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Linguistic Strategies and Cultural Styles for Persuasive Discourse

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This chapter describes the ways in which culture, language, and rhetorical situation come together to shape persuasive strategies used in the European West and the Arab and Iranian East. It is an attempt to find a way of combining a view of rhetoric that sees persuasive style as a facet of culture, and hence to some extent predetermined, with a view that sees speakers as making choices, based in immediate rhetorical situations, among "available means of persuasion."

Let me begin with three examples of the kinds of communicative problems that this chapter attempts to explain. The first is an essay written by a young Egyptian student for an intermediate-level composition class that was part of an intensive English as a second language (ESL) program. The topic for this assignment was "What was the most frightening experience you ever had?" I have edited out orthographic and syntactic errors, which are not relevant to the present discussion, and have numbered the sentences for later reference:

(1) The thing that makes me most frightened to think about is death. (2) I don't like it because it takes one of my best friends and when I begin to think if one of my family died, what would happen to me. (3) I love my father, my mother, and my brother and I can't imagine my situation in this case. (4) Really I don't know what I'd do. (5) And really I worry about my father and mother because they are becoming old. (6) And I can't do anything to save them. (7) I am just studying to keep them

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happy. (8) And if I knew the way to keep them happy and alive forever, I'd do it and I'd like to give them my life on a gold tray. (9) I feel afraid when I think about this problem. (10) And I don't know how to solve it. (11) I am just praying to God and asking him for a good, long, happy life for my parents.

This is a nice essay, in some ways. The writer expresses his deep and sincere care in forceful and rather poetic language. But there are some obvious oddities, too. The essay doesn't really address the assigned topic, since it is not about an experience, and furthermore, there are some rhetorical strangenesses, such as the writer's unusual use of *really* in sentences 4 and 5, and the fact that four of the eleven sentences in the essay begin with *and* (sentences 5, 6, 8, and 10). There is also a rather large amount of paraphrase for an essay this short, rather than any real development of the writer's thesis: sentences 3, 4, and 10 all say much the same thing, for example ("I don't know what I'd do"), as do sentences 1 and 9 ("The problem of death makes me afraid"). In several respects, then, this is not the sort of essay an American student might be expected to produce in response to an assignment like this.

A second example of miscommunication has to do with service interaction. Several years ago, I met several women who were on the staff of a Washington organization that facilitates educational exchange programs between the United States and various Middle Eastern countries. These women worked as counselors, helping to place Arab students at appropriate American universities and arrange for their transportation, orientation, and housing.

The counselors were all thoughtful, well-educated, and interested in the people they were dealing with; most of them had lived abroad, many had served in the Peace Corps, and some had traveled in the Middle East. Yet they were all frustrated with their job. They felt put upon by their Arab student clients, who, they said, "simply would never take no for an answer." The students would instead phone or write repeatedly to insist on some service that they had already been told was impossible, and then would finally announce to the counselors that they felt hurt and ignored, that the counselors weren't doing their jobs and didn't care about their clients. This was painful for the counselors, who certainly *did* care about their clients and were doing their best to carry out the organization's policies fairly and to communicate clearly. In the end, the counselors decided that the problem

was that they were women and their student clients for the most part were men, thus confirming the common but inaccurate North American belief that Arab men don't like women. Gradually they came to dislike the people they were trying to help.

My third introductory example has to do with a more formal speech event, a journalistic interview, in a different Middle Eastern setting—revolutionary Iran.¹ In 1979, Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci was granted an interview with Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini, which was published in the *New York Times Magazine* (Fallaci, 1979). The interview turned into an abusive argument, during which Khomeini accused Fallaci of being a prostitute, Fallaci stripped off her chador, or cloak, in Khomeini's presence, and Khomeini finally ordered Fallaci to leave the room, and from then on refused to see any more Western journalists.

Two sorts of things seem to go wrong in the interview. For one thing, Fallaci often proposes syllogistic arguments to Khomeini, challenging him to reexamine and clarify the logic on which his claims are based. Khomeini, however, rejects these arguments out of hand, simply refusing to respond to them. For example, Fallaci uses the following argument in an attempt to challenge Khomeini's prohibition of alcohol and music: If, according to Khomeini, drinking and singing are sinful, and if the Pope drinks and sings, then the Pope must be a sinner. Khomeini rejects the entire argument, saying, "The rules of your priests do not interest me." Islam, he says, does not allow alcoholic drinks, and "that's all."

