strengthening listening comprehension, and cultivating analytical and rhetorical skills through iterative, socially mediated exchanges.

Keywords: *religious debates, aristotle's rhetorical triangle, catholic faith defenders, protestant preachers*

Introduction

Religious debates between Catholic Faith Defenders and Protestant Preachers represent a dynamic form of intrafaith engagement where opposing theological positions are articulated through structured argumentation. Catholic defenders typically rely on ecclesiastical tradition, magisterial authority, and scriptural interpretation rooted in Church teachings, while Protestant preachers emphasize sola scriptura, personal conviction, and evangelistic rhetoric. These debates often unfold in public forums—both physical and digital—where participants employ apologetics, exegesis, and rhetorical appeals to defend their faith and challenge opposing doctrines.

However, the problematic issue in these debates lies in the language used, which can be exclusionary, polemical, or emotionally charged. The rhetorical strategies employed—such as metaphor, hyperbole, and appeals to authority—may obscure theological nuance and reinforce sectarian boundaries. Studies have noted that religious discourse, especially in adversarial contexts, can perpetuate doctrinal rigidity and hinder ecumenical understanding (Smith, 2019; Lee, 2021). Moreover, the rise of digital platforms like Facebook and YouTube has intensified the visibility and virality of these exchanges, often amplifying theological conflict rather than fostering dialogue (Zhang, 2025).

Globally, religious debates have long shaped theological and political landscapes. In Europe, seventeenth-century polemics between Catholics and Protestants were deeply entwined with just war theory and confessional nationalism (Parrott, 2022; Endy, 2018). In the United States, evangelical apologetics and Catholic counter-apologetics have evolved through televised debates and online ministries, reflecting broader cultural tensions (Montgomery, 2004; Lynch & Miller, 2017). In Asia, religious pluralism and digital evangelism have transformed the way faith communities approach doctrinal defense, with rhetorical styles adapting to local cultural norms and media ecologies (Yahaya & Ali, 2022).

In the Philippines, where Catholicism remains the dominant religion, religious pluralism is expanding as evangelical, independent, and non-trinitarian churches continue to grow. This pluralism introduces both opportunities and tensions. Catholics, as the historically dominant group, may perceive criticism as religious intolerance, while Protestants and Evangelicals often frame religiosity as relational and community-oriented (Cornelio & Aldama, 2020, 2022). Local studies have explored covenantal pluralism and interfaith cooperation, but few have examined the rhetorical interplay between Catholic and Protestant debaters in live or recorded settings. This study addresses that gap by analyzing the rhetorical devices, appeal strategies, and biblical constructions used in Philippine religious debates.

The social value of this research lies in its contribution to understanding how rhetorical persuasion shapes religious identity, doctrinal commitment, and community formation. By examining how pastors and priests use language to influence belief and behavior, the study offers insights into the pedagogical and spiritual dimensions of religious discourse. It also supports ecumenical efforts by demonstrating how rhetorical awareness can foster more respectful and constructive engagement across doctrinal divides.

Upon completion, the research findings will be disseminated through academic and theological seminars, international conferences on communication and religion, and meetings of ecumenical and religious organizations. For broader scholarly impact, the study will be submitted to peer-reviewed journals such as Philippine Studies and the Journal of Communication and Religion. This dissemination

plan ensures that the rhetorical practices of Catholic and Protestant leaders are documented, analyzed, and shared, thereby fostering a deeper understanding of the role of persuasion in religious discourse and its implications for interfaith understanding.

Research Questions

This study answered the following questions.

1. What predominant rhetorical strategies of persuasion do Catholic Faith Defenders and Protestant preachers employ in religious debates?
2. What key linguistic features are found in these religious debates?
3. How do linguistic features and persuasive strategies vary between these two groups of debate?
4. What is the role of these debates in language learning?

