PARATAxis IN ARABIC:
MODIFICATION AS A MODEL FOR PERSUASION

Barbara Johnstone
Georgetown University

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 ḥal 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 183b); 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 yará ‘anna al’-adaba al-jadirá
and as-if he thinks that the literature the worthy
bi-hádá al-ismi, huwa allaádí yará‘u al-sam‘a
of this the name it that-which delights the hearing
kamá yará‘u al-qalba fi ‘ánin wáhidín: wa-huwa
as delights the heart at time one and he
li-dáliká yuwaaffiru li-sawiti-hi kullá jamálín
thus furnishes of sound its all beauty
munkínin. wa-min al-yaríbi, ‘anna-hulá
possible and among the strange that he (neg.)
yu’addilu 'ibáratan yu’mít-há wa-lá
yu’iddu corrects phrase dictates it and (neg.) prepares
muhabádatan qabla ‘ilqá‘í-há. fa-qad 'asbaña
lecture before delivering it for (perf.) became
hádá al-‘uslábú juz‘an min nafsí-hi wa-qaqlí-hi,
this the style part of soul his and mind his
fa-huwa lá yumlí wa-lá yu’ádiru ’illá
for he (neg.) dictates and (neg.) lectures except
bi-hi. wa-kád‘ran-má, tajidu fi-hi al-’alábá
in it and often you-find in it the expressions
al-mukárraratá, wa-huwa ya’midu ’illá dáliká ’amándan,
the repeated and he intends to that intending
hádá yásitimma má yurídú min ‘íqá‘átín
so-that complete what wants of rhythms

(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 [Táhá Husayn] 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 allaádí yará‘u ... wa-huwa li-dáliká yuwaaffiru ...* (is) that which delights ... and he thus furnishes ..., the first part of which is also conjoined in a paraphrastic double: *yará‘u al-sam‘a kamá yará‘u al-qalba* 'delights the hearing as it delights the heart.'

The predicate of the second sentence is also conjoined: *lá yu’addilu ... wa-lá yu’iddu ...* 'he never corrects ... and he never prepares ...' The parallelistic effect of the two quite similar lexical roots here, *-l-I* and *-d-d*, is not unintentional. In the third sentence we find the lexical couplet *min nafsí-hi wa-qaqlí-hi* 'of his soul and his mind' and the doubled predicate, in the second clause, *lá yumlí wa-lá yu’ádiru ’illá bi-hi* 'he never dictates and never lectures except in it.' In the last sentence are two doublings: *‘íqá‘átín wa-an'ámin ‘rhythms and melodies' and sámi‘i-hi wa-qári‘i-hi* 'his hearer and his reader.'

All four sentences begin with coordinating conjunctions, three with *wa* 'and' one with *fa* 'for.' 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 hād clauses, one of which modifies the other: ya'āṣu fi-hā ... yuḥissu ... wa-yāṣ'uru-hā tāsīr ... ‘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: ta'būrin wa-taswīrūn ‘expression and description’ (which is a morphologically parallel lexical couplet) and li-maṣīḥir al-ṣūrā‘i wa-'aṣfārī-him ‘of the feelings of the poets and their thoughts.’ In the second sentence we find rayru wāqī‘iyyatin ‘ay xaya‘liyyutun ‘not real, that is imaginary’, which, given the fact that wāqī‘iyyun ‘real’ and xaya‘liyyun ‘imaginary’ are clearly contrasted in the preceding clause, is paraphrastic, if not redundant. The third sentence includes two doublings, both paraphrastic. One is yuḥissu-hā fi nabadātī qalbi-hi wa-yāṣ'uru-hā tāsīr fi dimā‘i-hi ‘he senses it in the pulses of his heart and feels it flow in his blood.’ The other is yuḥissu bi-hā al-ṣā‘iru, wa-ya‘āṣu fi-hā ‘the poet senses 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-dālika ‘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-dālika 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:

1. Her statistics are impeccable and her argument flawless; therefore, we will accept her theory. (*logos*)
2. 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*)
3. 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,
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) ye‘midu ‘ilā ḍalika ṭamdan
intends to that an-intending
(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) taxtalifu ixtilāfan ‘asāsiyyan
differs a-differing basic
(basically differs)

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

(8) kānā iltazamā al-mabda‘a ‘aṣadda al-iltizāmi
were adhered-to the principle strongest the adherence
(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 (jā‘a bi-sur‘aṭin ‘he came with speed [quickly]'), with certain verbs (kidtū ‘aqaṣū ‘I almost fell'), with certain nouns in the accusative (‘aḥyānān ‘sometimes'), with ḥāl 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: darabtu-hu ṣāṭīdan ‘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 darabtu-hu darban ṣāṭīdan ‘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 (ḥāl) 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) waqala wa-bayna kutubi-hi risālatu al-ra‘īs
he-arrived (wa) among books his letter the president
(He arrived with the president's letter among his books.)

