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 courthouse 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. 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. 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. 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, non-demonstrative 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-
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 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, 1963, 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 relegated 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-
suaded 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. 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 quasilogical 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.
Of course, there is nothing new about this kind of civil disobedience. It was seen sublimely in the refusal of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to obey the laws of Nebuchadnezzar because a higher moral law was involved. It was practiced superbly by the early Christians who were willing to face hungry lions and the excruciating pain of chopping blocks, before submitting to certain unjust laws of the Roman Empire. To a degree academic freedom is a reality today because Socrates practiced civil disobedience. (Both excerpts 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 does in these two excerpts precisely what Khomeini does in the second of the two interview selections presented above, the one in which he tells a story from the history of Shi'ite Islam in answer to Fallaci's request for his position on democracy. Khomeini's repeated and insistent use of analogical persuasion and Fallaci's insistence on quasilogical persuasion, as well as the inability or refusal of each to see the other's style in a persuasive light, are at the root of the ultimate failure of their interview (Johnstone, 1986).

**Conceptual Correlates: Strategies Become Styles**

With each of the three persuasive strategies I have discussed go a set of what I call conceptual correlates, an epistemological stance about what sorts of arguments and what sorts of people can be persuasive. By means of a discussion of these conceptual correlates, I would like to begin to relate persuasive strategies to the historical and cultural facts that can predispose one or another persuasive strategy to become the dominant strategy of a cultural group, or that group's persuasive style. Figure 7.2 summarizes this discussion.

Quasilogical persuasion is based on the notion that the key to the persuasiveness of an argument is the ideas that are expressed. If a claim is true, it is true no matter who states it or what sort of language is used. What is important about quasilogical discourse is that its logical structure be orderly. This is the epistemology that underlies the Aristotelian notion that invention and arrangement are prior to mere style, which is simply the dressing up of ideas in clever ways. It is also the epistemology that makes it possible for people like the Arab-student counselors I discussed before to say things like "Those are the rules; I didn't make the rules and I can't bend them." Truth, in this view, is not a matter for individual decision. Once established via rational procedures, decisions are no longer negotiable, and they apply in any situation.

Presentational persuasion, on the other hand, is made possible by an epistemological context in which people, not ideas, are responsible for persuasion. What is crucial is the individual's choice of repeated words, phrases, and rhythms with which to move other individuals to belief. Culturally, presentational persuasion is most likely in situations in which truths are imminent, recorded in doctrinal texts or given by God, and not matters for rational decision, and the persuader's task is to make a potentially available truth actually available—or present—in the audience's consciousness. Such cultural settings include those in which religion is central, settings in which truth is brought to light rather than created out of human rationality. One such setting is the traditional Islamic theocracy of the Arab world (Koch, 1983); another is the world of the missionary (see, for example, Harding, 1987). In a presentational world, individuals deal with individuals rather than with ideas or institutions; hence the Arab students' perception that the American counselors who relied on quasilogical arguments for institutional truths were not treating them as people.

Rosaldo (1973) describes an epistemological context much like the one I am describing, among missionized Christian Ilongots, who subscribe to an ideology in which the truth is external and predetermined in a doctrinal text (the Bible), while the traditional Ilongot worldview is egalitarian and nonauthoritarian. Interestingly, however, the linguistic style of Christian Ilongots does not seem to be presentational. It is characterized in Ilongot terms as *straight speech*, and is thought