Literature Review

Persuasive Strategies in Religious Discourse

Classical rhetorical theory, particularly that of Aristotle, places great emphasis on formalized discourse, a fact vividly reflected in religious practices such as hymns and prayers. Classical rhetorical theory offers valuable insights into the persuasive impact of religious discourse, illustrating how rhetorical strategies shape and refine spiritual messages. Aristotle's theories on rhetoric, particularly the five phases of rhetoric—style, memory, delivery, arrangement, and invention—are also highly relevant in religious settings. These guidelines provide a systematic framework that speakers can use to organize and present their sermons more effectively. By utilizing these stages, preachers can formulate persuasive arguments (invention), organize their sermons coherently (arrangement), and use language that resonates with individuals' emotions and spirituality (style). In addition, the focus on delivery prepares preachers to memorize their sermons for genuine presentation, and the focus on memory prepares them to let their bodily presence, tone, and movement engage and ensnare contemporary congregations (Fauziah & Syifa, 2024). Malik et al. (2023) assert that religious communication effectively integrates faith and reason, allowing speakers to captivate their audience through both persuasive arguments and logical reasoning. By combining their knowledge of theology with logical reasoning, these speakers make their points more precise and relevant, which helps people understand and connect with them more effectively.

Linguistic Features in Religious Debates

Religious language uses marked lexis to invoke authority and evoke emotional responses in listeners. By deliberately using common words and idioms, sermons maximize their religious authority, creating a lasting impression at both cognitive and affective levels among listeners. As explained by Razzaq (2023), religious language deliberately employs lexical selection, appeals to emotion, and an authoritative voice to maximize its persuasive power. In the same vein, Kumorová (2023) reminds us that the language of stylistically marked and expressive sermons is both didactically and aesthetically functional, establishing the speaker's moral-religious authority.

Differences in Persuasion Strategies between Catholic and Protestant Preachers

Catholicism emphasizes tradition and Church authority, and its mode of persuasion is rooted in doctrines and sacraments. These core elements are responsible for affirming messages disseminated by Catholic preachers. Protestantism, conversely, calls for personal interpretation of the Bible and a more individualistic approach. This focus takes the form of persuasive strategies based on personal faith, as well as direct engagement with scripture, which serves as the dynamic and changeable aspect of Protestant rhetoric (Pinontoan, 2021). Alnadi and Al-Rababah (2024) note that Catholic preachers adopt a formal and orderly style, relying on rituals and liturgical forms to evoke a sense of reverence and authority. Their appeal processes tend to resonate with the community's traditions and collective values, affirming the audience's group identity. However, in Adam (2024), the Protestant preacher's narrative is a constitutive feature of Protestant sermons, enhancing listener attention and emotional engagement through personal storytelling. They employ narrative and personal experience to establish emotional connections with their congregants and motivate believers to action by making their religion relatable through compelling stories. This strategy identifies the diverse rhetorical practices employed within these religious traditions to engage and mobilize their constituents.

The Role of Religious Debates in Language Learning

Religious language is central to linguistic competence and effective communication within religious groups. Razzaq (2023) examines how lexical choice in sermons is shaped by theological and cultural consciousness, enabling religious language to become deeply internalized within its audience while also influencing broader linguistic trends. For this purpose, Pak (2022) discusses the strategic deployment of rhetorical devices, such as metaphors and rhetorical questions, which enhance the persuasiveness, memorability, and emotive power of religious discourse.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods research design to investigate the rhetorical strategies used in religious debates between Catholic

Faith Defenders and Protestant Preachers. The design integrated both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive analysis of persuasive discourse across theological traditions.

On the quantitative side, the study conducted a content analysis of transcribed debates, systematically coding rhetorical features such as narrative use, emotional appeals, and logical structuring. Frequencies and percentages of these features were calculated to identify patterns of rhetorical emphasis across groups. To test for statistically significant differences in rhetorical strategy usage between Catholic and Protestant speakers, a Chi-square test of independence was applied (Creswell & Creswell, 2020).

