

# Arabic rhetorical devices

Contents [hide]

## Beginning

- ▼ Domain A: Sentence Construction & Syntactical Stylistics (*‘ilm al-ma‘ānī*)
- Sentence-Type Switches
- Information Flow & Sequencing
- Referential Switches
- Textual Additions & Omissions
- ▼ Domain B: Figurative Speech (*‘ilm al-bayān*)
- Explicit Comparison
- Conceptual Transfer
- Semantic Ambiguity
- ▼ Domain C: Linguistic Embellishments (*‘ilm al-badī‘*)
- Wordplay & Phonetic Styling
- Contrasts & Inversions
- Repetition & Reinforcement
- Indirectness & Ambiguity
- Grouping & Distinguishing
- Paragraph Structure & Flow
- Intertextuality
- Argumentation & Illustrative Persuasion
- Persuasive Tricks
- Rhythmic Structuring & Balance

Page Discussion

Read

From The Encyclopedia of Arabic Rhetoric

 All rhetorical devices

Alphabetical list

Page information

 Live DOI

10.64393/balaghah.rhetorical.devices

PDF

Download PDF 

The [Encyclopedia of Arabic Rhetoric](#) maintains a structured inventory of Arabic [rhetorical devices](#) that meet the [Criteria for Inclusion](#).

This page presents the [Encyclopedia's](#) current working inventory of 80 rhetorical devices. Stable, time-stamped, and citable releases of the inventory are published separately as the [Arabic Rhetorical Device Taxonomy](#).

In alignment with [classical Arabic rhetorical theory](#), the [Encyclopedia](#) organises [rhetorical devices](#) into three principal domains:

- A) [Rhetorical devices related to Sentence Construction & Syntactical Stylistics \(\*‘ilm al-ma‘ānī\*\)](#)
- B) [Rhetorical devices related to Figurative Speech \(\*‘ilm al-bayān\*\)](#)
- C) [Rhetorical devices related to Linguistic Embellishments \(\*‘ilm al-badī‘\*\)](#).

## Domain A: Sentence Construction & Syntactical Stylistics (*‘ilm al-ma‘ānī*)

The crafting of sentences with purposeful departure from what is syntactically or contextually expected (*ikhrāj al-kalām ‘alā khilāf muqtaḍā al-ẓāhir*) to achieve rhetorical effect, emphasis, or nuance.

The hallmark of this domain is pragmatic deviation - an expression means exactly what it says, but it is deployed in a way that defies the default expectation of the context. When using the [Universal Framework for Identifying Arabic Rhetorical Devices](#), expressions using rhetorical devices from this domain are identified by asking, "Given this situation, why would someone say it this way rather than the normal or most straightforward way?"

### Sentence-Type Switches

A [declarative sentence](#) may function as a [performative sentence](#), and vice versa (*wad‘ al-khabar mawḍi‘ al-inshā‘ wa-‘aksuhu*). Or, a [performative sentence](#) may perform an unexpected pragmatic role.

| Identifier | Name of rhetorical device                                                                                                                                                                    |
|------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|            | Declarative sentences in performative roles & vice-versa                                                                                                                                     |
| DECPERF    | <div>Declarative Sentences in Performative Roles</div> <div><i>wad‘ al-khabar mawḍi‘ al-inshā‘</i></div>  |
|            | Performative sentence types in unexpected roles                                                                                                                                              |
| INTEROG    | <div>The Interrogative</div> <div><i>al-istifhām</i></div>                                                |
| IMPERAT    | <div>The Imperative</div> <div><i>al-amr</i></div>                                                        |
| PROHIB     | <div>Prohibition</div> <div><i>al-nahī</i></div>                                                          |
| WISH       | <div>Wish</div> <div><i>al-tamannī</i></div>                                                              |
| AFFIRM     | <div>Affirmation</div> <div><i>al-ta‘kid</i></div>                                                        |
|            | <div>The Vocative</div>                                                                                   |

### Referential Switches

The manipulation of reference to affect perspective and inference.

