



Culture and Reasoning in Arabic Discourse: A Contrastive Analysis of Rhetorical Patterns in Algerian Academia

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Abstract:

In an increasingly interconnected world, the intricacies of cross-cultural communication and language acquisition are of a crucial importance. Contrastive Rhetoric theory offers valuable insights into how rhetorical patterns are transferred from L1 to L2. While previous studies acknowledge the influence of culture on rhetoric, they often overlook the reasoning mechanisms shaping rhetorical choices. The present research addresses this gap within the context of Arabic discourse, focusing on Algerian academic corpus, by shifting the focus from surface cultural manifestations to the fundamental reasoning embedded within Arab culture. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of how major Arabic rhetorical patterns, including paraphrase, lexical couplets, and parallelism, are transferred to English compositions by Algerian students.

Keywords: *Contrastive Rhetoric; Paraphrase; Lexical Couplets; Parallelism; Arabic Discourse; Academic Composition.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the interconnected world we live in today, understanding the intricacies of cross-cultural communication and language acquisition is crucial. In the field of academic composition, applied linguists devote serious attention to such intricacies as the latter intervenes in both language acquisition and production. Contrastive Rhetoric theory serves as a lens through which researchers examine how rhetorical patterns from first language (L1) are transferred to compositions in the target language (L2), in this respect English language as the lingua franca of major academic communication (Kaplan, 2005; Kaplan, 1967; Leki, 1991; McIntosh & Connor, 2023; Ostler, 2002; Ying, 2000). However, amid the large body of literature dealing with cultural influence on rhetoric and composition, a crucial aspect often overlooked is the underlying cultural reasoning that shapes rhetorical choices. My research address this overlooked aspect in the context of Arabic cultural group in particular, with a special focus on Algerian academic corpus.

The review of previous studies in the research corpus provides valuable insights into the rhetorical patterns present in Arabic discourse (Abdelrady Altaher, 2023; Al-brefkane & Fathi, 2023; Attiya, 2022; Aziz, 2012; Djamila, 2020; Jawad, 2007; Johnstone, n.d.; R. B. Kaplan, 1967; Liebman, 1992). However, they all seem to neglect a crucial aspect in relating rhetorical patterns to Arab culture. The present research seeks to offer a deeper understanding of rhetorical patterns in Arab culture and Arabic discourse by shifting the focus from merely cultural manifestations to the underpinnings of reasoning embedded within Arabic discourse and Arab scholarly production. While previous studies have acknowledged the influence of culture on rhetorical patterns, they have often failed to delve into the specific reasoning processes that underlie these patterns. By bridging this theoretical gap, this study aims to elucidate how major Arabic rhetorical patterns, rooted in cultural reasoning, are transferred to compositions in English by Arabic-speaking students.

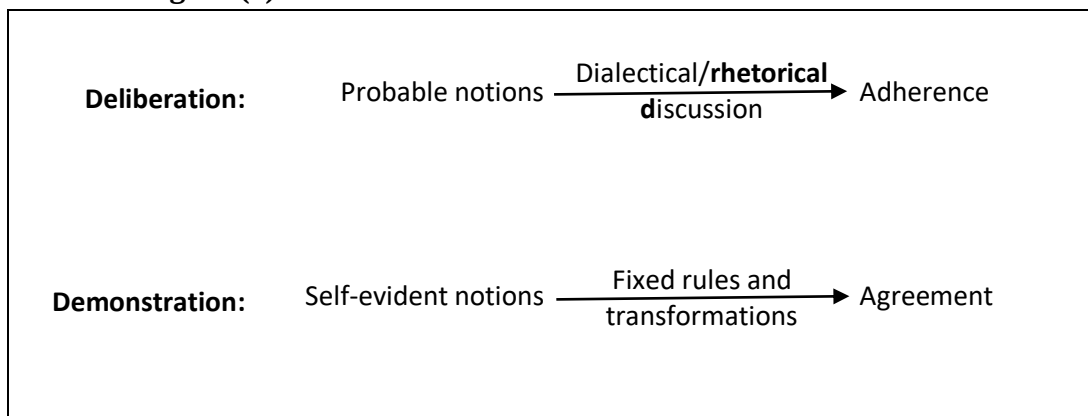
The nature of CR studies requires the appropriation of tools of analysis from a range of disciplines since it comprises of diverse variables including culture, language, rhetoric and reasoning. Borrowing from neighboring disciplines becomes a de facto for CR studies, which further incorporates, by necessity, other elements in the analysis, mainly from philosophy and history of science. From the discipline of philosophy and rhetoric, Charles Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca's seminal work *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation* offers illuminating insights on the difference between Deliberation and Demonstration as two modes of persuasion. Similarly, the claim I endeavor to substantiate in this study, that reasoning is ultimately cultural specific and equally timeless, requires extended and simultaneously critical scrutiny of Arab epistemological fundamentals. The four-volume treatise of Mohammed Abed al-Jabri *Critique of Arab Reason* be as the first and most serious project on the subject, yields extremely useful notions on the history of science and the evolution of epistemology in Arab culture. From Applied Linguistics, be as the core discipline to which this paper belongs, discourse and text analysis offers tools for spotting linguistic sequences which function as structural evidence of rhetorical patterns specific to Arabic native speakers. At this level, I deploy theories and insights from the rigorous analysis of repetitive