The qualitative component involved thematic, discourse, and rhetorical analyses. Thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework, was employed to identify recurring patterns and rhetorical motifs embedded in the debates (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Discourse analysis examined how language shaped meaning, identity, and ideology, attending to both linguistic elements (e.g., syntax, pragmatics) and extralinguistic factors (e.g., speaker intent, audience reception) (Fairclough, 2025; Gee, 2023). Rhetorical analysis focused on the deployment of ethos, pathos, and logos, revealing how speakers constructed credibility, evoked emotion, and built logical arguments to persuade their audiences (Gagich & Zickel, 2022; Claire, 2024).

By integrating these methods, the study offered both statistical insight and interpretive depth, illuminating how rhetorical practices function as tools for persuasion, doctrinal defense, and ideological formation in Philippine religious debates.

Respondents

This study conducted qualitative interviews with ten (10) purposefully selected individuals to explore their perceptions of debates as tools for language learning. These interview participants are different from the Data Corpus, which comprises 21 YouTube videos analyzed separately.

The interview group included two (2) Priests, two (2) Pastors, two (2) Students, two (2) Professionals, and two (2) Laymen. Selection was based on verified firsthand exposure to the debate videos. Prior to formal interviews, participants underwent a brief screening in which they recalled specific debate content—such as topics, speakers, or notable arguments—to confirm legitimate engagement.

No restrictions were imposed regarding the number of hours viewed or frequency of exposure. This inclusive approach prioritized qualitative depth and contextual richness over quantitative metrics, allowing for a diverse range of perspectives. Varying levels of engagement were considered valuable, as they could yield both convergent and divergent insights into the pedagogical and rhetorical functions of religious debates.

Although none of the interviewees belonged to conventionally defined vulnerable populations, additional ethical precautions were taken with religious leaders (Priests and Pastors). Given their institutional roles and theological sensitivities, the study ensured anonymized reporting, carefully moderated interview protocols, and provided opportunities for participants to review transcripts, thereby safeguarding their participation.

All participants were fully briefed on the study's purpose, procedures, and potential outcomes. Informed written consent was obtained prior to participation. Voluntary participation and the right to withdraw at any stage were emphasized, ensuring ethical transparency and academic integrity throughout the research process.

Instrument

This study employed two primary instruments to support its mixed-methods design: a coding protocol for discourse and rhetorical analysis, and a semi-structured interview guide for collecting qualitative data.

For the discourse and rhetorical analysis, a researcher-developed coding sheet was constructed to systematically identify and categorize rhetorical features across the 21 transcribed debate videos. The coding protocol included predefined categories such as metaphor, analogy, rhetorical question, repetition, lexical choice, syntactic complexity, and appeals to ethos, pathos, and logos. Each category was operationally defined based on established rhetorical and linguistic literature to ensure clarity and consistency. To enhance inter-rater reliability, two independent coders were trained using the protocol and conducted a pilot coding session on a subset of the data. This process ensured that the coding was both replicable and analytically robust.

For the qualitative interviews, a semi-structured interview guide was used to elicit participants' perceptions of religious debates as tools for language learning. The guide was independently crafted by the researcher, grounded in the study's conceptual framework, and aligned with the research questions. It included open-ended prompts designed to explore rhetorical awareness, linguistic uptake, and pedagogical impact. To ensure content validity, the guide was reviewed and refined by subject matter experts and members of the examining committee. Their feedback informed revisions that improved item clarity, thematic alignment, and ethical sensitivity, particularly in relation to religious identity and doctrinal nuance.

The semi-structured format allowed for a balance between standardization and adaptability, enabling the researcher to maintain consistency across interviews while also accommodating emergent themes and participant-specific insights. This design is particularly suited for exploring complex perceptions and experiences, as it encourages depth of response without sacrificing comparability (Adams & Lawrence, 2021). The instrument's flexibility also supported iterative probing, allowing the researcher to clarify responses and

explore nuanced dimensions of rhetorical and pedagogical engagement within religious debates.

