

English Naming Policy for Arabic Rhetorical Devices

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From The Encyclopedia of Arabic Rhetoric

Introduction

The **English Naming Policy for Arabic Rhetorical Devices** establishes how the [Encyclopedia of Arabic Rhetoric](#) names Arabic rhetorical devices in English. It distinguishes between the authoritative Arabic terminology of the classical tradition and the English labels through which the [Encyclopedia](#) makes that tradition accessible to English-speaking users. The **Policy** first explains why Arabic rhetorical devices require carefully controlled English labels, and then sets out the [Encyclopedia's](#) rules for creating them.

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The Naming Problem

Arabic terminology is authoritative

The [Encyclopedia of Arabic Rhetoric](#) is grounded in the classical Arabic rhetorical tradition. Where available, the Arabic name and classical definition of a rhetorical device establish that device's identity, boundaries, internal distinctions, and relation to other categories.

The Encyclopedia enables English access to Arabic rhetoric

The [Encyclopedia of Arabic Rhetoric](#) is an English-language resource. It is intended to make Arabic rhetoric accessible for scholarship and applications in Digital Humanities and Quantitative Linguistics, fields in which much research communication, corpus annotation, computational infrastructure, structured-data practice, and software development are conducted in English.

Arabic terminology therefore cannot normally appear as the [Encyclopedia's](#) only public label. A bare term such as *al-majāz* is authoritative within the Arabic rhetorical tradition, but it does not, by itself, enable an English-speaking user, annotator, corpus researcher, or computational system to identify the relevant linguistic mechanism, navigate the taxonomy, or apply the category consistently.

The [Encyclopedia](#) consequently uses English as its primary access layer into Arabic rhetoric. English labels support discovery, navigation, documentation, annotation, data exchange, and computational use. Their role is to make Arabic rhetorical categories intelligible and usable for English-speaking audiences, not to replace Arabic terminology or assimilate Arabic rhetoric to an English-language taxonomy. The English name is not intended as a replacement for the Arabic term. It is not an independent definition of the device, and it must not delimit the Arabic category. Arabic terminology and the classical Arabic definition remain authoritative.

Existing English terminology is not a reliable default

The obvious English labels available to the [Encyclopedia](#) often derive from Western rhetorical or modern linguistic traditions. These labels may overlap with Arabic rhetorical categories, but overlap does not establish equivalence.

Using an established English rhetorical label for an Arabic device may produce three forms of error:

- Analytic drift.** Annotators may apply the inclusion and exclusion criteria of a familiar English term rather than the [Encyclopedia's](#) classical Arabic definition.
- Taxonomic drift.** An Arabic category may be silently narrowed, broadened, merged with, or otherwise reshaped by a non-equivalent English category.
- Model-mediated drift.** AI systems, search tools, and downstream users of the [Encyclopedia's](#) data may prioritise a high-frequency English term and infer its usual English-language rhetorical properties rather than the intended Arabic definition.

For example, if an Arabic device were labelled *metonymy*, a user or AI system might apply the usual English-language understanding of metonymy, even if that understanding did not match the relevant classical Arabic definition of *al-kināya*. The same concern applies to terms such as anaphora, cataphora, synecdoche, apostrophe, periphrasis, irony, litotes, chiasmus, hypallage, zeugma, and prolepsis.

The problem, then, is not whether to use Arabic or English. The [Encyclopedia](#) requires both: Arabic for scholarly authority and English for accessibility. The challenge is to provide English labels that facilitate access without importing non-equivalent external definitions.

The English Naming Policy

The **English Naming Policy for Arabic Rhetorical Devices** adopts four principles to meet the requirements stated above.

Principle 1: Non-equivalent Western labels are avoided

Terms from Western rhetoric or linguistic discourse analysis whose conventional meanings do not fully match the scope of an Arabic term are not used as:

- English names for Arabic rhetorical devices
- Category labels
- Aliases
- Equivalence mappings
- Comparative correspondences

The [Encyclopedia](#) adopts a policy of strict non-equivalence mapping. At present, it is not within the scope of the [Encyclopedia](#) to provide mappings, equivalents, or comparative correspondences between Arabic rhetorical terms and Western rhetorical terms. This reflects both methodological care and project scope. Reliable comparison would require extensive specialist research, citation, and review; an inaccurate or under-supported comparison could mislead users and compromise the self-contained Arabic taxonomy.

Principle 2: Indispensable English terms are used under specified conditions

A familiar English rhetorical term may be used only when all of the following conditions apply:

1. **Intelligibility:** it is the ordinary English access term through which users would expect to find the broad phenomenon, and its conventional meaning is sufficiently aligned with the Arabic category to function as an access label without misrepresenting it.
2. **Non-presumption:** the ordinary English usage does not materially narrow, expand, or predetermine the [Encyclopedia's](#) Arabic definition.
3. **Necessity:** an alternative constructed English label would be unintelligible or cumbersome.

The limited set of permissible access terms includes [simile](#), [metaphor](#), [pun](#), [palindrome](#), [hyperbole](#), [ellipsis](#), [repetition](#), [antithesis](#), and [euphemism](#). When the Encyclopedia uses such a term, the Arabic definition - not the English term's conventional usage - remains authoritative.

Principle 3: Mechanism-based descriptive English terms are preferred

Where no pre-existing indispensable English term is available, the [Encyclopedia](#) uses descriptive English names that identify the Arabic [linguistic operation](#). A descriptive label should state, where relevant:

- What is present or omitted
- What is advanced, delayed, repeated, transferred, or otherwise changed
- What is referred to
- Which elements are related
- The direction of a relationship
- The grammatical target of the operation
- The grammatical or lexical target of the operation
- Any condition necessary to distinguish the operation from neighbouring devices

Reflecting the [Model for Rhetorical Action](#), descriptive labels should identify the [linguistic operation](#) rather than its likely [communicative purpose](#) or [communicative enhancement](#). They should be specific enough to distinguish neighbouring categories, while remaining as concise and natural in English as accuracy permits. Additional information should be incorporated into the label only where it is necessary to preserve a distinction made by the Arabic category.

Principle 4: Arabic names are preserved

Where available, the Arabic name of a device is retained as authoritative scholarly terminology. Its transliteration, following the [International Journal of Middle East Studies \(IJMES\) transliteration system](#) [↗](#), must be stored as a searchable, machine-readable alternate label.

The transliteration should normally be displayed alongside the English label on individual device pages and detailed taxonomy views. In compact interfaces, it may be available through expansion, hover text, or click-through presentation.

See Also

- [The Encyclopedia's Typological Foundation is the Classical Arabic Rhetorical Tradition](#)
- ["A Roman, a Hellene, and an Abbasid walk into a café..."](#) [↗](#) (3 February 2026)

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