

# Investigating Linguistic Choices Affecting Motivation in Motivational Speakers' Speeches

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## Abstract

Motivation remains one of the important factors in current research (Altalib, 2019; Dörnyei, 1998, 2003; Furman et al., 2022; Moskovsky et al., 2013; Oxford & Shearin, 1994; Ryan & Deci, 2000a; Steinmayr et al., 2019). Moreover, research has been done on the stylistic analysis of motivational speeches (Aflahah, 2017; Rahayu & Kurniawan, 2020; Sutrisno & Sunarsi, 2019). Very little research has been done on the linguistic choices in the speeches of motivational speakers. This article aims to find out linguistic choices of motivational speakers affecting the motivation of their audience. It will also highlight the two categories (intrinsic and extrinsic) of motivational word choices, motivational speakers use in their speeches. Eric Thomas, one of the reputed motivational speakers, speeches are selected for the current research work. Data will be collected from his speeches. Self-determination theory of Deci and Ryan (1985) will be applied. The result will be the linguistic choices (lexical) affecting the type of motivation whether intrinsic or extrinsic. Even though, the current study is limited to Eric Thomas' speeches, it can be used to investigate the speeches of other motivational speakers.

**Keywords:** Linguistic choices, motivational speeches, motivational speaker

## 1. Introduction

Since motivation impacts peoples' thinking, motivated behaviors are processed in peoples' brains and can affect cognition (Hughes & Zaki, 2015). The decisions people make on the experiences or goals they will pursue or avoid, as well as the amount of effort they will put forth in this regard, are referred to as their motivation (Keller, 1987). In order to do something, one must be motivated (Ryan & Deci, 2000b). Motivation have different aspects of its own and have been divided in to two main categories by Ryan and Deci, (2000b), i.e. intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation refers to engaging in an activity because it is naturally fascinating or enjoyable, the desire to carry out an action purely for the enjoyment of it (Ryan & Deci, 2000b). Extrinsic motivation describes taking action because it produces a distinct result and refers to the drive to act in order to achieve an external objective or adhere to an externally imposed limitation (Ryan & Deci, 2000b). So, according to Ryan & Deci, (2000b) the most important factors in motivation are either internal or external depending on the desire.

Motivational speakers motivate their audience in different ways by the choice of words they select in their speeches. According to Ryan and Deci (2000b), motivation can be of two types, i.e., intrinsic or extrinsic motivation. Words related to intrinsic motivation refers to the desire to carry out an action purely for the enjoyment, to accomplish something for its own sake or just because you enjoy it (Hennessey, 2014). On the other hand, words that are related to extrinsic motivation refers to act in order to achieve an external objective or adhere to an externally imposed limitation, the desire to take action in order to fulfill an externally imposed need or achieve an externally set objective (Hennessey, 2014). According to self-determination theory by Deci & Ryan, (1985) intrinsic motivation means acting in a way that is intrinsically engaging or delightful or enjoyable, and extrinsic motivation, which denotes acting in a way that results in a distinct outcome. The act of engaging in an activity for its own intrinsic rewards rather than for a secondary benefit is known as intrinsic motivation while extrinsic motivation is a concept that applies whenever an action is taken to achieve a distinct goal, some separable outcome, reward or instrumental value (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). In self-determination theory there are two types of motivation i.e., autonomous motivation and controlled motivation. Autonomous motivation describes or names what are doing you feel a full sense of willingness, volition, and choice. Whatever the activity is, when you are doing it with full sense of interest, enjoyment and value then its likely that you are autonomously motivated. In contrast, is controlled motivation which refers to do something in order to get some reward, or to avoid some punishment, it means doing something because you are feeling pressured, demanded, obliged to be doing it. Most people think about autonomous motivation than controlled motivation. According to Ryan, when people are autonomously motivated their performance, engagement and their wellness are greater. This is the first important distinction that's been made in self determination theory. The second important point in self determination theory is that all human beings have a set of basic psychological needs. These important needs are the needs for confidence, which means to feel confident and effective to relation what ever you are doing. Second, to feel relatedness that is to say to feel cared for by others, to care for others, to feel that you belong in various groups that are important to you. The third need is autonomy,

which is actually a human need and for that human must get satisfied for optimal wellness and optimal performance. Intrinsic motivation one type of autonomous motivation.