Procedure

The researcher initiated the study by securing formal approval from the Dean of the University of Immaculate Conception Graduate School and ethical clearance from the Research Ethics Committee (REC). These letters outlined the study's title, objectives, methodology, and adherence to ethical standards.

Following approval, the researcher collected 21 open-access YouTube videos—primarily from Rev. Fr. Darwin Gitgano's Punto por Punto and international debates featuring Catholic and Protestant pastors. Videos were selected based on specific criteria: 20–50 minutes in length, over 1,000 views, and uploaded between 2015 and 2025 to ensure relevance and rhetorical consistency.

The verbal content of each video was transcribed and translated when necessary. For the quantitative analysis, a researcher-developed coding sheet was used to identify and categorize rhetorical features, including metaphor, analogy, rhetorical question, repetition, lexical choice, syntactic complexity, and appeals to ethos, pathos, and logos. Each feature was operationally defined to ensure clarity and replicability. Frequency counts were tabulated and converted into percentages to determine the relative prevalence of each rhetorical feature. To test for statistically significant differences between Catholic and Protestant speakers, a Chi-square test of independence was performed, comparing speaker affiliation with the distribution of rhetorical features.

For the qualitative phase, discourse analysis was applied to examine linguistic patterns and socio-cultural contexts. In contrast, rhetorical analysis focused on persuasive strategies using Aristotle's framework of ethos, pathos, and logos. These interpretive methods were used to explore how speakers constructed meaning, negotiated theological authority, and engaged their audiences. Ethical safeguards included the use of pseudonyms for anonymity, secure data storage, and compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012. Member checking was implemented by returning transcripts to participants for validation prior to final analysis.

Data Analysis

This study employed a mixed-methods data analysis approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative procedures to examine rhetorical strategies and linguistic features in religious debates between Catholic Faith Defenders and Protestant preachers. For the quantitative component, a content analysis was conducted on the transcribed debate corpus. Linguistic features, including metaphors, analogies, rhetorical questions, and appeals to ethos, pathos, and logos, were systematically coded using a researcher-developed coding scheme. Each feature was manually counted and tabulated across all 21 debate videos. These frequencies were then converted into percentages to determine the relative prevalence of each rhetorical device, allowing for comparative profiling across denominational lines. To assess whether the distribution of rhetorical features varied significantly between Catholic and Protestant speakers, a Chi-square test of independence was performed. This test examined the relationship between speaker affiliation (Catholic vs. Protestant) and rhetorical feature type, with observed frequencies drawn from the coded dataset. A 0.05 significance threshold was used to determine whether rhetorical preferences were statistically associated with religious affiliation.

Three theoretical frameworks guided the qualitative analysis. Aristotle's rhetorical criticism informed the identification and interpretation of persuasive strategies, particularly the use of ethos (credibility), pathos (emotional appeal), and logos (logical reasoning). These elements were analyzed in relation to speaker intent and audience engagement. Bitzer's rhetorical situation model was applied to examine how linguistic features—such as lexical choice, syntax, and pragmatics—responded to rhetorical exigencies, audience expectations, and contextual constraints within the debates. This framework illuminated how situational forces and communicative purpose shaped language. Vygotsky's constructivist theory supported the analysis of how debates functioned as scaffolds for language acquisition and communicative competence. The study explored how social interaction within the debates activated the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and facilitated guided learning through exposure to argumentative discourse. By integrating these analytical procedures, the study provided both statistical insight and interpretive depth, offering a multidimensional understanding of how rhetorical and linguistic strategies operate within religious debates and contribute to the formation of pedagogical and ideological perspectives.

Ethical Considerations

While conducting this research, the researcher is committed to upholding the highest ethical standards. To ensure compliance with academic, institutional, and ethical standards, the study will require formal approval and assessment by the University of the Immaculate Conception's Research Ethics Committee (UIC-REC). To ensure compliance with their rules and procedures, the pre-final submission will include the official Protocol Code published by the UIC-REC.

