Faculty and Researchers	Faculty and Researchers' Publications

2014-03-31

Toward an Understanding of Arabic Persuasion: A Western Perspective

Suchan, Jim

International Journal of Business Communication

Article

Toward an Understanding of Arabic Persuasion: A Western Perspective

Jim Suchan[1]

Abstract
Despite the political and economic importance of Arabic-speaking countries in the Middle East and Northern Africa, limited published research exists about how Arabic culture and language shape regional communication practices, particularly persuasion. This research describes key characteristics of Arabic persuasion by reviewing the extant research and analyzing the persuasion dynamics between a U.S. organization and a Jordanian organization attempting to form a service partnership. Both the literature and results from the case study indicate that Arabic persuasion strategies differ in fundamental ways from U.S. and Western strategies. Various forms of repetition, highly metaphoric language, and strong emotion characterize Arabic persuasion norms when using Arabic and English. These norms are created by the linguistic characteristics of Classical Arabic, the close connection between the Arabic language and Islam, and the social and political hierarchies that shape Arabic interaction.

Despite the information explosion caused by myriad new technologies and the increased ease of communication, there are countries, regions, and cultures about which we have limited accurate information. The Middle East is one such region. This lack of reliable information becomes acute when complex events such as "9/11" and even the "Arab Spring" occur. Unreliable information helps create stereotypes,

[1]Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA, USA

Corresponding Author:
Jim Suchan, Naval Postgraduate School, Graduate School of Business and Public Policy, 321 Ingersoll Hall, Monterey, CA 93923, USA.
Email: jsuchan@nps.edu

misperceptions, and misunderstandings that make it easy to homogenize Middle Eastern people, ascribe inaccurate attributes to them, and in some cases even demonize them. These attitudes may be shortsighted for purely pragmatic let alone humanistic reasons: The region is crucial to U.S. and Western political, economic, and security interests.

One key to understanding how people think, organize, and interact is to examine their language. That is particularly true in the Middle East where language, religion, social and political organization, and individual and national identity are tightly intertwined. Arabic is the official language of 26 countries that stretch from northwestern Africa to the Middle East. Approximately 300 million people speak Arabic as their primary language and about 250 million as a secondary language. The Arabic language, its close connections with Islam, and the unique ways of thinking this Arabic-Islam dynamic engenders play a dominant role in almost all Middle East interactions, even when they are conducted in English.

Not surprisingly, we have limited research-based knowledge—aside from anecdotal information describing cultural "dos and don'ts"—about how Arabic culture and language shape interaction, particularly persuasive communication. More specifically, business and managerial intercultural communication researchers have yet to examine in any depth the unique rhetorical characteristics of Arabic—both written and spoken—to provide businesspeople, public sector leaders, workers in nongovernment organizations, and the military with the knowledge and skills to facilitate interaction with Arabic audiences in the public and private sectors.

Because of these large gaps in basic knowledge about Arabic communication practice and the cultural contexts that shape interaction, this article's goals are both descriptive and analytical. Specifically, this article

1. Describes the unique characteristics of written and spoken Arabic and examines how these characteristics shape Arabic thinking about persuasion and help define some of its primary cultural values
2. Examines the reciprocal relationship between Islam and Classical Arabic as well as the privileged role that Classical Arabic still enjoys in the Middle East
3. Describes key characteristics of Arabic persuasion by reviewing the cultural linguistics, Middle East studies, linguistic anthropology, and intercultural communication literature
4. Analyzes through use of a brief case study the persuasion dynamics between two public sector service organizations—one located in Jordan and the other in the United States—attempting to establish a partnership

What follows is an overview of the complex dynamic between spoken and written Arabic, a discussion of the close relationship between Islam and Arabic and this relationship's impact on how Arabs "know," a description of key characteristics of Arabic persuasion strategies based on the limited research published in English, a description and analysis of Arabic persuasion strategies based on an ongoing negotiation between a U.S. organization and a Jordanian organization attempting to form a partnership, and finally a listing of key research questions that require future examination.

The Complex Dynamic Between Spoken and Written Arabic

To understand how Arabs think about persuasion and the strategies they use, we must first examine the significant differences between spoken and written Arabic, the power and prestige ascribed to written Classical Arabic, the tug and tension between Classical and Classical-Modern Arabic, and finally the political and religious stresses that are making transition to a more modern form of Arabic difficult.

Significant linguistic differences exist between spoken and written Arabic (Said, 2002). The spoken Arabic a child learns at home is fundamentally different from the written and spoken Arabic taught in religious, state, private, and foreign-run private schools. For example, an Egyptian child learns at home "Egyptian Arabic," one of over 26 Arabic vernaculars that exist in the pan-Arabic region. However, when children attend middle school (the sixth or seventh grade) or religious schools (ages approximately 6 to 9) whose purpose is to provide instruction in the Qur'an, they begin the often painful and complex process of learning to read and write in Classical Arabic (Haeri, 2003).

