

An introduction to Multiple Meanings of Rhetoric

Mohammad Ahmadi¹

PhD Student of Persian language and literature, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran

Taghi Poornamdarian

Professor of Persian language and literature, Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies, Tehran, Iran

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Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

Rhetoric is a term that has significantly changed in meaning throughout the history. Not enough attention has been given to the term's conceptual complexity in Persian and its vast meaning in literary studies. Although it is impossible to differentiate between the various meanings of the term, rhetoric in different contexts has a particular meaning. In Persian, this term has frequently been translated to oratory and eloquence; as rhetoric is more than oratory and eloquence, in this essay we have studied how different meanings of rhetoric have been shaped throughout the history. Some of the most important meanings of rhetoric are eloquence, oratory, weak style and communication. This essay can help the scholars to distinguish between the various meanings of rhetoric in different contexts and differentiate their significance in translation.

2. Methodology

Individuals trained in different fields often prefer to use rhetoric in specific contexts, while rhetoric cannot be restricted to a particular use. Considering the fact that none of its equivalents in Persian can completely demonstrate the true nature of rhetoric and also because of cultural and historical connotations, we have preferred to use the term rhetoric in this essay instead of any of its equivalents in Persian. Different meanings of rhetoric in different periods have been investigated in this essay. Obviously, the perspectives of our ancestors about rhetoric have never been forgotten completely in any time, but we can say in different historical periods, one specific meaning of rhetoric has been dominant over its other meanings.

3. Discussion

Based on historical facts, the term rhetoric was first used in one of the Plato's dialogues known as *Gorgias*, which was probably written around 380 BC. Without any doubt, rhetoric in this work referred to oratory. After Plato, Aristotle, Cicero and

1. Corresponding Author: mohammadahmadi1368@yahoo.com

Quintilian who were the most eminent figures and biggest theoreticians of oratory in ancient times also used rhetoric in the same manner and rhetoric was long used to mean oratory. But after the democratic governments in Greece and Rome collapsed, the civic role of rhetoric gradually decreased and weakened and instead of practicing forensic and deliberative oratory, aesthetics became the concern of the teachers of rhetoric and the aesthetic topics in rhetorical handbooks became dominant, and rhetoric begin to mean eloquence. In other words eloquence is one of the several meanings of rhetoric. As soon as style became dominant over the other principles in rhetorical handbooks sophistication and attention to the decorative and imaginative aspects of language and the techniques and ways of beautifying grew among rhetoricians and they became obsessed with aesthetics. In this period the meaning of rhetoric changes to verbiage and weak style. Even today in educational institutions in the United States and other countries, rhetoric still has negative connotations. We can claim that rhetoric in its history was always fluctuated between moral and logical and aesthetical perspectives and these perspectives have imposed positive and negative meanings to this term. In the modern period, scholars believe that rhetoric is any kind of communication attempt to change or reinforce an idea, behavior or attitude of human beings. That's why rhetoric nowadays is equal to all human communication. In other words rhetoric in its new meaning is part of human identity, because whenever man strives to express his emotions and thoughts with the aim of influencing others he is using rhetoric, so we can infer that rhetoric is omnipresent. In this new perspective rhetoric is more than oratory, eloquence and verbiage.

4. Conclusion

The term rhetoric was first used in one of the paltos dialogues known as *Gorgias* and has long been used to mean oratory; but due to intellectual, social and political developments in Europe the meaning of rhetoric underwent changes throughout the history and this term gradually not only referred to oratory, but also begin to mean eloquence, verbiage, weak style, persuasion and communication. Persian scholars and translators have mostly translated rhetoric to eloquence or oratory and have neglected the other meanings of rhetoric. In this essay we have analyzed how the scope of rhetoric due to political and social changes have changed throughout the history and what has rhetoric been referred to in different periods. This essay can help the scholars to distinguish the various meanings of rhetoric in literary and nonliterary studies and differentiate their significance in translation.

Keywords: rhetoric, oratory, eloquence, weak style, communication, persuasion.

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