

THE EMERGENCE OF ARABIC STYLISTICS

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Abstract: *The emergence of Arabic stylistics traces back to the expansion of Islam, which significantly influenced the development of the Arabic language and its sciences. The integration of Arabs with non-Arabs led to linguistic changes that necessitated the standardization and codification of Arabic grammar, morphology, and stylistics. This study explores the historical progression of stylistics in Arabic, highlighting the foundational contributions of early scholars like Abu Ubaydah and the evolution of rhetoric (balagha) as an essential discipline. Drawing parallels with Greek rhetoric, it examines the interplay of eloquence, clarity, and linguistic artistry. The study also delves into the components of Arabic stylistics – ilm al-ma'ani, ilm al-bayan, and ilm al-badi' – and their significance in achieving eloquence and intellectual expression. Furthermore, it discusses the interplay of meaning, structure, and word choice in creating impactful speech, emphasizing the importance of clarity and aesthetics in Arabic rhetoric.*

Keywords: *Arabic stylistics, balagha, ilm al-bayan, ilm al-ma'ani, ilm al-badi', rhetoric, eloquence, linguistic artistry*

Introduction

After the establishment of Islam, the Arabian Peninsula saw a significant increase in the number of Muslims. Interaction between Arabs and non-Arabs led to changes in the Arabic language. Even native speakers began to mispronounce or alter words. Scholars concerned about the future of Arabic developed disciplines to study its grammar and other rules. This effort led to the creation of syntax (**Ilm al-Nahw**), morphology (**Ilm al-Şarf**), and later the foundations of stylistics (**Ilm al-Balāghah**). Initially, there were no standalone books on stylistics, only short treatises addressing specific questions written by Arabic language scholars.

The first scholar to write a book specifically about stylistics was **Abu Ubaydah** (d. 825 CE), who authored *Majāz al-Qur'ān* ("The Allegory of the Qur'an").

The Term Stylistics in Arabic

The term "stylistics" as it is used today did not exist in classical Arabic. Instead, terms such as **al-Aslūb** (style) and, more accurately, **al-Balāghah** (eloquence) were used to refer to the art of effective communication and rhetoric. The word *rhetoric* originates from the Greek *rhetorike*, meaning "the art of oratory". Historically, this term has been interpreted in various ways.

The Development of Rhetoric and Stylistics

Although the art of oratory was valued in Egypt and Assyria, ancient Greece is considered the birthplace of rhetoric. Public speaking in Greece was intricately tied to societal life, especially in city-states (polises) where critical political and legal matters were decided collectively. Anyone could act as a prosecutor or defender, and accused individuals had to defend themselves. In this context, a command of language and persuasive speech were essential skills.

Rhetoric became a key academic subject because politicians, military commanders, and litigants all needed to address various audiences effectively. As an academic discipline, its goal was to teach clear, purposeful, and convincing speech. Mastery of rhetoric was a prerequisite for holding political office, engaging in public life, or serving as a judge in both ancient Greece and Rome.

Prominent definitions of rhetoric include Cicero's "the systematization of oratory experience", Quintilian's "the science of speaking well and the power of persuasion", and Aristotle's "the art of discovering the various means of persuasion". [3, 19] Aristotle also described rhetoric as "an art corresponding to dialectic". [3, 19]

Arabic Rhetoric and Its Elements

In Arabic, **balāghah** literally means "eloquence" and refers to conveying meaning clearly and effectively with impactful language that is appropriate to the audience and context. It is considered one of the arts that relies on intellectual acumen and aesthetic sensibility. A rhetorician in Arabic is akin to a painter; just as the painter carefully selects colors and patterns to captivate the viewer, the rhetorician constructs their speech or writing to influence and move the audience.

The core components of **balāghah** include words, meaning, and the arrangement of expressions in a way that is impactful, beautiful, and contextually appropriate. [6, 8] Stylistic elements are chosen based on the subject, audience, and purpose, ensuring the speech resonates with its listeners.