Research on the speeches of motivational speakers have been done in reference to stylistic analysis, discourse analysis and language style. To critically evaluate the previous studies on the stylistic analysis of motivational speeches, it is imperative to examine the profundity and influence of linguistic components. Studies, like the analysis of motivating language in commencement addresses, frequently determine those specific linguistic techniques, such as direct address and rhetorical questions, markedly improve speaker persuasiveness and audience involvement. This conclusion may occasionally neglect the heterogeneity in audience reaction and the context-dependent efficacy of various tactics.

A significant limitation in the existing literature, such as Mayfield et al. (1998), is the primary emphasis on traditional speech forms, neglecting the cultural and situational contexts that may influence the perceived efficacy of motivational language. Moreover, although the studies frequently underscore beneficial effects, there is generally insufficient focus on the capacity of motivational speeches to perpetuate existing biases or foster reliance on external incentive, indicating a necessity for a more nuanced examination of these rhetorical strategies.

This research will stylistically analyse the speeches of Eric Thomas. Eric Thomas is known for his impactful and motivating speeches that particularly appeal with youth struggling for achievement despite challenges. His talks frequently emphasize personal accountability, tenacity, and the efficacy of self-confidence. Analysis of his talks underscores that his incorporation of personal experiences, emotional resonance, and direct audience participation substantially amplifies the effectiveness of his message, establishing him as a distinguished figure in motivational speaking.

## **2. Literature Review**

This section deals with the past studies related to linguistic analysis of the different motivational speeches.

### *2.1 Linguistic Choices in Motivational Speeches*

The literature on motivational speeches, especially regarding language choices, offers a multifaceted perspective that combines psychology, communication, and linguistics. Altalib (2019), Dörnyei (1998, 2003), and Ryan & Deci (2000a) provide essential insights into the psychological dimensions of motivation, differentiating between intrinsic and extrinsic motivators, which are vital for comprehending the effects of motivating speeches.

Moreover, the stylistic analysis of motivating speeches has been thoroughly examined by scholars such as Aflahah (2017), who investigate how particular stylistic choices in language can affect audience engagement and persuasion. These studies establish a framework for evaluating the efficacy of language strategies, including rhetorical questions and storytelling, in augmenting the motivational influence of speeches.

The use of Self-Determination Theory by Deci and Ryan (1985) in speech analysis introduces an additional dimension, emphasizing how language can cultivate autonomy and competence, hence enhancing intrinsic motivation. Hennessey's (2014) research on lexical selections in motivating speeches underscores how particular words can elicit intrinsic or extrinsic drive.

While the literature acknowledges the efficacy of these linguistic methods, it also highlights their limits. Research such as that conducted by Mayfield et al. (1998) highlights the propensity for motivational speeches to reinforce biases or diminish in efficacy when removed from their cultural or situational setting. This requires a more sophisticated understanding of the dynamic interaction among the speaker, the speech content, and the audience.

The current literature offers a comprehensive framework for examining the language selections of motivational speakers such as Eric Thomas, emphasizing both the strengths and possible deficiencies in existing study approaches. The investigation of Eric Thomas' speeches, emphasizing intrinsic and extrinsic motivational variables, enhances this domain by providing targeted insights into the effectiveness of motivating language in practical settings.

Recent studies have expanded the understanding of motivational speeches through the lens of linguistic and psychological analysis. Furman et al. (2022) explored the intersection of motivational linguistics with digital media, showing how speakers adapt their message to different platforms. This is relevant in examining Eric Thomas' use of social media to amplify his speeches. Similarly, Moskovsky et al. (2020) revisited earlier motivational theories, integrating them with modern socio-cultural dynamics to assess their influence on speech strategies.

The impact of emotional and cultural relevance in motivational speeches has been highlighted by Rahayu & Kurniawan (2020), emphasizing how culturally grounded metaphors enhance engagement. In the context of Thomas' speeches, his references to overcoming adversity resonate particularly well with culturally diverse and youth-centered audiences.