structures in Arab rhetoric highlighted by Barbra Johnstone in her book *Repetition in Arabic Discourse: Paradigms, Syntagms, and the Ecology of Language*. In the following I focus on three main rhetorical patterns frequently present in Arabic discourse (*paraphrase*, *lexical couplets* and *parallelism*), respectively relating each of them with epistemological fundamentals in Arab reason (Demonstration versus Deliberation; Words versus Ideas; and Analogy).

1. Demonstration versus Deliberation and Paraphrase

Aristotle, the founder of the study of rhetoric in western discourse, presented two modes of persuasion in two separate treatises: (1) demonstration in *On Rhetoric*, and later (2) dialectic deliberation in *Topics*. The two modes of persuasion apply different means and methods to achieve different argumentation aims. Deliberation mode constructs arguments based on *probable* notions to secure *adherence* from the audience. The notions presented in such arguments are subject to questioning and disagreement among the audience throughout the argument. This mode of persuasion did not last long in western culture and had gradually faded granting the other mode of persuasion to prevail in western rhetoric. Demonstration mode, since Descartes and on, establishes argument based on self-evident and universal premises, linked by definite warrants, which ultimately leads to audience agreement (Johnstone, 1991). The following figure from previous research (Lebiar, 2017) sums the difference between the two modes:

Figure (1): Demonstration and Deliberation: means and ends



The distinction between the two occurs to be outdated since Deliberation as a mode of persuasion is no longer valid at least in scientific sphere. However, a historical enquiry of epistemology in Arab culture reveals that Aristotelian logic was not introduced to Arab philosophers during the Era of Codification –when Arab reason was formed. At the time, mere fragments and scattered texts were translated to Arabic. Aristotelian logic was not introduced to Arab-Islamic culture until the reign of Al-Ma'mun (813-833AC), who promoted translation of Greek texts to Arabic, among them *Prior Analytics*, *Posterior Analytics* and *Topics*. However, due to political unrest and theological antagonism, Aristotelian logic was not fully comprehended let alone appreciated by Arab scholars (Al-Jabri, 2009/2011, pp. 288-90). As I previously referred to, Demonstration as a mode of persuasion is introduced to Western thought in *Topics*, one of Aristotle's works that are not present in Arab-Islamic culture. For this reason, Deliberation prevailed as the sole mode, mainly because it yields to Arab scholars' prior

fascination with the Art of Rhetoric.

The purpose behind this extensive discussion of modes of persuasion and their influence on Arab reason is to account for *paraphrase* frequency in Arab rhetoric. Barbra Johnstone (1991) elaborates on the distinction between demonstration and deliberation to justify the writer's inclination to paraphrase:

For this reason, proof may in certain situations be counterproductive or even impossible. This is the case, for example, in some kinds of theological arguments. People who are so deeply convinced that God exists that they see no possibility of doubt about the matter cannot, by the very nature of proof, attempt to prove it to an agnostic. To do so would be paradoxical. The only thing the missionary can do is to attempt to *present* the truth, and he or she does this, in many cases, by simply saying it, again and again, in his or her own words and in the words of the Bible or other relevant texts. [the author's emphasis] (p. 115)

In Arab reason, confusing deliberation and demonstration causes argumentation to be full of paraphrasing, where the interlocutor presents *probable notions* to achieve *agreement*. Thus, he/she keeps paraphrasing those probable notions aiming to elevate them to *self-evident* status.

2. Words versus Ideas and Lexical Couplets

Ente At this level, I would like to explain the relation between the importance of language in Arab reason and the rhetorical pattern frequently present in compositions by Arabic native speakers known as Lexical Couplets. From an epistemological level, Al-Jabri (2009/2011) declares, "If philosophy was the 'miracle' of the Greeks, the Arab[ic] sciences are the 'miracle' of the Arabs. The truth is that the achievement during the Era of Codification of the collection of the language and categorising and analysing its grammatical bases, was indeed something of a miracle" (pp. 89-90). This stems not only from a pure academic orientation, but also from the status Arab scholars accord to Arabic language. Indeed, the first 'scholastic' initiatives in Arab reason are treatises of lexis and grammar, probably the most significant works at the time are (1) the first dictionary in Arabic language Al Farahidi's Kitab Al-Ayn and (2) one of the earliest studies of grammar –Sibawayh's Al-Kitab. From this crucial period on, scholars and academics promoted the language factor in their political and cultural agendas to seek unity to the Arab peoples relying on the unity of their tongue. Not only scholars, but also the majority of peoples inhabiting the Arab world glorify Arabic language and consider it superior to all other languages. Coining it with the Koran and their cultural and political unity, Arabs who rarely use Standard Arabic in everyday life are actually very affectionate to Arabic that the slightest critique of their language could be taken as offensive and ultimately leads to hostility.