| Identifier | Name of rhetorical device                                                                                                                                             |
|------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| DEFINT     | <div>Definiteness</div> <div><i>al-ta‘arīf</i></div>                             |
| INDEF      | <div>Indefiniteness</div> <div><i>al-tankīr</i></div>                            |
| PRONOUN    | <div>Forward-Pointing Pronoun</div> <div><i>al-‘iḍmār muqām al-‘iḍhār</i></div>  |
| NOUNPRO    | <div>Nominal Prominence</div> <div><i>al-‘iḍhār muqām al-‘iḍmār</i></div>        |
| RHSHIFT    | <div>Rhetorical Shift</div> <div><i>al-iltifāt</i></div>                         |

### Textual Additions & Omissions

The modulation of textual density to sharpen meaning, control emphasis, or guide interpretation.

| Identifier | Name of rhetorical device                                                                                                             |
|------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| BREVTY     | <div>Brevity</div> <div><i>al-‘ījāz</i></div>    |
| ELLIPS     | <div>Ellipsis</div> <div><i>al-ḥadhaf</i></div>  |

|         |                                 |                                                                                |
|---------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| VOCATIV | The vocative<br><i>al-nidā'</i> |  |
|---------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

|         |                               |                                                                                    |
|---------|-------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| VERBOS  | Verbosity<br><i>al-'itnāb</i> |    |
| RESTRCT | Restriction<br><i>al-qasr</i> |  |

## Information Flow & Sequencing

The reorganisation of clauses to produce continuity or emphasis.

| Identifier | Name of rhetorical device                                         |                                                                                   |
|------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| CONJUN     | Conjunction<br><i>al-waṣal</i>                                    | +/-                                                                               |
| DISJUN     | Disjunction<br><i>al-faṣal</i>                                    | -/+                                                                               |
| FOREGR     | Foregrounding and Backgrounding<br><i>al-taqdīm wa al-ta'khīr</i> |  |

## Domain B: Figurative Speech ('ilm al-bayān)

The crafting of expressions with purposeful departure from literal meaning, by saying one thing to mean another, to achieve rhetorical effect, vividness, or imaginative resonance.

The hallmark of this domain is the meaning gap: a difference between what an expression literally says and what it actually means. When using the [Universal Framework for Identifying Arabic Rhetorical Devices](#), expressions using rhetorical devices from this domain are identified by asking, "Is the literal meaning impossible, unlikely, or insufficient - and is there a richer intended meaning behind it?"

- See: [Disambiguation page for Figurative Speech \('ilm al-bayān\)](#)

### Explicit Comparison

The direct presentation of similarity between two entities through explicit markers of comparison and shared attributes.

| Identifier | Name of rhetorical device   |                                                                                     |
|------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| SIMILE     | Simile<br><i>al-tashbīh</i> |  |

### Conceptual Transfer

The conveying of meaning through the transfer of properties, relations, or structures from one conceptual domain to another.

| Identifier | Name of rhetorical device              |                                                                                     |
|------------|----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| METAPH     | Metaphor<br><i>al-isti'āra</i>         |  |
| TRANSFR    | Relational Transfer<br><i>al-majāz</i> |  |

### Semantic Ambiguity

The use of lexically ambiguous expressions to sustain multiple potential meanings.

| Identifier | Name of rhetorical device              |                                                                                       |
|------------|----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| IMPREF     | Implicit Reference<br><i>al-kināya</i> |  |
| INDIRECT   | Indirect Address<br><i>al-ta'riḍ</i>   |  |
| PUN        | Pun<br><i>al-tawriya</i>               |  |

## Domain C: Linguistic Embellishments ('ilm al-badī')

The crafting of expressions with purposeful formal patterning beyond what neutral expression requires, to achieve rhetorical effect, beauty, or aesthetic intensification.

The hallmark of this domain is formal surplus: an expression carries more phonetic, lexical, or structural patterning than plain communication would need. When using the [Universal Framework for Identifying Arabic Rhetorical Devices](#), expressions using rhetorical devices from this domain are identified by asking, "Is there a pattern — in sound, structure, or wording — that goes beyond what simply conveying the meaning would require?"

