Parataxis in Arabic: Modification as a model for persuasion

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PARATAxis IN ARABIC: MODIFICATION AS A MODEL FOR PERSuSion

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It is traditionally thought that the strategies a speaker uses to persuade someone of something are constrained only by psychological and historical factors. In this paper I argue that linguistic constraints on persuasive strategy are equally significant. I suggest that the syntax of phrase- and clause-level modification in written Arabic is a model of the sentence- and paragraph-level structure of rhetorical discourse. Arabic persuasive discourse, in the contemporary texts I have examined, is rhetorically effective through paratactic repetition. An idea is made believable by being stated, restated, and paraphrased; Arabic authors use a great deal of coordination, and very little of the subordination which is so highly valued in English persuasive writing. Arabic modificational syntax is also characterized by the paratactic juxtaposition of items. Adjectival modification with adjectives and certain relative clauses, as well as adverbial modification with cognate accusatives and hāl clauses, all involve structures which are appositive in nature, juxtaposing items from the same syntactic category. This structural homology between persuasion and modification is not coincidental; persuasion can in fact be seen as a function of a kind of modification. My more general claim is that the availability of syntactic strategies like parataxis in a language is precisely what accounts for their pragmatic use in discourse, and vice-versa.*

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1. **Parataxis in discourse**

Arabic persuasive discourse is complexly repetitive and almost entirely paratactic. Synonymous terms are coordinated in lexical couplets (Koch 1983b); morphological roots and morphological patterns are repeated; repetitions of syntax create parallel phrases and clauses; expressions are paraphrased. Example (1), taken from a work of literary criticism, is a particularly appropriate one, since it not only illustrates the phenomenon but also attempts to explain it.2

(1) wa-ka’anna-hu yarāʿ ‘anna al-‘adaba al-jadīra
and as-if he thinks that the literature the worthy
bi-hādā al-ismi, huwa allaḍi yarāʿu al-samaca
of this the name it that-which delights the hearing
kamā yarāʿu al-qalba fi ‘ānin wāḥidin: wa-huwa
as delights the heart at time one and he
li-dālīka yuwa‘affiru li-sawti-hi kulla jamālīn
thus furnishes of sound its all beauty
mumkinin. wa-min al-yarībi, ‘anna-hulā
possible and among the strange that he (neg.)
yu‘addilu ʿibāratan yumlī-hā wa-lā yu‘addīdu
corrects phrase dictates it and (neg.) prepares
muhādarataq gabla ‘ilqā‘i-hā. fa-qad ʿasbaḥa
lecture before delivering it for (perf.) became
hādā al-ʿuslābū juz’an min nafsi-hi wa-caqli-hi,
this the style part of soul his and mind his
fa-huwa lā yumlī wa-lā yuḥādiru ‘illā
for he (neg.) dictates and (neg.) lectures except
bi-hi. wa-kaḍir-an-mā, taqīdu ʿi-hi al-ʿalfāḥa
in it and often you-find in it the expressions
al-mukarrara, wa-huwa ya‘midu ʿi-lā dālīka ‘amanān,
the repeated and he intends to that intending
ḥattā yastimma ma yuridu min ‘tqā‘ātîn
so-that complete what wants of rhythms

and melodies penetrates with them to emotions
sāmī‘i-hi wa-qā‘rī‘i-hi
hearer his and reader his

(And it is as if he thinks that literature worthy of the name is that which delights the hearing as it delights the heart at one time: and he thus furnishes its sound with all possible beauty. And it is strange that he [Tāhā Ḥusayn] never corrects a phrase which he dictates and never prepares a lecture before delivering it. For this style has become part of his soul and his mind, for he never dictates and never lectures except in it. And often you find in it repeated expressions, and he does this on purpose in order to complete the rhythms and melodies he wants with which he penetrates the emotions of his hearer and his reader.)

There is a great deal of paraphrastic and near-paraphrastic conjunction throughout this text, especially in the predicates of sentences. In the first sentence we find a conjoined predicate, huwa allaḍi yarāʿu ... wa-huwa li-dālīka yuwa‘affiru ... ‘(is) that which delights ... and he thus furnishes ...’, the first part of which is also conjoined in a paraphrastic double: yarāʿu al-samaca kamā yarāʿu al-qalba ‘delights the hearing as it delights the heart.’ The predicate of the second sentence is also conjoined: lā yu‘addilu ... wa-lā yu‘addīdu ... ‘he never corrects ... and he never prepares ...’ The parallelistic effect of the two quite similar lexical roots here, ṣ-d-l and ṣ-d-d, is not unintentional. In the third sentence we find the lexical couplet min nafsi-hi wa-caqli-hi ‘of his soul and his mind’ and the doubled predicate, in the second clause, lā yumlī wa-lā yuḥādiru ‘illā bi-hi ‘he never dictates and never lectures except in it.’ In the last sentence are two doublings: ‘tqā‘ātîn wa-an‘fāmin ‘rhythms and melodies’ and sāmī‘i-hi wa-qā‘rī‘i-hi ‘his hearer and his reader.’