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<tr>
<th>Conceptual Correlates</th>
<th>Quasilogical</th>
<th>Presentational</th>
<th>Analogical</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ideas are persuasive</td>
<td>people are persuasive</td>
<td>culture is persuasive</td>
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<tr>
<td>institutions make decisions</td>
<td>individuals make decisions</td>
<td>history, tradition make decisions</td>
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<td>structure is crucial</td>
<td>words are crucial</td>
<td>aptness is crucial</td>
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<td>culture/geography</td>
<td>canonically</td>
<td>Western (though not so typical as we suppose)</td>
<td>Eastern (in older and more religious tradition)</td>
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Figure 7.2: Three persuasive styles.
to be direct and explicit, while traditional Ilongot crooked speech rhetoric is more elaborate and allusive. Perhaps the direct, unelaborated character of straight speech is partly a response to the Ilongot social context; Christian Ilongots need to set themselves apart from traditional Ilongots, and hence cannot use the same linguistic techniques for persuasion. Straight speech, in other words, may serve presentational ends by different means, since the poetic features of presentational discourse are a marker of traditional style and hence not available to Christianized Ilongots. In any event, Rosaldo’s findings serve to underscore the caution that is necessary in generalizing about persuasive styles and strategies that are a function of very specific contexts.

While presentational persuasion is expository (accessible truths are made available by being stated and restated), analogical persuasion is narrative in nature. Analogical persuasion is rooted in the belief that traditional stories—allegories about truth rather than arguments establishing truth or direct statements of truth—are persuasive, and that decisions are best made with reference to historical precedent. What is crucial in a setting like this is the arguer’s choice of apt historical examples. Legal argumentation is often analogical, taking its effectiveness from compelling use of precedent. Teachers, too, as well as mothers, shamans, and others whose roles involve being what anthropologists call “culture bearers,” use analogy. (See, for example, Ochs, 1973, on the role of proverbs in Malagasy oratory; the papers in Bloch, 1975, also describe situations in which “traditional authority” is at the root of persuasive force.) One figure who personifies this role is the Ayatollah Khomeini; as Beeman (1986, pp. 207–211) points out, the entire rhetoric of the Iranian revolution is based on a return to traditional Shi’ite Islamic values, and Khomeini’s role is that of “chief regent” for the Twelfth Imam, the most perfect of men and the one who will judge people’s sins at the last judgment. That Khomeini should resort to analogical persuasion seems almost predictable.

CULTURAL DETERMINISM AND RHETORICAL CRAFT

In conclusion, I would like to make a few comments about a word I have just used—predicable. I have suggested that certain historical and cultural settings call forth certain persuasive strategies, turning these strategies into the dominant persuasive styles of people in these settings, and that cross-cultural friction is created as persuasive styles collide. Is it, in fact, predictable that Westerners will resort to quasi-slogoric persuasion, and Easterners to presentational or analogical persuasion? To put the same question in broader terms, Does culture determine language use in rhetorical situations?

My answer to both versions of the question is no. Any persuader has access to a range of persuasive strategies, and his or her choices of persuasive strategies, like his or her choices of words or grammatical structures, are made in the context of the interaction at hand. Culture may predispose certain choices over others, but it does not determine choices. For every example of cross-cultural miscommunication, one could adduce at least one example of cross-cultural communication, at least one case in which interlocutors successfully adapt to each other’s cultural styles and personal idiosyncrasies. To cite just one example, Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech was delivered before a mixed audience of Blacks and Whites; White audiences in the 1960s (before the advent of nationally known Black politicians such as Jesse Jackson) were accustomed to the quasi-slogoric style of most White politicians. Yet King’s presentational speech was accepted by the Whites in his audience, for whom it was as forceful and persuasive as it was for the Blacks. Persuasion is negotiated in a give and take between speakers and audiences, and rhetoric creates social relations as well as reflecting them (Paine, 1981, pp. 2–5). Cases in which communication fails to occur may be more often noticed than cases in which communication does occur, but I do not think they are more frequent.