Sometimes, a word may appear beautiful in one context but lose its appeal when used in another. Likewise, a sentence may possess intrinsic beauty and charm, yet if not applied appropriately, it falls outside the bounds of eloquence and becomes a target for critics. An example of this is found in the opening verses of Al-Mutanabbi's poem written in praise of Kafur al-Ikhshidi:

وما طربي لما رأيته بدعة لقد كنت أرجو أن أراك فأطرب

"How joyful I become upon seeing you! I had wished to see you and rejoice".

Al-Wahidi remarked that this verse seems almost sarcastic because it implies that the poet becomes as amused upon seeing Kafur as people might when observing something comical. Ibn Jinni commented, "When I recited this verse to Abu al-Tayyib, I told him, you've turned the person into a monkey, and he burst into laughter". [7, 10]

The Sciences of Balāghah

Arabic rhetoric was systematized into three sciences:

1. **‘Ilm al-Ma‘ānī**: The study of sentence structure to express intended meanings clearly and appropriately. This includes variations in word order to highlight specific meanings. For example:

- أَنْحُنْ نَذْهَبُ الْيَوْمَ إِلَى السَّيْنِمَا؟ (Are we going to the cinema today?)
- الْيَوْمَ نَذْهَبُ إِلَى السَّيْنِمَا؟ (Are we going *today* to the cinema?)
- أَلَّى السَّيْنِمَا نَذْهَبُ الْيَوْمَ؟ (Are we going to the *cinema* today?) [8, 10]

2. **‘Ilm al-Badī‘**: The study of linguistic embellishment and artistic elements that make speech pleasing. This field was first explored by **Abu Uthman Amr ibn Bahr al-Jahiz**, followed by **Khalifa ibn al-Mu‘tazz**. It examines how poetic and artistic devices can enhance the aesthetic appeal of language, and its principles can be observed in both pre-Islamic poetry and the Qur’an.

3. **‘Ilm al-Bayān**: The study of clarity and expression, focusing on how a single idea can be communicated in multiple ways. For example, the statement “Ahmad is generous” can be expressed as:

- أَحْمَدُ كَرِيمٌ (Ahmad is generous.)
- أَحْمَدُ مِثْلُ حَاتِمٍ (Ahmad is like Hatim.)
- أَحْمَدُ مُرْنٌ لِأَصْدِقَائِهِ (Ahmad is a rain cloud for his friends.)
- أَحْمَدُ عِنْدَهُ ضَيْوُفٌ دَائِمًا (Ahmad always has guests at his home.)

Eloquence (Fasāḥah)

Fasāḥah (eloquence) refers to clear and fluent expression. A fasīḥ statement is characterized by clarity, ease of pronunciation, and adherence to linguistic norms. It avoids obscure vocabulary, complex structures, or improper usage. Words that are pleasing to the ear, such as *المزنة* (al-muznah) and *الديمة* (ad-dīmah) for “rain cloud”, are preferred over harsher-sounding alternatives like *البيعاق* (al-buāq).

[7, 9] ولو ان مجدا اخلد الدهر واحدا من الناس ابقى مجده مطعما

“If the glory and honor of a person could cause them to remain eternal in this world and extend their life, then among all people, Mut’im ibn Adi would be the most deserving of eternal life”.

In this verse, the pronoun referring to “majd” (glory) returns to the word “Mut’im”, which appears earlier in the line. However, the pronoun precedes the noun it refers to. For this reason, this verse is not considered eloquent.

Conclusion

In summary, fasāḥah emphasizes conveying ideas in clear, simple, and linguistically correct sentences, while balāghah encompasses the sciences of **‘Ilm al-Ma‘ānī**, **‘Ilm al-Badī‘**, and **‘Ilm al-Bayān** to master the art of eloquence and persuasion. Together, they represent a significant intellectual tradition in Arabic culture, reflecting the depth and richness of the Arabic language.

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