This prestige accorded to Arabic asserts an enduring influence on Arab episteme and rhetoric. In Arabic persuasive discourse, language is elevated above the ideas it expresses themselves. As noted by Raphael Patai (1983) in his investigation on The Arab Mind, "no language I know comes even near to Arabic in its power of rhetoricism,

in its ability to penetrate beneath and beyond intellectual comprehension directly to the emotions and make its impact upon them” (p. 48). This “ability” instilled to Arabic in academic discourse makes words and phrases preloaded with a persuasive force, where the audience could be drawn to agreement regardless to the notion presented in the argument. The author continues as to highlight the impact of this power instilled in Arabic language on rhetoric: “It is a characteristic of the Arab mind to be swayed more by words than by ideas, and more by ideas than by facts” (p. 48). Preliminary corpus analysis reveals a frequent presence of a rhetorical pattern known as Lexical Couplets (Johnstone, 1991) –combining two synonyms that refer to the same notion in a sentence linked by additive conjunction and or disjunctive conjunction or. In Arabic discourse, coining two words that are close or identical in meaning is an attempt to reinforce the persuasive power of the notion presented, for words have rhetorical force on their own in Arabic discourse.

3. Analogy and Parallelism

In addition to its cohesive magnitude, Johnstone (1991) claims that Parallelism serves an essential discursive function in Arabic language, which she labels as *Paradigmatic Patterning*. Clauses and/or sentences in parallel structures are meant to serve the same function in the discourse; they are tailored in such a structure to be related in terms of purpose. The ideational items presented in a given parallel form share a semantic prevalence, similar to linguistic items categorized under the same “paradigmatic class” or the same “associative axis.”² In other words, like linguistic items under associative axis, clauses and sentences in parallelism are meant to be associated, not only syntactically, but also semantically. Analyzing several genres of Arabic texts and speeches, Johnston (1991) concludes: “items which are similar in syntactic form [i.e. parallelism] are interpreted as members of a common paradigmatic class of items.” (p. 106) Unable to separate the two discursive functions (rhetorical and textual), the author argues, Arabic speakers evoke such parallel structures in their composition not only for ornamental purpose, but concurrently to keep ideational items tied together to “a definite viewpoint” usually presented in the first clause/sentence of the parallel sequence, or “the parallelistic beginning.” With every clauses/sentence included in the parallel structure, the listener/reader learns more, hence the discourse changes gradually, slightly affecting the meaning of the following item. By the end of the parallel structure, the speaker/writer has grouped together a class of items, associated to the same “definite view point” but slightly different from one another in meaning.

Johnstone, the linguist, explains the tendency of Arab speakers to adopt parallelism in their elocution in terms of the structure of Arabic language itself, following the rather arguable Sapir-Whorf hypothesis in its strong version, asserting hence the reciprocal relationship between language and thought. Nonetheless, to abide by the confinement of scientific inquiry, a broader analysis that integrates Arab reason and epistemology is required to clear up the confusion caused by the problematic hypothesis and to lay concrete scientific foundations for future CR studies. In the course

² De Saussure uses the dichotomy *syntagmatic/associative* while Hjelmslev broadens the former dichotomy and uses the term *paradigmatic* instead of *associative*. However, the term *associative* fits more appropriately in the argument of this paper.

of decimating bias in ethnographic research, and to remedy the shortcomings incited by the different unscientific approaches to CR studies, the present review urges researchers to restrict the scope of research within epistemological underpinnings as founded and evolved in a given culture. In relation to the critique presented at the beginning of this paper, this profound maneuver in the studies of CR that moves from one crucial construct –*culture*, to *reason*, allows the analyst to work on more operational data, itself collected from analyzing scholastic materials rather than merely popular and prejudicial prospects on that particular culture.