(10) ḥādara ‘ilā ‘amriqu wa-huwa ṣayīrun
he-came to America (wa) he young
(He came to America when he was young.)

One example from text (2) above is this:

(11) ya‘ṣū ‘fi-hā ... yuḥissu-hā fi nabadāti qalbi-hi
he-lives in it senses it in pulses heart his
wa-yayṣur-hā tathā fi dimā‘i-hi
and feels it flows in blood his
(He lives in it ... sensing it in the pulses of his heart and feeling it flow in his blood)

Here there are two ḥāl clauses, one modifying the main clause and one modifying yasṣur-hā ‘he feels it.' In all ḥāl 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 ḥāl 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-ḥāl 'the wa of condition.' Whether or not the wa of condition is best consid-
ered 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 *hāl* clause:

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

*Hāl*-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 *hāl* clause is variable; *hāl* clauses can be temporal, adversative, or explanatory. While they are semantically subordinate, *hāl* 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 *nafsi-hi wa-*aqli-hi ‘his soul and his mind’ provides further evidence that apposition is a basic mechanism for nominal modification in Arabic. Non-idiomatic, nonce form lexical couplets like this one have a strong tendency to be modificational (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

\[(14)\] 
\[\text{masā'ira sadiqatin yuhiissu bi-hā al-ṣā'iru,}\]
\[\text{feelings true senses them the poet}\]
\[\text{wa-yasīšu ēl-hā}\]
\[\text{and lives in them}\]

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.9 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.10 But formally, indefinite relative clauses, like *hāl* clauses, are strikingly like paratactic appositives.

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 modificational 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

NOTES

1) The genre on which this study is based is written discourse in Modern Standard Arabic, the literary dialect and lingua franca of Arabic speakers. The texts I have examined were all written with persuasive intent, for a general, literate audience; that is to say that they are 'rhetorical' in the Aristotelian sense. All were written in the second half of the twentieth century.

2) Šawqi Dayl, Al-‘adabu al-arabiyyatu al-mu‘asiru (Cairo, 1957), 251-252.

3) fa means something like 'for' in this sentence, but other things elsewhere. The semantics of this and other conjunctions in Arabic has recently been discussed by Al-Batal (1985).

4) Ernest Ahdel-Masih, from a draft of an article. I do not know whether this has appeared in print.

5) The most convincing practical demonstration of this that I know of is in a pair of articles, one by A.L. Becker (1979) and one by Judith Becker (1979), about Javanese wayang plots, the Javanese calendrical system, and Javanese music.

6) If, indeed, rhetorical and non-rhetorical discourse can really be distinguished. Kenneth Burke (1950), and rhetoricians in the Burkean tradition, would claim that they cannot; that all discourse is rhetorical.

7) 'Purely ornamental' implies 'completely non-communicative,' and it is doubtful whether anything, even silence, is completely non-communicative.

8) Although even here one can choose. Speakers are free to make special points by breaking normal agreement rules. One can imagine a science fiction setting involving beings with multiple personalities in which I 'are' would be interpretable. A less bizarre example is the use by some writers of she in the generic sense traditionally associated with he.

9) There are cases, mainly in Classical Arabic rather than in MSA, of relative clauses without resumptive pronouns or finite verbs. In Classical Arabic the resumptive pronoun is often omitted after man ‘whoever' and ma ‘what(ever)' (Haywood and Nahmnd 1965:285; Wright 1951 [1898]:319).

10) Haddad and Kenstowicz (1980) argue that the definite relative clause marker and the definite article have a number of features in common. This suggests that definite relatives might also be seen as appositive clauses, which are marked simply to make them agree in definiteness with their head nouns, the way adjectives do.

REFERENCES


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