All four sentences begin with coordinating conjunctions, three with wa ‘and’ one with fa ‘for.’3 Apart from two indefinite relative clauses, to which I will return later, there is only one subordinate clause in the passage.

Item (2) is another example of highly paraphrastic discourse. It consists of a passage from an article in the same genre as the previous example: literary criticism.4
includes two subordinate hypothetical clauses, one with sawā'an kāna ‘whether it be’ and one with wa-law kāna (even) if it be’, and two circumstantial or ḥāl clauses, one of which modifies the other: yaʾīsū fi-hā ... yuḥīṣṣu ... wa-yāšʿurū-hā ṭasrī ... ‘he lives in it ... sensing ... and feeling it flow...’ (While there is an obligatory reduction of the first clause in English which makes ‘sensing’ and ‘feeling’ participial modifiers, they are fine verbs in Arabic.) On the whole, the passage is somewhat less paratactic than many, although it is polysyndetic. However, the passage is typical in being highly repetitive. There are two paraphrastic doublings in the first sentence: taʾbirūn wa-tašwirūn ‘expression and description’ (which is a morphologically parallel lexical couplet) and li-maṣʿīri al-ṣūʿarāʾi wa-ʾafkārī him ‘of the feelings of the poets and their thoughts.’ In the second sentence we find rayru wāgīrīyyatīn ‘ay yayālīyyatun ‘not real, that is imaginary’, which, given the fact that wāgīrīyyun ‘real’ and xayālīyyun ‘imaginary’ are clearly contrasted in the preceding clause, is paraphrastic, if not redundant. The third sentence includes two doublings, both paraphrastic. One is yuḥīṣṣu-hā fi nabadātī qaḥī-hi wa-yāšʿurū-hā ṭasrī fi dimāʾi-hi ‘he senses it in the pulses of his heart and feels it flow in his blood.’ The other is yuḥīṣṣu bi-hā al-ṣūʿirū, wa-yāʾīsū fi-hā ‘the poet senses them and lives in them.’

The entire third sentence is also a paraphrase of the second. Both say the same thing: poetry expresses true experiences because the poet lives in the experiences and feels them whether they are real or not. What keeps one from noticing this paraphrastic relationship at first is the word bi-ḍālīka ‘thereby’ at the beginning of the third sentence. Thereby, in English, is not a word we expect to see before a paraphrase. It is highly unlikely, though, that a writer who produced a text as complex as this one, as carefully structured and balanced, would use bi-ḍālīka in the wrong place.

2. Presentation and persuasion

In Western, ‘quasi-logical’ rhetorics, in which the structure and phrasing of non-formal arguments mimic those of formal ones (Perelman 1969: 193-255), the canonical function of therefore and similar conjunctions, and the function for which the symbolic shorthand ⇒ is used, is to signal the conclusion of a syllogistic deduction: All men are mortal, Socrates is a man, therefore Socrates is mortal. Pragmatically, however, therefore and related expressions often signal claims that have been validated in other ways. For example, persuasion resulting from ethos, the arguer’s presentation of self,
or from pathos, emotional appeal, can be described in the same way as logical persuasion:

(3) Her statistics are impeccable and her argument flawless; therefore, we will accept her theory. (logos)

(4) - The senator insists that he is honest; he is highly respected and apparently a family man and goes to church every Sunday; therefore, we are dropping our case against him. (ethos)

(5) Vice-President Nixon obviously loved his little dog so much that it made people cry; therefore, they believed that he had not accepted bribes. (pathos)

It is fair to assume that the pragmatic function of therefore is to signal that whatever it follows has substantiated the conclusion it precedes; the job of the contrastive rhetorician is to figure out how.

How, then, can a proposition substantiate a paraphrase of the same proposition? Why it is rhetorically more effective to say the same thing twice, or three times, than to say it once? And why is it that, in Arabic, repetition is by far the most common and most basic mechanism for persuasion?

