

Jonathan Edison

English 110C, Instructor Bradley

Rhetorical analysis essay

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Rhetorical analysis of “How Being Polite With Police Can Backfire”

In the article, “[How being polite with police can backfire](#)”, Chi Luu effectively uses emotional appeals to real-world social injustices, credible linguistic research, and logical analysis of courtroom language to educate and convince readers on how to interact with law enforcement. Chi Luu wrote this article in the wake of major historical events, including the tragic passing of George Floyd and other social injustices that sparked public outcry. In a time when people were more uncertain about talking with the police, Chi Luu uses this article to inform marginalized communities how to more effectively navigate a police interaction.

Chi Luu opens the article with a direct emotional reference to the tragedies of George Floyd and Daunte Wright, which immediately pulls readers into the article and shows why it is important to listen to what she has to say. The title was also specifically chosen to act as an attention grabber. It prompts readers to reflect on their behavior towards law enforcement and how their actions could potentially jeopardize them. She then discusses the importance of using direct and clear language when communicating with law enforcement. This can help ensure that your words aren't misinterpreted, and they know exactly what it is that you meant. This is especially important in navigating the straightforward system that is the legal system. Chi Luu then goes into detail about how these issues of speaking ambiguously to law enforcement affects minorities and women at higher rates, due to them wanting to be on the “Good side” of the police. This is because of the long-standing issues and conflicts between minorities and law

enforcement, only further brought to the forefront of society's mind due to events like the tragic murder of George Floyd that happened shortly before this article was released.

Additional ecologies she discusses throughout this article include references to everyday language, including things like “What time is getting to be?”(Luu), which helps readers connect the linguistic ideas she talks about in the article to familiar social interactions. She also leans on the context of racial injustices throughout America. Another ecology she uses to further her argument is gender and power dynamics. She references a commonly believed idea of “women’s language” and the powerlessness that is associated with it to better explain the power imbalance that can be associated with talking to law enforcement. An ecology she overlooks in her article is the process of police training in response to indirect speech that influences how they treat people when they use it.

Throughout the article, Chi Luu uses a variety of rhetorical strategies to effectively get her point across to the reader. The use of ethos is scattered throughout the article when she appeals to other respected linguists, including Jane E. Answorth, Robin Lakoff, and William O’Barr, rooting her argument in scholarly references. She also uses quotes from people with biases to support her argument. Attorney General William Barr says when citizens interact with law enforcement, they should “comply first, and, if warranted, complain later.” This quote from him highlights how people in power can have skewed views on police interactions. It is a prime example of the bias within the legal system that Chi Luu is trying to expose. Something that further reinforces Attorney General William Barr’s uncredibility is the fact that he was the sitting Attorney General for only two short stints compared to other Attorney Generals who have sat for longer periods at a time, which implies that he didn't do a well enough job to stay in office as long as his peers.

The use of emotional appeals plays a significant role in grounding her argument. References to the tragic deaths of George Floyd and Daunte Wright at the beginning of the article immediately situate the reader within the real and urgent context of racial injustice. Examples like these highlight the real-world implications that routine police encounters can entail. The inclusion of real statements like, “Wait a minute. Maybe I ought to have an attorney. You guys are trying to pin a murder rap on me, give me 20 to 40 years,”(Luu) allows the reader to imagine the fear and vulnerability of someone who tries to invoke their rights but is dismissed due to ambiguous language. Using these emotionally charged examples, Chi Luu invites readers to consider how language can be weaponized against those who are already at a disadvantage.

In addition to the use of these rhetorical strategies, Chi Luu’s argument draws on logic and reasoning heavily. She goes into depth, explaining the concept of performative speech acts to get the reader to fully understand the linguistic principles and relates these principles to the topic at hand. She supports her reasoning with real court cases in which suspects were denied lawyers because they didn’t explicitly ask for one. By breaking down linguistic features such as modal verbs, readers can understand her argument and analysis of the topic on a deeper level. She also uses juxtaposition to show the contrast between direct legal language and indirect social speech. The contrast of indirect and direct speech is shown through examples like “I guess I should have a lawyer,” and “I would like a lawyer now.(Luu)” She uses these to highlight how the difference in speech can heavily impact the outcome of an interaction with law enforcement.

In conclusion, Chi Luu successfully convinces her audience of the idea that using direct and assertive language with law enforcement is often better than trying to be overly polite and ambiguous with your speech. Her rhetorical choices kept me engaged with the article throughout. The examples she used to bridge the gap between linguistic analysis and real-world problems

made me consider how I would feel if I were put in a vulnerable situation like that. Her article provides a unique perspective from a linguist on issues that affect marginalized communities. It leaves a memorable message and leaves the reader with a call to action that can positively impact their lives. Completing this rhetorical analysis will help me become a more effective communicator and better understand the strategies I can use to persuade different audiences and structure compelling and thought-provoking arguments.

Works Cited

Luu, Chi. "How Being Polite with Police Can Backfire - JSTOR DAILY." JSTOR DAILY, 28

Apr. 2021, [daily.jstor.org/how-being-polite-with-police-can-backfire/](https://www.jstor.org/stable/48544444).