Furthermore, advancements in linguistic analysis methods, such as machine learning in discourse studies, have been discussed by Sutrisno and Denistia (2024). These approaches offer tools to dissect the structure and lexical variety in motivational speeches, providing insights into how language patterns influence audience perception.

By incorporating these newer perspectives, the literature review strengthens the framework for analyzing Eric Thomas' speeches and their motivational efficacy. It also emphasizes the dynamic evolution of motivational speaking in the digital age, bridging theoretical underpinnings with practical applications.

### **3. Methodology**

The method employed by the researchers depends on the nature of the study and the type of data required. Hence, the descriptive method was selected by the researchers of this article.

#### *3.1 Data Collection*

The study focuses on the examination of ten recent speeches by Eric Thomas, chosen for his significant impact in motivational speaking, especially among young audiences. The remarks were obtained from his official YouTube channel and website, guaranteeing the content's relevancy and legitimacy for examination.

### *3.2 Transcription and Preliminary Analysis*

Each chosen speech was transcribed verbatim to preserve all linguistic subtleties. Several readings of these transcripts were performed to guarantee a thorough comprehension of the material and to ready the data for in-depth analysis.

### *3.3 Application of Self-Determination Theory*

Subsequent to the transcription, the study utilized Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) as its analytical framework. This theory differentiates between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, which are essential for comprehending the motivational influence of lexical selections in the speeches.

### *3.4 Lexical Analysis*

The transcribed data was subjected to a lexical analysis, categorizing words and phrases as intrinsic or extrinsic motivational factors according to Self-Determination Theory. This classification was carefully organized to enable a methodical analysis.

### *3.5 Analytical Tools*

Qualitative data analysis software tools were employed to facilitate the coding and categorizing procedure. This facilitated the management of huge text volumes and enabled precise and reproducible analyses. The utilization of software tools in qualitative data analysis is becoming more prevalent, especially in research necessitating the management of enormous text volumes, as exemplified by the analysis of motivational speeches in this study. Although these instruments provide considerable benefits, including enhanced accuracy and guaranteed reproducibility of analyses, they also pose problems that require careful evaluation.

#### *3.5.1 Enhanced Accuracy and Efficiency*

Software applications for qualitative data analysis, including NVivo and MAXQDA, provide systematic approaches for coding and categorizing qualitative data. This enables the systematic detection and classification of lexical selections that correspond to intrinsic or extrinsic motivation. By automating the detection of lexical patterns and frequencies, these technologies mitigate the potential for human mistake, hence enhancing the accuracy of the study. This is particularly advantageous in research utilizing extensive datasets, where manual coding can be laborious and susceptible to discrepancies.

Nonetheless, dependence on software may result in an excessive focus on quantitative elements (e.g., word frequencies) at the expense of the intricate meanings of language in particular settings. Motivational speeches inherently utilize rhetorical strategies and context-specific language that automated tools may not adequately capture. This constraint requires the

researcher to actively engage in interpreting the results to guarantee that significant qualitative nuances are not disregarded.

### 3.5.2 Repeatability and Reliability

The application of software tools facilitates the reproducibility of analyses under comparable conditions, which is essential for the dependability of qualitative research. By standardizing the coding process, these technologies enable the application of uniform criteria across many datasets or speeches, facilitating a more consistent and replicable methodology. This enhances the credibility of the results, enabling other researchers to replicate the processes to corroborate or contest the findings.

However, repeatability does not inherently correspond to validity. Software solutions may implement standardized coding standards; but, they cannot entirely accommodate the dynamic character of language or the contextual factors influencing specific lexical selections. Motivational speeches can have varying connotations based on the speaker's tone, audience, and cultural context—elements that software cannot sufficiently address. Consequently, although repeatability improves dependability, it necessitates meticulous interpretation to preserve the validity of the results.

### 3.5.3 Managing Large Volumes of Text

A primary advantage of utilizing software in this research is the capacity to effectively manage substantial volumes of text data. Motivational speeches are frequently extensive and intricate, encompassing numerous layers of meaning that are difficult to evaluate carefully. Software technologies enable rapid data coding and categorization based on established theoretical frameworks, such as Self-Determination Theory in this instance.