Clearly, the choice of how to express an idea --- how you say it --- is often as important as the proposition expressed --- what you say. Paraphrase is often persuasive, in many informal rhetorical contexts ('Oh, now that you put it that way ...'), and, in American society, in some formal ones (though the dominant model for persuasive writing subordinates presentation, or style, to invention and arrangement). This kind of persuasion can be called presentation (Koch 1983a). Presentation makes things believable because it forces them into the affective field of the hearer and keeps them there. Repetition makes ideas present by keeping them in the here and now of discourse. The use of the present tense, in English, can also bring ideas closer to here and now. This happens when the present tense is used to talk about the past, and it has been discussed recently by Schiffrin (1981) in an article about the historical present in narrative. ‘Emotional deixis’ (Lakoff 1974), as exemplified by the here and now in ‘Here’s an idea’ or ‘Now, my next point is this’ also creates presence. Visual metaphors are another way in which presence is created; speakers can suggest that ideas are affectively close by having hearers look at them, or by claiming that they can be easily seen. Writers of Arabic make use of all these strategies in persuasive discourse to create presence. Repetition, both structural and paraphrastic, embedded in parataxis, is the most salient.

Presentation, and the paratactic repetition associated with presentation, are the keys to how Arabic persuasive discourse is built. That is to say that the need for presentation affects the form of discourse in crucial ways. The question to which I now turn is, why this particular strategy for persuasion, with its particular attendant formal correlates?

3. **Parataxis in syntax**

In the broadest sense, the way we make discourse coherent reflects the way we make the world coherent. In the narrower context of discourse, there are two important sources of constraint. On one hand, the form of a discourse is constrained by its intended function: rhetorical discourse differs from non-rhetorical discourse, and culture-specific epistemologies and rules about who can persuade whom and how this can be done bear upon topics for rhetorical discourse and on persuasive strategies. Examination of the traditional Arab-Islamic reverence for the Word, as well as the history of Arabic discourse forms and Near Eastern politics, are crucial for understanding Arabic persuasive discourse, as I have attempted to show elsewhere (Koch 1983a).

On the other hand, the form a discourse takes is a function of what it is made of: the words and structures of a language. In other words, the syntactic constraints of a language are constraints on discourse in that language. In what follows, I suggest that at least some of the kinds of paratactic repetition that are responsible for persuasion in Arabic are actually rooted in the syntactic structure of the language itself. That is, there are ways in which Arabic itself, and not just discourse in Arabic, calls for paratactic repetition. In particular, the syntax of a number of kinds of verbal and nominal modification in Arabic is paratactic.

Most of the Arabic discourse features which I pointed out in examples (1) and (2) are the result of relatively conscious choice on the part of the writers. It is perfectly possible to write grammatically correct Arabic without, for example, using lexical couplets or conjoined, parallel verb phrases. The criteria for choosing a lexical couplet over a single word are not criteria of grammaticality, but criteria of acceptability at a different level: the kind of criteria an editor might use in deciding whether something was well-written or not. There are, however, cases in which the choices are not so free; cases in which a repetitive, paratactic structure is chosen because it is pre-
ferred by the grammar of Arabic, or even because it is the only choice that the grammar allows. There is a kind of cline of freedom of choice in discourse. One end approaches choices that are completely free, from the point of view of grammaticality, such as the choice of purely ornamental figures of speech, if purely ornamental items are even possible. The other end approaches 'choices' that are completely constrained by syntactic rules, such as, perhaps, the choice of a verb which agrees with its subject.

A structure which falls somewhere in the middle of this cline is the cognate accusative, a structure in which a verbal form (verb, participle, or verbal noun) is accompanied in a phrase by a verbal noun from the same root. An example from text (1) above is

\[
(6) \quad \text{ye\textsuperscript{a}midu ilä ðalika ðamdan}
\intents to that an-intending
\(\text{(he does this on purpose)}\)
\]

The verbal noun is usually, and preferably, of the same verb form as the verbal element, thus creating a two-faceted repetition (repetition of root and repetition of verb class). The verbal noun is often modified, either by an adjective (in which case both verbal noun and adjective are in the accusative case).

\[
(7) \quad \text{taxaltifu itxtiläfan 'asäsiyyan}
\differs a-differing basic
\(\text{(basically differs)}\)
\]

or by being made the second term of an idäfa (genitive construct) construction,

\[
(8) \quad \text{känä ilazamä al-mabda' a 'asadda al-ilizämi}
\were adhered-to the principle strongest the adherence
\(\text{(they had adhered the most strongly to the principle)}\)
\]

or in a number of other ways. The function of the cognate verbal noun together with its modifier is to provide adverbial modification for the main verbal element.