What happens, then, in cases like the ones with which this chapter began, in which persuasion is foiled by a clash of styles? Since, as I have pointed out, Westerners do use analogies and poetic discourse persuasively, and since the Muslim world has a long and important tradition of logical inquiry in the Aristotelian tradition, none of the failures of communication in my introductory examples should have had to happen: An American ESL teacher should be able to respond to the poetic force of the Egyptian’s essay; Arab students should be able to take American academic counselors at their quasi-slogoric word; Khomeini and Fallaci should be able to interpret what each other did as persuasive in intent. The problems that occurred have their roots not in unbridgeable cultural gaps, but rather in specific rhetorical interactions. What happens in situations like these is some-
what akin to what Bateson (1972) calls “complementary schizmogenesis” (pp. 66–72). Faced with persuasive strategies that seem inappropriate, interlocutors try to repair the situation by becoming more insistant on the strategies they individually think best, and a sort of face-off is created in which setting the strategic tone for the interaction becomes the locus of persuasive force. (If you can force your opponent to play by your rules, rather than your adapting to his or hers, you have a better chance of winning the game.) Thus the interaction changes from one in which persuasion per se is the goal to one in which controlling the means of persuasion is the goal. Problems like this are not simply the result of intercultural difference. At root, I think, they are the result of failures of good will, the will to adapt and understand.

It is for these reasons that I think it is crucial to find ways of talking about rhetoric and culture that do not end in cultural determinism, but that instead treat rhetoric the way Aristotle did, as the craft of finding the best of the available means of persuasion for the rhetorical situation at hand. I have tried to do this by separating persuasive strategies from persuasive styles, and by treating the latter as cultural predispositions rather than as cultural rules. In doing this, I am trying to develop a theoretical framework suitable for thinking about culture and communicative style in a nondeterministic way, in keeping with traditional and recurrent notions about the emergent, situated nature of language and linguistic interaction.

NOTES

1. See Johnstone (1986) for a detailed analysis of the miscommunication in this interview.
2. The term rhetorical situation is used here to refer to a speech situation that calls for persuasive discourse. I use the term somewhat differently than does Bitzer (1968).
3. I am grateful to Susan Heumann for providing this example.
4. It must be stressed that this is by no means an exhaustive list of possible persuasive strategies. Among others might be the persuasive use of emotion (see Bailey, 1983); Quaker “friendly persuasion,” in which silence and a special kind of enlightened witnessing ideally give rise to consensus; the strategy of “dynamic opposition” identified by Kochman (1981) as characteristic of American Black style; and a variety of nonverbal strategies, such as sit-ins or other demonstrations.
5. This strategy shares many features with modes of discourse identified with orality (Ono, 1982), and in fact the following example is from a speech. But not all presentational discourse is spoken, and oral is a potentially misleading term when it is used as a descriptor of culture types (see Johnstone, in press).
6. As the American teacher in question, I in fact did find the essay very appealing, and it was one of the things that originally sparked my interest in Arabs’ persuasive style. However, essays like this are generally perceived by ESL teachers as repetitive, digressive, and needlessly elaborate (see Kaplan, 1966; Thompson-Posas & Thomas-Ruzic, 1983).

REFERENCES

Telephone Openings and Conversational Universals
A Study in Three Languages

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This chapter advances the claim that structural universals underlie telephone conversational openings in English, French, and Arabic. Specifically, conversational analysis method is used to delineate conversational universals in the three languages. Two tentative conversational universals in telephone openings are proposed at the end of the chapter. Telephone conversation is viewed as a critical activity in this increasingly multilingual, interdependent world.

Language diversity, according to persistent legend, originated when humans tried to build the Tower of Babel, in order, perhaps, to eavesdrop on heaven. It is curious that no contemporary theory of language proposes a comprehensive and satisfactory explication of the truism that humans speak within thousands of speech communities. We cannot speak to just any human, but only to co-members of speech communities. Speaking with someone is coparticipating in a speech community. Humans who speak and listen in turn to one another usually characterize themselves as speaking a language in common. Many speakers treat the languages they speak as prisons limiting the range of their conversations to coparticipants. Considering cross-linguistic speaking is a bit like wandering in a labyrinth, attempting to recall or recapture some linguistic paradise lost (Steiner, 1975).

That human beings speak thousands of different languages is a truism that, for most us, remains unexplained. On the surface, all linguistic systems differ from each other in multitudes of details. Some scholars (e.g., Whorf) believe that such code differences make interlanguage communication extremely problematic. However, others argue that in some sense all languages are “put together in similar