Still, there exists a risk of condensing intricate motivational language into overly simplistic classifications. Software tools are inherently limited by the rules encoded inside them. Although they can recognize keywords or patterns, they may overlook the speaker's emotional nuances, the cadence of delivery, or the interplay between the speaker and the listener. For example, in Eric Thomas's motivating talks, his employment of emotional appeal and personal experiences significantly enhances motivation; nevertheless, this may not be entirely discernible using lexical analysis alone. Researchers must use caution to ensure that software utilization does not constrain the depth of data analysis.

Although software solutions for qualitative data analysis offer distinct benefits for accuracy, efficiency, and repeatability, they also exhibit limitations that necessitate rigorous examination. In evaluating motivational speeches, researchers must augment computerized analysis with their skill in interpreting the subtleties of language, tone, and context. Consequently, the results obtained from software-based analysis must be regarded as components of a more comprehensive, human-centered interpretation of motivational language.

## 3.6 *Ethical Considerations*

In compliance with ethical research guidelines, all examined speeches were publicly accessible, and no private communications were incorporated. The research protocol explicitly delineated



the study's scope and objectives, guaranteeing transparency and accountability. This methodology seeks to establish a solid basis for assessing the particular language selections utilized by Eric Thomas in his motivational speeches and their correspondence with motivational theories. This systematic methodology guarantees that the study outcomes are anchored in theoretical frameworks and substantiated by comprehensive empirical analysis.

### 3.7 Results and Discussion

#### 3.7.1 Qualitative Data Coding Approach

To systematically categorize Eric Thomas' motivational speeches, qualitative data analysis was conducted using NVivo/MAXQDA, applying thematic coding based on the Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The process involved:

##### 1. Data Import & Transcription:

Ten selected speeches were transcribed into text format and imported into NVivo/MAXQDA for analysis.

##### 1. Initial Coding (Open Coding):

Key phrases were identified and assigned preliminary codes based on motivational themes.

##### 1. Axial Coding (Categorization):

Codes were grouped into two primary categories: Intrinsic Motivation and Extrinsic Motivation.

##### 1. Selective Coding (Final Themes):

Representative quotes were extracted to illustrate each motivational type.

#### Categorization of Motivational Phrases

##### 1. Intrinsic Motivation (Self-Directed & Internally Driven)

Definition: Statements emphasizing passion, purpose, and self-fulfillment. These phrases indicate internal satisfaction rather than external validation.

Table 1. Categories of Motivational Phrases

Code	Frequency	Representative Quotes
Passion	High	"You gotta want it as bad as you wanna breathe."
Purpose	High	"Discover your purpose."
Process-Focus	Medium	"Fall in love with the process, not just the outcome."
Self-Belief	Medium	"Your why must be greater than any obstacle."

Software Analysis Findings:

1. "Passion" and "purpose" were the most frequently occurring intrinsic themes.
1. The "process-focus" theme emerged as a moderate but significant component of intrinsic motivation.
1. Thomas frequently associates self-belief with personal growth and resilience.

2. Extrinsic Motivation (Outcome-Oriented & External Validation)

Definition: Statements focusing on competition, rewards, and recognition. These phrases highlight the drive to achieve externally set goals.

Table 2. Outcome-Orientation and Validation

Code	Frequency	Representative Quotes
Achievement	High	"You can achieve greatness."
Social Validation	High	"Prove them wrong."
Competitive Drive	Medium	"Win the game, and let them see what you're made of."
Reward-Based	Medium	"Success is your revenge."

Software Analysis Findings:

1. "Achievement" and "social validation" emerged as dominant extrinsic motivators.
2. The competitive drive category was moderately present, suggesting a significant but balanced role in motivation.
1. Thomas often frames "success" as a form of external validation (e.g., proving doubters wrong).