The researcher has a background in academic preparation and methodological improvement relevant to this study, as a third-year doctoral student in Education, majoring in Applied Linguistics. Extensive conversations with the research panel member and the dissertation adviser further support the study. The UIC Library will provide the environment required for practical data analysis, collection, and academic writing, including accessibility, academic databases, and other institutional resources such as consultation rooms and faculty support services. These frameworks ensure that research is conducted with full ethical responsibility, scholarly integrity, and in accordance with available resources.



Results and Discussion

This section presents the integrated results of both quantitative and qualitative analyses, focusing on persuasive language, linguistic features, and the pedagogical role of religious debates in language learning. Drawing from a mixed-methods design, the findings are grounded in systematic content analysis and statistical testing, alongside interpretive frameworks rooted in rhetorical and constructivist theory.

Table 1.1. *Profile of Religious Debates between Catholic Faith Defenders and Protestant Preachers*

Debate Code	Title	Time	Number Of Viewers	Date Of Uploading
1	SDA ng Davao nakipagsubukan kay Eugene Gapo	30:58:00	6,093	Nov 3, 2023
2	SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST vs CFD: Mainit na DebatE sa Religious Rally sa Camotes Island!	24:24:00	13,759	Dec 17, 2024
3	Father Darwin Gitgano versus Nico Torreon (Baptist)	26:05:00	84,333	Sept 29, 2023
4	Jessie Butlig ng SDA nakipagsubukan kay John Doe Alabado	25:28:00	3,820	Dec 7, 2023
5	FR. DARWIN TALO SA DEBATE! HINDI AKALAIN ANG IBINUNYAG NG DALAWANG SDA!	28:04:00	20,799	Dec 7, 2024
6	Father Darwin versus Jimmy Ranises - First Cross Examination	23:04:00	10,620	Aug 25, 2024
7	Junelito Bulawan nagimbal ng pasukin ni John Doe Alabado	22:03:00	4,938	Dec 10, 2023
8	Paul Alima sinubok si Archie Anedes sa isang tanong	21:24:00	16,246	Jan 31, 2024
9	Father Darwin Gitgano versus Archie Anedes	30:17:00	8,603	Sept 22, 2023
10	Ariel Amores pumasok at nakipagsubukan sa tanungan portion	20:05:00	5,294	Jun 27, 2023
11	Part 1 Mark Ombao versus San Rio (Affirmative Stand)	37:02:00	1,009	Oct 22, 2023
12	Part 2 Mark Ombao versus San Rio (Negative Side)	30:10:00	2,346	Oct 22, 2023
13	Balik-Tanaw sa Debate: Ramil Parba vs. Fr. Darwin	20:26:00	5,980	Nov 5, 2024
14	Pagbabalik-tanaw 2 Father Darwin Gitgano versus Ramil Parba (INC)	30:48:00	2,524	Sep 2, 2023
15	Debate Highlights: INC vs. CFD	23:14:00	13,423	Oct 22, 2024
16	(Catholic) Scott Hahn vs. (Protestant) Bowman Salvation Debate #1 of 3	37:36:00	499,535	Jun 13, 2017
17	(Catholic) Scott Hahn vs. (Protestant) Bowman Salvation Debate #2 of 3	37:37:00	256,491	Jun 13, 2017
18	(Catholic) Scott Hahn vs. (Protestant) Bowman Salvation Debate #3 of 3	37:41:00	146,282	Jun 13, 2017
19	Catholic Priest and Baptist Pastor Face Off! // Catholic in America	49:01:00	121,231	Sept 7, 2022
20	A Catholic and a Protestant Debate Salvation	23:25:00	61,740	Jul 6, 2023
21	Is the Pope Legit? Catholicism v. Protestantism Debate Ft. Michael Knowles	13:34:00	1,062,293	Jan 4, 2025