Arabic has few adverbs. Adverbial modification can be expressed in various other ways, such as with prepositional phrases (jad'a bi-surqe'in 'he came with speed [quickly]'), with certain verbs (kidtu 'aqe\textsuperscript{u} 'I almost fell'), with certain nouns in the accusative ('ähyüän 'sometimes'), with häl constructions, about which I will say more shortly, and with cognate accusative. Thus, while a writer may have a certain amount of freedom in deciding whether to use a cognate accusative or some other construction for adverbial modification, he rarely has a choice between a cognate accusative and an adverb. The cognate accusative serves an essential syntactic function, and, while it is never completely obligatory, it is highly favored by the syntactic structure of the language, in the sense that the choices are limited. Furthermore, certain adverbial uses of adjectives in the accusative are said to be derived from cognate accusatives: darabu-hu ñaditan 'I hit him hard' is explained in at least some grammars (e.g. Haywood and Nahmad 1965:332) as the result of the omission of the verbal noun in darabu-hu darban ñaditan 'I hit him a hard hitting.' In these cases, if this analysis is correct, root repetition plays a role at an abstract level of syntax.

Circumstantial (häl) clauses are another example of paratactic modification. A circumstantial clause provides adverbial modification by telling about the condition or the circumstances attendant on the modified clause. Examples are these (from Abboud, et al. 1975:435):

\[
(9) \quad \text{wasala wa-bayna kutubi-hi risälatu al-ra'isi}
\he-arrived (wa) among books his letter the president
\(\text{(He arrived with the president's letter among his books.)}\)
\]

\[
(10) \quad \text{ha\textsuperscript{a}ra ilä 'amrikä wa-huwa sayrûn}
\he-came to America (wa) he young
\(\text{(He came to America when he was young.)}\)
\]

One example from text (2) above is this:

\[
(11) \quad \text{ya\textsuperscript{a}tšu fi-hâ ... yuḥissu-hâ fi nabäddäti qalbi-hi}
\he-lives in it senses it in pulses heart his
\(\text{(He lives in it ... sensing it in the pulses of his heart and feeling it flow in his blood)}\)
\]

Here there are two häl clauses, one modifying the main clause and one modifying yas\textsuperscript{a}uru-hâ 'he feels it.' In all häl clauses there is a pronoun coreferential with the head NP in the modified clause, or a verb or participial form whose subject is this NP. The word order is the same as that of an independent clause. In most cases, the häl clause is introduced with wa. Abboud et al. (1975:435) label this wa as a subordinating conjunction homophonous with the coordinating wa 'and;' in Arabic it is called waw al-häl 'the wa of condition.' Whether or not the wa of condition is best consid-
er a different lexeme from the wa of coordination in contemporary Arabic, the two are clearly historically related. Beeston (1970:89) holds that the wa of condition originally was the coordinating functional, and gives this English sentence as an example of a coordinate clause with the effect of a ḫāl clause:

(12) He has behaved disgracefully to me, and he calls himself my friend.

Ḫāl-like clauses can also be found in spoken exchanges in English, such as ones like this:

(13) - John didn’t show up.
- Yeah, and he promised me he would.

(Ochs [1979] and others take examples like this as evidence for the claim that there is less subordination in speech than in writing. Perhaps a more exact phrasing would be to say that subordination is less often marked syntactically or lexically.) The logical relationship between a main clause and a ḫāl clause is variable; ḫāl clauses can be temporal, adversative, or explanatory. While they are semantically subordinate, ḫāl clauses are formally very much like independent clauses paratactically adjoined to what they modify.

Much closer to the completely constrained end of the cline of choice are several kinds of nominal modification that are inherently paratactic. Adjectives in Arabic take the same definiteness marking as the nouns they modify, and Beeston (1970:45) suggests that adjectives were historically appositive nouns. The semantics of lexical couplets like nafṣi-hi wa-qaqli-hi ‘his soul and his mind’ provides further evidence that apposition is a basic mechanism for nominal modification in Arabic. Non-idiomatic, non-form lexical couplets like this one have a strong tendency to be modificalional (Koch 1983b:54-55).