The second sort of trouble in the interview also has to do with what appear to be inappropriate responses by Khomeini to Fallaci's questions. Toward the end of the interview, for example, Fallaci attempts (as she does several times during the interview) to get Khomeini to clarify his notion of democracy, by asking him for his definition of the term. Khomeini responds not with a definition, but with a story from the history of Shi'ite Islam, about a dispute between Ali, the seventh-century Imam whom Shi'ite Muslims believe to be the first rightful Muslim leader after Muhammad, and a lowly Jew. In the courtroom where the dispute was to be settled, the judge stood when Ali entered the room, but not when the Jew entered. Ali became angry, pointing out that the contending parties in a lawsuit should be treated the same way, no matter what their social rank. Khomeini ends the story with a rhetorical question: "Can you give me a better example of democracy?" In this and other occasions on which Khomeini responds to a question with a story or an extended analogy, one senses that he may not understand,

or may be pretending not to understand, what Fallaci expects his answers to be like. Clearly, something went wrong during the interview; Khomeini and Fallaci seem continually to be talking at cross-purposes.

The three examples of miscommunication I have just presented may seem like disparate places to begin. Yet they all have something in common. All involve cross-cultural differences in styles of persuasion, or in how language is used rhetorically. In what follows, I would like to discuss the connections among rhetoric, culture, and language, particularly as these connections impinge on communication between the European and American West and the Arab and, more broadly, Islamic East. What I will try to do is to suggest a way of describing and thinking about cross-cultural differences in rhetorical language use that takes into account the ways people are constrained by the languages they speak and the communicative patterns of the cultures to which they belong, and the ways people use language and rhetoric creatively in particular communicative situations.

To do this, I will first introduce what I think is an important distinction between *persuasive strategies*, by which I mean, broadly speaking, the various means of persuasion available to any speaker, and *persuasive style*, or a speaker's general tendency, resulting in part from cultural and historical factors, to adopt one particular persuasive strategy in any situation. I will then describe and exemplify three different persuasive strategies, which I will call *quasilogic*, *presentation*, and *analogy*. I will discuss the linguistic correlates of each—what sorts of syntactic and lexical choices are most likely to be made in each mode—as well as what I will call the conceptual correlates—what sorts of beliefs about how persuasion works and how decisions are made tend to trigger each mode. Finally, I will talk about how and when each of the three persuasive strategies is likely to become a persuasive style, or the default mode for rhetorical discourse in a culture. This will involve a brief discussion of some cultural and historical facts about the Western, Aristotelian rhetorical tradition, about the theocratic tradition of the Arab world, and about Iranian Shi'ite ideology.

PERSUASIVE STRATEGIES AND STYLES

Let me now begin to lay out the model of persuasion and the relationships among language, culture, and persuasion with which I would like to work. First, I would like to elaborate on the distinction I

have made between *persuasive strategies* and *persuasive styles*. Persuasive strategies are the range of options from which a speaker selects in deciding on an appropriate tactic or combination of tactics for persuasion in a given situation. Clearly, we do not use the same tactics in every situation that calls for rhetorical discourse. All of us have access to a range of communicative strategies, verbal and nonverbal, among which we choose in situations where persuasion is necessary. Sometimes we use logic; sometimes we tell stories; sometimes we employ displays of emotion, threats, or bribes; sometimes we simply repeat what we want until our interlocutors give in. It is these tactics—the broad range of possible choices for how to persuade that is part of a speaker's communicative competence—that I refer to as *persuasive strategies*. Speech communities, and subgroups within them, may differ to some extent in the range of strategies available to their members. Keenan (1974) points out, for example, that Malagasy women may use direct requests for action, while Malagasy men are constrained to use more indirect, formalized strategies for persuasion. But no speaker is ever limited to a single strategy for persuasion in all situations, and it is likely that some strategies, based as they are in basic human ways of thinking, are universal. (Narrative may be one such strategy; see Bruner, 1986.)