Qualitatively, the study applied Aristotle's rhetorical triangle to interpret how speakers construct persuasive discourse. Logical reasoning was employed to clarify doctrine (Mehdi, 2025), while emotional appeals fostered empathy and engagement (Innocenti, 2007). Speaker credibility was established through moral integrity and an authoritative tone (Palangyos & Ulla, 2025). Bitzer's rhetorical situation model illuminated how linguistic features responded to contextual exigencies, audience expectations, and rhetorical constraints. For example, Catholic speakers often framed their arguments within the context of institutional authority, while Protestant speakers adapted their language to audience feedback and the immediacy of scripture. Vygotsky's constructivist theory provided a lens for understanding how debates function as scaffolds for language learning, particularly through social interaction and guided exposure to argumentative discourse.

Quantitatively, the study analyzed 21 transcribed debate videos using a researcher-developed coding scheme to identify rhetorical features, including metaphors, analogies, rhetorical questions, and appeals to ethos, pathos, and logos. Each feature was manually counted and converted into a percentage to determine its relative prevalence. Catholic Faith Defenders demonstrated a higher usage of metaphors (11.86%), analogies (9.29%), and syntactic complexity (13.76%), suggesting a preference for structured and figurative expressions. Protestant Preachers, by contrast, led in rhetorical questions (17.75%) and pragmatic markers (20.78%), indicating a more dialogic and context-sensitive approach. Repetition and lexical choice were comparably used by both groups, reflecting shared strategies for emphasis and precision. To test for significant differences in rhetorical strategy usage, a Chi-square test of independence was performed, comparing speaker affiliation (Catholic vs. Protestant) with rhetorical feature type. The results showed no statistically significant difference in the distribution of logos, ethos, and pathos between the two groups, supporting the null hypothesis that both traditions employ similar persuasive appeals. This finding suggests that while rhetorical frameworks are shared, theological orientation and communicative style diverge in nuanced ways, with Protestant preachers emphasizing personal scriptural interpretation and Catholic Faith Defenders relying on hierarchical tradition (Barraza, 2025).

Overall, the analysis suggests that religious debates significantly enhance language learning by facilitating the acquisition of a broad range of communication skills. Learners acquire specialized vocabulary, enhance coherence through argument structure, and refine their listening comprehension. They also develop critical evaluation skills and tone sensitivity, while mastering persuasive techniques such as repetition and rhetorical questioning. These practices enhance clarity, respectful dialogue, and memory retention through rhythmic, concept-driven exchanges.

The study results revealed that religious debate techniques rely on the balanced use of logos, pathos, and ethos, confirming that

persuasive theological discourse is shaped not only by doctrinal content but also by the strategic delivery of ideas. The quantitative analysis showed that both Catholic Faith Defenders and Protestant Preachers employed these rhetorical appeals with comparable frequency, as confirmed by the Chi-square test of independence, which found no statistically significant difference in their distribution. This suggests that despite theological divergence, both traditions share a common persuasive foundation rooted in classical rhetoric. Logical reasoning was employed to clarify doctrine (Mehdi, 2025), while emotional appeals fostered empathy and engagement (Innocenti, 2007). Speaker credibility was established through moral integrity and an authoritative tone (Palangyos & Ulla, 2025). These findings affirm that effective argumentation in religious debates is achieved through deliberate presentation, narrative framing, and strategic transmission.

The quantitative data also revealed nuanced differences in the usage of rhetorical features. Catholic speakers demonstrated higher frequencies of metaphor (11.86%), analogy (9.29%), and syntactic complexity (13.76%), indicating a preference for structured and figurative expression. These features support the use of doctrinal abstraction and institutional framing, allowing speakers to anchor theological claims in tradition while making them cognitively accessible. Protestant Preachers, by contrast, led in rhetorical questions (17.75%) and pragmatic markers (20.78%), reflecting a more dialogic and context-sensitive approach. These features suggest a rhetorical style that invites audience reflection and adapts dynamically to the immediacy of scripture and congregational feedback. Both groups comparably used repetition and lexical choice, reinforcing shared strategies for emphasis, precision, and doctrinal reinforcement.