Johnstone's insightful analysis of parallelism (or *paradigmatic patterning*) in Arabic discourse shows the functional significance of such a structure that serves as a constructive analogy in action, rather than a mere figurative manipulation of words. However, her explanation of Arabs tendency to compose parallel structures is not equally discerning, for it requires a deeper examination of Arab scientific production, its foundation and development, in order to achieve plausible illustrations of parallelism in Arab thought. In his analysis of Arab reason, Al-Jabri (2009/2011) claims that the beginning of Arab scientific production, which started during the Era of Codification roughly at the dawn of the 8th century. *Codifying* at the time is not related to Law in any way (as the term usually denotes), but involves the composition of a collection of books and treatises on Arabic language and syntax. Evidently, scholars wished to better interpret the Koran and to assert its linguistic miraculous-ness; a direction that Arab scholars still follow until today. Works from that era retained a substantial influence on Arab thought, that some of these scholars, Ibn Abi Ishaq, Al-Khalil al-Farahidi and Sibawayh for instance, are still considered to be, not only remarkable philologists and grammarians, but among the greatest thinkers who established the fundamentals for Arab thought and science for the next thousand years or so. Even the later equally important thinkers, who were preoccupied by identifying the sources of Sharia (the Islamic law), and sources of Creed, mainly Al-Shafi'i and Al-Ash'ari respectively, followed the exact same methods of earlier philologists and grammarians. All these influential thinkers, despite their affiliation with contradistinctive sciences and disciplines, devoted their work to an ultimate end: They were preoccupied by a *systematic codification of the methods and theories that designate Arab-Islamic science and knowledge ever since, predicated solely by a particular "rational act" –analogy.*

Only this "rational act" or "mental mechanism" that marked the beginning of Arab scientific activity and continues to be a major epistemological order in Arab reason until today could thoroughly explains the tendency of Arab speakers to adopt parallel structures in their compositions and utterances. Indeed, it is in defiance to Johnstone's explanation, which draws from Sapir-Wharf hypothesis and argues that parallelism in Arab composition stems from Arabic language itself. Then, how would the linguist explain the relatively high frequency of parallel structures even in English texts composed by Arab speakers as found by many CR studies (Almehmadi, 2012; Al-Qahtani, 2006; Lebiar, 2017)? Yet, while these studies and others with the same stance account for the transfer of structural patterns from L1 to L2, their analysis is loaded with intuitive and unscientific attitude to as a contentious concept as culture.

Analogical reasoning emerged as the main epistemological order from various scientific endeavors to establish a purely Arab-Islamic knowledge experience. It started

predominantly with philology and the study of rhetoric, as scholars transferred principles of comparison from Arabic language, mainly metonymy and metaphor, to rhetoric, establishing hence the beginning of Arab logic. Later on as experts in Jurisprudence, or the study of Islamic law, embarked on a quest to establish fundamentals of Sharia, they followed the exact same method, by comparing *the branch* and *the root* according to a certain correspondence between the two. Theologians used different terminology, but the same epistemological mechanism dominated their inquiry: it is the deduction of *the absent* from *evident* through analogy (Al-Jabri, 2009/2011). Analogical reasoning, then, deeply rooted in Arabs' rational activity, uncovers the reason that compels Arab students and researchers to overload their composition with parallel structures.

II. Conclusion:

Repetition in Arab compositions serves a significant role in rhetoric, as it prevails among native speakers of Arabic as they compose using their native language or the target one. I have discussed this kind of structures in this paper, but this does not confine CR analysts solely to repetition, for there are other patterns in students and researchers' compositions that could not fit in this paper. Some of these patterns, for instance, deal with reporting practices in academic writing. Modality, too, is another field of contrast, where academics from different cultural groups use modals differently in terms of frequency and manner. Whether repetition, reporting, modality or other specific patterns, the analyst may as well account for this sort of discrepancy in ESL composition and academic writing, as compared to NSE writing, by studying history of knowledge and thought in a specific cultural group rather than the actual cultural temperament.

The present study has shed light on the intricate relationship between cultural reasoning and rhetorical patterns within Arabic discourse, particularly in the context of Algerian academic corpus. By focusing on three prominent rhetorical patterns—paraphrase, lexical couplets, and parallelism—we have deepened our understanding of how these patterns are intertwined with underlying reasoning processes. The analysis revealed that Paraphrase, often reflective of the lack of genuine understanding of the difference between Demonstration and Deliberation as two different modes of persuasion in Arab reasoning, serves as a vehicle for conveying complex ideas and arguments. Similarly, the prevalence of repetition and Lexical Couplets reflects not only a rhetorical strategy but also a manifestation of cultural emphasis on a peculiar way of argument presentation. Furthermore, analogical reasoning, inherent in Arabic discourse since the foundation of Islamic-Arab civilization, influences the rhetorical choices made by Algerian students in particular and Arab speakers in general to adopt Parallelism in their argument construction. By elucidating these connections, this research underscores the importance of considering cultural reasoning in understanding the transfer of rhetorical patterns across languages. Moving forward, this nuanced understanding has practical implications for language education and cross-cultural communication, emphasizing the need for pedagogical approaches that account for the cultural and reasoning intricacies embedded within the culture and hence transferred to composition in second language.

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