To the extent that rhetorical situations—ones in which persuasion is necessary—are familiar, deciding on the most appropriate strategy does not pose a problem.² There are, however, situations in which a speaker may not know how best to proceed because he or she is faced with an unfamiliar rhetorical task, or with an interlocutor whose responses he or she is unable to predict. Such situations include, but are not limited to, the ones that occur in cross-cultural contexts. A person's initial, reflexive choice of persuasive strategy in situations like these, the strategy or set of strategies he or she assumes to be the best and the most universally applicable, is what I refer to as *persuasive style*. Persuasive styles are culturally predisposed. North Americans and other Westerners, I will claim, are most likely to use a persuasive strategy based on syllogistic, demonstrative logic; their persuasive style is what I will call *quasilogical*. In other cultural settings, other persuasive styles are likely. Note that I am not claiming that North Americans always try to persuade by appearing to be logical. I am simply claiming that for North Americans *quasilogic* is the most easily available and most obvious default choice for cases in which no other strategy immediately suggests itself.

Consider, for example, the following situation.³ A young North American woman spending a study year in Greece went to the post office to pick up a parcel mailed from home. The package was addressed to the woman, in care of the Greek friend with whom she was staying. The North American was told by the postal clerk that the package could not be released to her, because it was addressed not to her, but to her Greek friend. The friend was unfortunately out of town, and the woman needed the parcel right away.

The North American woman began by explaining to the postal clerk that the package was in fact hers, using as logical evidence for this claim the fact that it had her name on it. She displayed her passport to assure the clerk of her identity. This, however, did not work; the man was adamant in his refusal to give her the parcel because, he said, it was not addressed to her. The woman then tried several variations of her logical argument, all to no avail. The clerk finally announced that it was time for his break and slammed down the parcel pickup window, leaving the North American woman to storm out of the post office in utter frustration.

Sitting in a cafe, the woman thought over the situation and decided on a new persuasive strategy, one that she suspected might be more suitable in the Greek context of the interaction. She returned to the post office, but this time, instead of waiting in front of the parcel pickup window, she opened a door marked "private" and walked confidently into the room behind the window, where the packages awaiting pickup were arranged on shelves. She had seen where her package was stored, and she went directly to it, picked it up, and announced to the postal clerk who was now on duty that it was hers and that she was taking it. When the new clerk began to object, she repeated, in her most forceful voice, that the parcel was hers and that she would now take it home. She then walked out with her package.

It is not important for our immediate purposes to understand in detail exactly why this change of tactic worked. While we see in this scenario further evidence about persuasive strategies, about the range of choices a person has in any rhetorical situation, the scenario also illustrates something about persuasive styles. The North American woman's first line of attack was to use a persuasive strategy based on logic, a strategy in which claims are made and evidence adduced to support these claims. ("This package is mine because it has my name on it; I am who I claim to be because I have a passport with my photo and that name in it.") She used this strategy unreflectively, assuming

that it would work; it was only after further thought that she decided on a change of strategy.

I have now made clear the distinction between persuasive strategies and persuasive styles. I would like next to discuss three persuasive strategies in more detail, and then to examine the historical and cultural facts that have predisposed each of the three to become the persuasive style of at least one cultural group.

Three Persuasive Strategies: Linguistic Correlates

The three persuasive strategies I would like to discuss are what I call *quasilogic*, *presentation*, and *analogy*.⁴ Figure 7.1 presents in schematic form the material to be covered in this section.

The term *quasilogical* is borrowed from Belgian philosopher of rhetoric, Chaim Perelman (see Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1958/1969). Quasilogical argumentation is informal, nondemonstrative reasoning that takes its effectiveness from its similarity to formal, demonstrative logic. By making use of the structure and the vocabulary of formal logic, persuaders in the quasilogical mode create the rhetorical impression that their arguments are logically incontrovertible. The goal of quasilogical persuasion is to *convince*, to make it seem impossible for an audience using its powers of rationality not to accept the arguer's conclusion.