Indefinite relative clauses are also like appositive constructions, in that they are formally indistinguishable from full independent clauses. One example from text (2) above is

(14) maṣāʾira sadiqatin yuhisṣu bi-hā al-ṣāʾiru, feelings true senses them the poet wa-yawṣuṣu fi-hā and lives in them

The only indication that this is a relative clause, and not an independent clause (‘the poet senses them and lives in them’) is the fact that it is part of the same orthographic unit as the head noun, and the fact that it contains pronouns, hā, coreferential with the head noun. Most relative clauses are linked to their superordinate clauses in that they contain a copy pronoun or a verb whose subject is the head noun of the relative clause. But independent clauses can of course contain pronouns or verbs that refer back to preceding clauses, too; the linking requirement of relative clauses does not make them look any different from independent clauses. This is not to say that ‘indefinite relative clause’ is not a real clause type in Arabic; there are intonational cues that mark these clauses as dependent in speaking, and definite relative clauses are marked with relativizers. But formally, indefinite relative clauses, like ḫāl clauses, are strikingly like paratactic appositions.

4. Discussion

To summarize the argument, persuasive discourse in Arabic is characterized by paratactic juxtaposition of ideas couched in parallel words, phrases, and clauses. Repetitive juxtaposition works rhetorically by creating presence, that is, by bringing rhetorical claims into the affective present. Arabic modificalional syntax is also characterized by paratactic juxtaposition, by apposition of terms from the same lexical or syntactic class.

The semantic effect of juxtaposition in syntax is modification, and the pragmatic effect of juxtaposition in discourse is persuasion. The same perceptual strategy is at work on both levels: put simply, we perceive things differently depending on what they are with. For visual perception, this has been demonstrated in experiments with geometrical shapes and colors. For example, in the Müller-Lyer illusion (Tolansky 1964:28), two lines of equal length look different if one is between two angles pointing toward the line and the other between two angles pointing away (fig. 1). Or, in Ebbing-
haus' figure (Luckiesh 1965:56), equal circles can be made to look unequal if their contexts are different (fig. 2). Psychologists do not agree about how illusions like these are produced. Clearly, though, juxtaposition is a key factor: 'our assessment of geometrical quantity is very markedly affected by the nature of the surrounding territory' (Tolansky 1964:29).

For linguistic perception of meaning, the phenomenon can be demonstrated through an analysis of the semantics of lexical couplets like clear and concise. While clear, by itself, refers to one desirable quality of English prose and concise to another, the effect of the juxtaposition of the two words in clear and concise is to make concise modify clear: conciseness contributes to clarity. Social perceptions are also affected by juxtaposition: people are judged by who they're married to or who their friends are.

It is to be expected, then, that juxtaposition, in syntax or in discourse, will work the way it does whenever it occurs. The fact remains, however, that Arabic discourse makes more use of this strategy than does English, in which, at least in formal contexts, persuasion is the result of proof, arising through the subordination of ideas to one another, rather than of presentation. It seems to me that the homology between the Arabic strategy of modification and Arabs' strategy of persuasion is not accidental. Because it is a very frequent, and sometimes obligatory, modificational strategy in Arabic syntax, parataxis is available for use for the pragmatic purpose of persuasion. And through being pragmatically useful and often used in discourse, parataxis as a syntactic strategy becomes even more accessible. What is accessible is used, and what is used is accessible. Parataxis in Arabic provides a good example not only of the way in which rhetorical strategies are constrained by linguistic structure, but also of the process by which linguistic structure is emergent in rhetorical discourse.

![Figure 2](image-url)
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**STUDIES IN LANGUAGE 11:1**

### ARTICLES

- S. Wright and T. Givón: *The Pragmatics of Indefinite Reference: Quantified Text-Based Studies* .................................................. 1
- Terry Crowley: *Serial Verbs in Paamese* ...................................................... 35
- Barbara Johnstone: *Parataxis in Arabic: Modification as a Model for Persuasion* ............................................................................. 85
- Leo A. Connolly: *Case Grammar and Word Order in German: The Case for Place by Case* ......................................................... 129
- Rosália Dutra: *The Hybrid S-Category in Brazilian Portuguese: Some Implications for Word Order* ..................................................... 163
- Donna B. Gerds: *Surface Case and Grammatical Relations in Korean: The Evidence from Quantifier Float* ......................... 181

### SQUIBS/DISCUSSIONS

- Natsuko Tsujimura and Stuart Davis: *The Accent of Long Nominal Compounding in Tokyo Japanese* ................................................. 199
- F.R. Palmer: *Truth Indicative?* ...................................................................... 206
- Zygmunt Frajzyngier: *Truth and the Compositionality Principle: A Reply to Palmer* ................................................................. 211

### REVIEW ARTICLES

- Peter Rolf Lutzeier: Review Article on Pieter A.M. Seuren: *Discourse Semantics* ................................................................. 219

### REVIEWS (see inside back-cover) ......................................................... 245

### BOOK NOTICES (see inside back-cover) ............................................. 271