Wordplay & Phonetic Styling

Linguistic operations that exploit sound, pronunciation, or formal resemblance between words to create patterned or harmonious expression, or to generate meaning through phonetic or formal similarity.

| Identifier | Name of rhetorical device                                                                                                                                                |
|------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| PARONOM    | <b>Paronomasia</b><br><i>al-jinās / al-tajnīs</i>                                       |
| RHYMED     | <b>Rhymed Prose</b><br><i>al-saj'</i>                                                   |
| PRONUNC    | <b>Concordance of Pronunciation and Meaning</b><br><i>'itilāf al-lafz wa al-ma'anā</i>  |
| PRONCON    | <b>Concordance of Pronunciations</b><br><i>'itilāf al-lafz ma' al-lafz</i>              |

Contrasts & Inversions

Rhetorical devices that highlight meaning through opposites, structural reversals, and mirrored structures.

| Identifier | Name of rhetorical device                                                                                                                                                                |
|------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ANTITH     | <b>Antithesis</b><br><i>al-tibāq</i><br>↳ Includes <b>Parallel Antithesis</b> ( <i>al-muqābala</i> )  |
| COLCOMB    | <b>Colour Combination</b><br><i>al-tadbij</i>                                                         |
| PALINDR    | <b>Palindrome</b><br><i>al-qalb / mā lā yastahīl bi al-'n'kās</i>                                     |
| REVWORD    | <b>Reversal of Word Order</b><br><i>al-'aks / al-tadbīl</i>                                           |

Repetition & Reinforcement

The strategic reuse of words or phrases to emphasize, intensify, or create rhythm.

- See [Disambiguation page for Repetition Devices](#)

| Identifier | Name of rhetorical device                                                                                                                 |
|------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| REPET      | <b>Repetition</b><br><i>al-takrār &amp; al-tardīd</i>  |
| PROPORT    | <b>Proportioning</b><br><i>al-izdawāj</i>              |

Indirectness & Ambiguity

Rhetorical strategies that obscure, soften, or shift meaning to invite interpretation or avoid directness.

Paragraph Structure & Flow

Devices that shape the structure, transitions, and aesthetic impact of a passage from beginning to end.

| Identifier | Name of rhetorical device                                                                                                                                                |
|------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| PLSOPEN    | <b>Pleasantness of the Opening</b><br><i>husn al-ibtidā', husn barā'at al-maṭla'</i>  |
| OPENING    | <b>Artful Opening</b><br><i>barā'at al-istihlāl</i>                                   |
| DIGRESS    | <b>Digression</b><br><i>al-istitrād</i>                                               |
| BRANCH     | <b>Rhetorical Branching</b><br><i>al-tafrī'</i>                                       |
| CHNGTOP    | <b>Change of Topic</b><br><i>husn al-takhalus</i>                                     |
| FOREWRN    | <b>Forewarning</b><br><i>al-'irṣad / al-tashīm</i>                                    |
| ENDING     | <b>Artful Ending</b><br><i>husn al-intihā'</i>                                        |

Intertextuality

Techniques that incorporate or allude to external texts to strengthen discourse through authoritative reference and shared cultural knowledge.

| Identifier | Name of rhetorical device                                                                                                                       |
|------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ISLQUOT    | <b>Islamic Quotation</b><br><i>al-iqṭibās</i>              |
| POETINC    | <b>Poetic Incorporation</b><br><i>al-tadmīn / al-īdā'</i>  |
| ALLUSN     | <b>Allusion</b><br><i>al-talmīh</i>                        |

Argumentation & Illustrative Persuasion

Techniques that strengthen reasoning through vivid imagery, layered references, and strategic shifts in style or genre.

| Identifier | Name of rhetorical device                                                                                                                                     |
|------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| SCHOLAP    | <b>Scholastic Approach</b><br><i>al-madhab al-kalāmī</i>                 |
| PROVERB    | <b>Proverbialisation</b><br><i>'irsāl al-mathal / al-kalām al-jāma'</i>  |
| GENSHFT    | <b>Genre Shifting</b><br><i>al-iftinān</i>                               |
| ABSTRCT    | <b>Abstraction</b><br><i>al-tajrīd</i>                                   |