One of Perelman's examples of quasilogical argumentation in-

	Quasilogic	Presentation	Analogy
distinguish- ing model	model from formal logic; convincing	model from poetry; moving	model from narrative; teaching
linguistic correlates	use of "logical con- nectives": <u>thus</u> , <u>hence</u> , <u>therefore</u> . . .	"rhetorical deixis": <u>here</u> , <u>now</u> , <u>this</u>	formulaic language: "You know what they say"; "That reminds me"
		visual metaphors: <u>behold</u> , <u>look</u> , <u>see</u>	"the words of the ancestors"; proverbs
	subordination; integration	coordination/ parataxis/ parallelism; involvement	chronology; timeless past ("once upon a time"); involvement

Figure 7.1: Three persuasive strategies.

volves the informal use of the mathematical notion of *transitivity*. Formally speaking, *transitivity* is a property of certain relationships, such as equality or numerical superiority, that makes it possible to infer that because the relationship holds between *a* and *b* and between *b* and *c*, it therefore holds between *a* and *c*: If *a*, for example, equals *b*, and *b* equals *c*, then *a* equals *c*. Informal, or quasilogical, uses of transitivity treat relationships that are not in fact transitive as if they were. One such nontransitive relationship is friendship; a quasilogical argument that could be built with this relationship might be this: If John is a friend of mine, and I am a friend of Sue's, then John and Sue ought to get along well.

Note that the linguistic form of this argument is exactly the same as that of the formally transitive, demonstrative argument about *a*, *b*, and *c*. Quasilogical arguments borrow their strength not only from their propositional similarity to formal reasoning, but also from their linguistic similarity: They are characterized by their use of what writers' handbooks call "logical connectives" like *thus*, *hence*, and *therefore*, as well as by their use of hypotactic, subordinate structures, such as the conditional clauses needed to relate premises to conclusions. Quasilogical persuasive discourse is highly *integrated*, to borrow a term from Wallace Chafe (1982): Clauses are explicitly related to each other as superordinate claims and subordinate sources of support for these claims.

In order to make it as clear as possible that each individual has access to a range of persuasive strategies, I have chosen examples of all three strategies I am discussing from the work of one person, Martin Luther King, Jr. I need hardly point out that King is universally respected as a master of rhetorical discourse; his speeches and his writing, as well as his nonverbal strategies, have clearly been persuasive in causing important social change. While King was especially adept at making appropriate and effective choices among the rhetorical strategies available to him, his situated choices are in principle no different from the choices any speaker makes in attempting to adapt to audience and other contextual factors.

The following paragraph from King's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" (Washington, 1986, pp. 293-294) exemplifies quasilogical persuasive discourse. The paragraph is constructed on the model of a series of syllogisms, with the universal quantifiers *all* and *any* marking major premises and *so* marking conclusions.

Now what is the difference between [just and unjust laws]? How does one determine when a law is just or unjust? A just law is a man-made code that squares with the moral law or the law of God. An unjust law is a code that is out of harmony with the moral law. To put it in the terms of Saint Thomas Aquinas, an unjust law is a human law that is not rooted in eternal and natural law. Any law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust. All segregation statutes are unjust because segregation distorts the soul and damages the personality. It gives the segregator a false sense of superiority, and the segregated a false sense of inferiority. To use the words of Martin Buber, the great Jewish philosopher, segregation substitutes an "I-it" relationship for the "I-thou" relationship, and ends up relegating persons to the status of things. So segregation is not only politically, economically and sociologically unsound, but it is morally wrong and sinful. Paul Tillich has said that sin is separation. Isn't segregation an existential expression of man's tragic separation, an expression of his awful estrangement, his terrible sinfulness? So I can urge men to disobey segregation ordinances because they are morally wrong. (From "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," in *Why We Can't Wait* by Martin Luther King, Jr. Copyright © 1963, 1964 by Martin Luther King, Jr. Reprinted by permission of Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc.)

King begins here by arguing that segregation laws are unjust, because they are "out of harmony with the moral law," and any such law is, according to Aquinas and others, unjust. He then uses a similar argument to show that segregation laws are sinful: Sin is separation, according to Tillich, and segregation is "an existential expression of man's tragic separation"; therefore, segregation ordinances are morally wrong and should be disobeyed. Note that the first of these two arguments is really an argument from authority, and hence not demonstrative. The second argument has the form $A = B$ (sin is separation), $C = B$ (segregation is an expression of separation), therefore $C = A$ (segregation is morally wrong). This would constitute formally valid proof only if "is" in the major premise and "is an expression of" in the minor premise meant what = does; in fact, they do not. The rhetorical force of King's arguments comes not from their formal validity but from the ways they make use of the structures of formal arguments.