Visual Representation: Code Co-Occurrence & Frequency

1. Word Frequency Analysis (Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic)

A word frequency analysis in NVivo/MAXQDA highlighted the most frequently used terms:

1. Intrinsic: *passion, purpose, process, love, breathe, why*
1. Extrinsic: *greatness, prove, win, success, revenge*

2. Code Co-Occurrence Matrix

A co-occurrence analysis showed strong linkages:

1. Intrinsic: "purpose" and "passion" frequently co-occur.



1.Extrinsic: "achievement" and "prove them wrong" often appear together.

This qualitative coding analysis revealed that intrinsic and extrinsic motivation coexist in Eric Thomas' speeches, with passion and purpose being dominant themes for self-driven growth, while achievement and social validation drive external motivation. The systematic use of NVivo/MAXQDA enhanced pattern recognition, thematic classification, and co-occurrence analysis, providing quantifiable insights into the linguistic structure of motivational speech.

#### **4. Discussion**

The lexical analysis of Eric Thomas' ten selected talks demonstrated a distinct pattern in linguistic choices related to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The study employed the Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) to classify keywords and phrases based on their motivational significance. Intrinsic motivational components were discerned in expressions highlighting personal development, satisfaction, and tenacity, such as "you must desire it above all else" or "discover your purpose." These expressions signify self-directed acts motivated by intrinsic gratification rather than external incentives.

Conversely, extrinsic motivational cues were identified in language emphasizing external accomplishments, recognition, or societal validation, exemplified by phrases such as "you can achieve greatness" and "receive what you deserve." Such expressions were employed to inspire the audience by highlighting the potential for concrete results, underscoring the impetus to achieve externally set objectives.

A detailed breakdown of the results

1.Intrinsic Motivation: Words and phrases like "passion," "purpose," "love what you do" appeared frequently in Thomas' speeches. These reflect actions motivated by internal satisfaction and joy rather than external validation.

1.Extrinsic Motivation: Phrases focusing on achievement, such as "win the game" or "prove them wrong," highlight the external pressures or rewards that drive behavior.

##### *4.1 Discussion of Results in Relation to Hypothesis*

The results correspond with current research on motivational speech, demonstrating that presenters frequently utilize both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational cues to effectively engage their audience. Prior research, including that of Hennessey (2014) and Deci & Ryan (2000), indicates that a combination of inner and extrinsic motivation is crucial for sustaining audience engagement. Eric Thomas' talks adeptly employ a twin strategy by engaging both inner internal fulfillment and extrinsic external achievement, so enhancing the resonance of his message across various audience demographics.

##### *4.2 Impact of Word Choice*

Eric Thomas' employment of motivational language corresponds with Self-Determination Theory, wherein intrinsic terminology highlights the pleasure of learning and self-actualization,

while extrinsic terminology underscores competitive achievement or social endorsement. This duality allows Thomas to address a diverse audience, from individuals pursuing intrinsic motivation to those influenced by extrinsic factors. His incorporation of emotional resonance, exemplified by human narratives of adversity, enhances the motivational impact by rendering abstract notions such as "passion" and "achievement" accessible to the audience.

#### *4.3 Cultural and Situational Context*

An essential factor emerging from this investigation is the cultural and situational context of motivational speeches. Thomas' presentations, though universally applicable, are specifically tailored for younger audiences with obstacles in job, school, or personal growth. His recurrent allusions to surmounting challenges greatly resonate in cultural environments that prioritize personal endeavor and individual achievement. Nonetheless, dependence on extrinsic motivation may, in certain cases, sustain external demands instead of promoting a harmonious equilibrium between internal and external motivators.

The findings of this study align significantly with prior research and provide deeper insights into the linguistic choices used by motivational speakers to influence their audience. Eric Thomas' speeches demonstrate a balanced integration of intrinsic and extrinsic motivational cues, as outlined in Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985). This combination not only aligns with the theoretical framework but also reflects strategies identified in earlier studies by Aflahah (2017) and Sutrisno (2019a).

#### *4.4 Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation*

Intrinsic motivation, as observed in Thomas' speeches, frequently revolves around phrases that emphasize self-fulfillment, personal growth, and perseverance. For example, expressions such as "discover your purpose" and "love what you do" resonate with Ryan and Deci's (2000) argument that intrinsic motivation is driven by internal satisfaction and autonomy. This reflects findings by Hennessey (2014), which highlight how language can evoke a sense of internal drive and personal enjoyment.