These rhetorical devices play a critical role in the effectiveness of apologia and religious debate. Repetition, for instance, emphasizes dogmatic confessions and directs audience attention to theological centers. As Pak (2022) explains, rhetorical repetition in religious language serves both mnemonic and persuasive purposes, reaffirming doctrinal authority and enhancing affective appeal. Metaphor and analogy bridge abstract theological concepts with lived experience, enabling speakers to render complex ideas more concrete and relatable (Sanders, 2018). Rhetorical questions, often posed without immediate response, invite introspection and expose doctrinal tensions, prompting listeners to engage in reflective consideration (Downey, 1993).

Allusion functions as an intertextual authority tactic, invoking scripture or tradition to authenticate theological legitimacy and foster familiarity (Palangyos & Ulla, 2025). Lexical selection shapes tone and persona, allowing speakers to oscillate between assertiveness and humility, while syntactic structure regulates clarity, rhythm, and the flow of argumentative discourse (Akinwotu, 2022). Pragmatic context, as Spiess (2024) notes, embeds meaning within social and situational richness, guiding interpretation through metapragmatic cues and discourse positioning.

The Chi-square test results further reinforce the interpretive claim that both groups employ similar persuasive strategies, even as their theological orientations diverge. Catholic Faith Defenders tend to emphasize hierarchical tradition and sacramental reasoning, while Protestant Preachers foreground personal scriptural interpretation and decentralized authority (Barraza, 2025). These structural differences shape rhetorical style but do not alter the foundational reliance on classical appeals and linguistic devices.

Finally, the pedagogical implications of these findings are significant. Religious debates were shown to enhance language learning by fostering a broad range of communicative competencies. Participants acquired specialized vocabulary, including rare theological lexicon and formal registers not commonly used in everyday speech. As Balraj Singh and Abd Manan (2020) observe, religious language serves as a cultural reservoir, preserving doctrinal nuance and identity-building terminology. Learners also improved their coherence through exposure to structured argumentation and transition markers, which facilitated a logical flow and control of ideas. The mastery of persuasive techniques—such as repetition, rhetorical questioning, and pragmatic framing—enabled learners to engage in respectful dialogue, refine tone sensitivity, and retain complex content through rhythm and conceptual scaffolding. These findings affirm that religious debates are not only sites of doctrinal exchange but also dynamic platforms for linguistic enrichment and cognitive development.

Conclusions

The study concludes that religious debates between Catholic Faith Defenders and Protestant Preachers serve as dynamic platforms for both rhetorical engagement and language development. Through a mixed-methods approach, the research demonstrated that both groups consistently employed persuasive strategies—logos, pathos, and ethos—with no statistically significant difference in their distribution, as confirmed by the Chi-square test of independence. This suggests a shared rhetorical foundation despite theological and stylistic divergence. Catholic speakers favored structured and figurative expression, using metaphors, analogies, and complex syntax, while Protestant speakers leaned toward dialogic and context-sensitive techniques, such as rhetorical questions and pragmatic markers. These linguistic choices reflect not only doctrinal orientation but also audience engagement styles.

The study also affirms the educational value of religious debates, highlighting their role in fostering vocabulary acquisition, syntactic awareness, and pragmatic competence. Participants and observers reported gains in analytical reasoning, tone sensitivity, and mastery of persuasive techniques, including repetition and rhetorical framing. These findings support the integration of debate-based activities into instructional practice to enhance linguistic proficiency, critical thinking, and metacognitive awareness. By exposing learners to authentic theological discourse and structured argumentation, religious debates enable more precise, coherent, and persuasive expression of complex ideas—making them a valuable pedagogical tool in both secular and faith-based educational contexts.

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