In contrast to quasilogical persuasion, with its underlying metaphor of persuasion as a process of rational convincing, *presentational* persuasion could be said to be based on the assumption that being per-

sueded is being moved, being swept along by a rhythmic flow of words and sounds, in the way people are swept along by poetry. The goal of presentational persuasion is to make one's claim maximally present in the audience's consciousness, by repeating it, paraphrasing it, and calling aesthetic attention to it.

The language of presentational persuasion is characterized by its rhythmic, paratactic flow. Rather than having to jump from level to subordinate level, readers or hearers are swept along by parallel clauses, connected in coordinate series. Visual metaphors also help to make the persuader's claim present, as if the claim were actually in the audience's line of vision; hearers are told to "look," "see," or, in languages in which a comparable word exists, "behold." Presentational discourse also makes use of what Lakoff (1974) has called "rhetorical deixis," the use of terms like *here*, *now*, and *this*, from the spatial and temporal realms, in reference to ideas. In contrast to the dense, "integrated" style of quasilogical discourse, which calls on the audience's rational (or, as Bruner, 1986, pp. 12–13, would say, "paradigmatic") minds, presentational discourse creates "involvement" (Chafe, 1982; Tannen, 1987) in the way good poetry does.⁵

An example of presentational discourse is from King's "I Have a Dream" speech (Washington, 1986, pp. 217–218). In connection with the visual nature of presentational persuasion, it is interesting to note Coretta Scott King's comment on the effect of this speech: "At that moment it seemed as if the Kingdom of God *appeared*" (Washington, 1986, p. 217; italics added).

We have also come to this hallowed spot to remind America of the fierce urgency of now. This is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism. Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy; now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice; now is the time to lift our nation from the quicksands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood; now is the time to make justice a reality for all God's children. It would be fatal for the nation to overlook the urgency of the moment. This sweltering summer of the Negro's legitimate discontent will not pass until there is an invigorating autumn of freedom and equality.

King makes use here of all the features of presentation I have just listed: long patterns of syntactic parallelism in the clauses beginning with "now is the time"; poetic alliteration and imagery as, for exam-

ple, "the dark and desolate valley of segregation"; and repeated appeals to here and now. The first selection discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the Arab student's essay, is also essentially presentational, hence its inappropriateness in a setting (an American narrative theme assignment) that calls for chronological order and quasi-logical development.

A third persuasive strategy is analogy. Analogical persuasion works by calling to mind, explicitly or implicitly, traditional wisdom, often in the form of parable- or fablelike stories. Anyone who has ever countered an overcritical friend by saying, "People in glass houses shouldn't throw stones," or used a "When I was your age" story to talk a greedy child out of something, has made use of analogical persuasion. Analogical rhetoric persuades by teaching, reminding its audience of time-tested values by the indirect mode of storytelling. Analogical arguers persuade by having their audiences make lateral, abductive leaps between past events and current issues.

The language of analogical persuasion is the language of folktales, with their formulaic openings and closings, and the timeless and placeless quality signaled by expressions like "once upon a time, in a land far away." As do all narratives, stories used as analogies involve chronology and the linguistic markings of chronology, as well as what Labov (1972) and others refer to as "evaluation," or the various linguistic devices that underscore the pointfulness of stories.

Below are two examples of persuasive analogy from Martin Luther King's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" (Washington, 1986, pp. 290; 294). The first is part of King's answer to the implied question "Why are you in Birmingham?"; the answer takes the form of references to Christian precedent.

Beyond this, I am in Birmingham because injustice is here. Just as the eighth century prophets left their little villages and carried their "thus saith the Lord" far beyond the boundaries of their hometowns; and just as the Apostle Paul left his little village of Tarsus and carried the gospel of Jesus Christ to practically every hamlet and city of the Graeco-Roman world, I too am compelled to carry the gospel of freedom beyond my particular hometown. Like Paul, I must constantly respond to the Macedonian call for aid.

In the following excerpt, King defends civil disobedience with reference to biblical examples.