- See: [Disambiguation page for Ambiguity and Lexical Wordplay Devices](#)

| Identifier | Name of rhetorical device                            |                                                                                   |
|------------|------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| DELIBAM    | <b>Deliberate Ambiguity</b><br><i>al-ibhām</i>       |  |
| NAMES      | <b>Meaningful Proper Nouns</b><br><i>al-tawjīh</i>   |  |
| EVLETTT    | <b>Evasive Letterplay</b><br><i>al-muwāraḃa</i>      |  |
| WISE       | <b>Wise Response</b><br><i>'uṣlūḃ al-ḥakīm</i>       |  |
| REFSHFT    | <b>Referential Shift</b><br><i>al-istikhdām</i>      |  |
| EUPHEM     | <b>Euphemism</b><br><i>at-talattuf</i>               |  |
| EMBED      | <b>Rhetorical Embedding</b><br><i>al-idmāj</i>       |  |
| TRUNC      | <b>Truncation</b><br><i>al-iktifā'</i>               |  |
| STACKED    | <b>Stacked-up Descriptions</b><br><i>al-istitbā'</i> |  |

### Grouping & Distinguishing

Logical and stylistic techniques that organize, compare, or contrast elements within a sentence or passage.

- See: [Disambiguation page for Grouping & Distinguishing devices](#)

| Identifier | Name of rhetorical device                                                         |                                                                                     |
|------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| SYNGRP     | <b>Syntactic Grouping</b><br><i>al-jam'</i>                                       |  |
| SEMGRP     | <b>Semantic Grouping</b><br><i>murā'āat al-naẓīr</i>                              |  |
| DIVITEM    | <b>Dividing Items</b><br><i>al-taqṣīm</i>                                         |  |
| GRPDIV     | <b>Grouping And Dividing</b><br><i>al-jam' ma' al-taqṣīm</i>                      |  |
| GRPDIFF    | <b>Grouping Then Differentiating</b><br><i>al-jam' ma'a al-tafrīq</i>             |  |
| DIFSIM     | <b>Differentiating Between Similar Items</b><br><i>al-tafrīq</i>                  |  |
| FOLDING    | <b>Folding and Unfolding</b><br><i>al-tay wa al-nashar / al-laff wa al-nashar</i> |  |

### Persuasive Tricks

Expressive techniques that persuade through exaggeration, irony, semantic inversion, or emotional manipulation.

| Identifier | Name of rhetorical device                                                                |                                                                                       |
|------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| HYPERBL    | <b>Hyperbole</b><br><i>al-mubālagha</i>                                                  |    |
| FANCIFL    | <b>Fanciful Causation</b><br><i>ḥuṣn al-ta'līl</i>                                       |    |
| PRAISE     | <b>Affirmed Praise</b><br><i>ta'kid al-madaḥ bimā yushbah al-dham</i>                    |    |
| DSPRAIS    | <b>Affirmed Dispraise</b><br><i>ta'kid al-dham bimā yushbah al-madaḥ</i>                 |    |
| NEGATE     | <b>Negation by Affirmation</b><br><i>nafy al-shay' bi-tjābihi</i>                        |    |
| PRBLAME    | <b>Praise-Blame Dichotomy</b><br><i>al-mughāyra</i>                                      |    |
| IGNORNC    | <b>Feigned Ignorance</b><br><i>tajāḥul al-'ārif</i>                                      |    |
| SERIOUS    | <b>Humour Through Which Seriousness is Intended</b><br><i>al-hazl yurād bihi al-jidd</i> |    |
| REQUEST    | <b>Finesse of Requesting</b><br><i>birā'a al-talab</i>                                   |   |
| RETRACT    | <b>Retraction</b><br><i>al-rujū'</i>                                                     |  |

### Rhythmic Structuring & Balance

Rhetorical techniques that organise language through balance, symmetry, proportion, and rhythmic structuring of phrases and clauses.

| Identifier | Name of rhetorical device                                                 |                                                                                       |
|------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| TAILHD     | <b>Tail-Head</b><br><i>rad al-'ajaz 'alā al-ṣadar / al-taṣḍīr</i>         |  |
| HDTAIL     | <b>Head-Tail</b><br><i>tashābuhu al-aṭrāf / radd al-ṣadr 'alā al-'ajz</i> |  |
| EXCELDV    | <b>Excellence of Division</b><br><i>ḥuṣn al-taqṣīm</i>                    |  |
| METRCL     | <b>Metrical Ellipsis</b><br><i>al-taṣhrī'</i>                             |  |
| HEMICON    | <b>Hemistich Ending Concordance</b><br><i>al-taṣrī'</i>                   |  |

Category: [Encyclopedia Pages](#)