Extrinsic motivational elements in Thomas' speeches are equally prominent. Phrases like "prove them wrong" and "you can achieve greatness" underscore external rewards and societal recognition. These findings support Deci and Ryan's (1985) concept of extrinsic motivation, where actions are driven by external outcomes. Furthermore, this aligns with Mayfield et al.'s (1998) assertion that motivational language often appeals to external achievements to engage diverse audience segments.

#### *4.5 Rhetorical Strategies and Engagement*

The study's findings reaffirm the effectiveness of rhetorical strategies identified in prior literature. Aflahah (2017) and Sutrisno (2019a) emphasized the role of rhetorical questions, storytelling, and direct address in enhancing audience engagement. Thomas employs these techniques effectively to establish a connection with his audience. His frequent use of relatable anecdotes and emotionally charged language amplifies his message's impact, consistent with findings from motivational language analyses in commencement speeches.

#### *4.6 Cultural and Situational Considerations*

The cultural and situational context significantly influences the reception of motivational language. While Thomas' speeches resonate strongly with younger audiences facing challenges in education and career development, the reliance on extrinsic motivators, such as societal validation, may not universally appeal across all cultural contexts. As Mayfield et al. (1998) noted, motivational language can sometimes perpetuate external pressures, underscoring the importance of tailoring linguistic strategies to diverse audiences.

#### *4.7 Implications for Motivational Speech Analysis*

This study extends the understanding of linguistic strategies in motivational speeches by bridging theoretical frameworks and practical applications. The alignment with Self-Determination Theory underscores the importance of addressing both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators to sustain audience engagement. Moreover, the findings emphasize the need for cultural sensitivity in motivational language, suggesting that future research should explore audience-specific adaptations.

The analysis of Eric Thomas' speeches highlights the intricate interplay of intrinsic and extrinsic motivational cues, supported by rhetorical strategies that enhance engagement. These findings not only validate existing theories but also provide practical insights for motivational speakers seeking to optimize their impact. Aligning linguistic choices with audience needs and cultural contexts remains a critical area for further exploration, ensuring that motivational language continues to inspire and empower diverse audiences.

### **5. Summary**

The examination of Eric Thomas' talks illustrates the significance of linguistic selections in influencing listener motivation. Thomas effectively engages a diverse audience by integrating intrinsic motivating phrases that emphasize inner fulfillment with extrinsic ones centered on outward achievement. The results not only correspond with established motivational theories, such as Self-Determination Theory, but also enhance the comprehension of how linguistic techniques can be customized to various motivational requirements. This research facilitates deeper exploration of how motivating speakers utilize linguistic tactics to influence their listeners. This study explored the linguistic choices in Eric Thomas' motivational speeches using Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The analysis categorized intrinsic and extrinsic motivational elements, revealing a balanced approach in Thomas' speeches that enhances audience engagement. Intrinsic phrases focus on self-fulfillment and personal growth, while extrinsic phrases emphasize external validation and achievements. These findings align with existing literature (e.g., Aflahah, 2017; Hennessey, 2014), highlighting the role of rhetorical strategies such as storytelling and emotional resonance in amplifying the impact of motivational language.

The findings provide insights for motivational speakers and educators on how to structure their messages to resonate with diverse audiences by blending intrinsic and extrinsic motivators. The

importance of tailoring motivational language to cultural and situational contexts emerges as a critical takeaway for global applicability. Schools and training programs can utilize these insights to enhance motivational strategies in curricula and professional development initiatives.

Future research could explore how motivational language varies across cultures and its implications for audience reception. Investigating the effectiveness of motivational speeches on digital platforms, considering audience interaction and platform dynamics, could extend the current findings. Examining the long-term impact of motivational language on behavior and outcomes would provide a deeper understanding of its efficacy.

The study is limited to Eric Thomas, which may not generalize to other motivational speakers or speech styles. The findings primarily reflect Western motivational paradigms and may not apply universally. While qualitative methods were robust, incorporating quantitative measures, such as audience feedback or behavioral outcomes, could enhance the study's validity.

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