Linguists call this condition diglossia—the coexistence of two languages in everyday communicative interactions. Ferguson (1991, 1996) defines diglossia as a relatively stable language situation where in addition to the primary spoken dialects of the language there also exists a very different, highly codified (often linguistically and grammatically more complex) language contained in written literature, particularly canonical texts, which is learned through formal education. Ferguson observes that the school-taught written language is almost always viewed as "high" because it is more structurally complex than primary dialects; is connected often with a revered past (a golden age); and is used by people of status, power, and wealth in writing, literature, political speeches, and, most importantly, religious texts. In contrast, "low" Arabic is almost always the medium of oral communication, though literature in genres of poetry and the epic does exist in many of these dialects.

Said (2002) points out that among the educated, high Arabic (Classical Arabic) is viewed as so superior to "low" (the vernacular) that one who only knows "low" Arabic (though the person may be very skilled in the dialect) is thought to not know Arabic at all. One reason for this severe judgment is that these dialects have been modified by languages of former colonial powers (the French, English, Germans, and Turks) who many still see as sources of Arab humiliation. Furthermore, many intellectuals and religious leaders view these dialects infused with colonial words and phrases and new "Western" terms as inferior because they carry the seeds of a destructive kind of secular modernism (Haeri, 2000). Consequently, Classical Arabic's form and structure remains normative; most contemporary writers try to follow the rhetorical, stylistic, syntactic, and grammatical norms established by classical grammarians centuries ago. As we will see in later sections, Classical Arabic heavily influences how Arabs think about persuasion and the strategies they use because of its purity and perceived superiority to other forms of spoken and written Arabic.

Despite the status, power, and beauty ascribed to high (Classical) Arabic, Arabs are "two-minded" about it: they simultaneously revere and intensely dislike it (Haeri,

2003). On the one hand, Classical Arabic is called the "eloquent Arabic language" (*al-lugha al-arabiyya al-fusha* or *fusha* for short) because of its structural and metaphoric beauty—the language is melodic due to its built-in alliteration and assonance—and its connections with God's word through the Qur'an (Hitti, 2002). On the other hand, the language is grammatically and syntactically complex (four cases with diacritical marks indicating case and words' relationship with each other), thus making it very difficult to learn. Egyptians, for example, have such painful memories of learning Classical Arabic that many avoid reading novels, nonfiction, and even magazines (Haeri, 2003; Said, 2002).

What adds an additional layer of complexity is the existence of two different forms of written Arabic: Classical and Classical-Modern. Because of Classical Arabic's poetic, high flung diction and the difficulty learning the language, many business-people, intellectuals, and political figures believe a simpler, more modern form of written Arabic is needed that looks and sounds like Classical Arabic but is responsive to and reflective of the contemporary world. Classical-Modern Arabic is that language. It is based on Classical Arabic but at the same time is removed from it because of its uncomplicated syntax—simplified word order and no cases—and modern concepts that have been "Arabized" (e.g., *diblumasyya* for diplomacy). Not surprisingly, this push to establish Classical-Modern Arabic as an Arabic "lingua franca," which started in the 1920s but gained significant momentum in the 1970s, remains controversial because this modified language suggests that a dangerous form of secularization has become a major force within the cultural and political life of the region (Suleiman, 2006).

Although written Arabic appears to be undergoing change due to the interaction of Classical and Classical-Modern, the written language is stable compared to spoken Arabic. Arabic spoken dialects vary widely by region; in fact, a number of them are so different that speakers are unable to understand each other though both are speaking "Arabic." The primary Arabic dialects include Egyptian—the most widely understood due to the large number of Egyptian movies and television programs that flooded Arabic-speaking countries in the 1970s and 1980s—Arabian (the Gulf region), Iraqi, Levantine (Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine), and Maghrebi (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya).

What adds to this vernacular complexity is the emergence of a new, distinctive form of spoken Arabic called "educated spoken Arabic" (Haeri, 2000). Neither collo-quial nor classical, this form of Arabic may eventually serve as a linguistic bridge for the larger Arabic community. However, this attempt to create a common spoken Arabic is controversial. Among Arab nations there exists a close connection between the country's vernacular and its identity. For example, the people of Morocco, Algeria, and Egypt strongly believe that their vernacular or dialect connects them with their history and defines who they are, and, just as importantly, who they are not. A shift to "educated spoken Arabic" would blur national identities (Suleiman, 2006).

The numerous Arabic dialects, the significant differences between these dialects, and the differences between Classical and Classical-modern Arabic make it challenging to understand the overarching Arabic mental model about persuasion that results

from the interplay of language and culture and the specific persuasive strategies and interactions that result from that mental model. Furthermore, it is difficult to determine how these various forms of spoken and written Arabic shape communicators' language strategies when they use English. Because of the dearth of research published in English about Arabic persuasion strategies, let alone the differences in spoken and written Arabic that I've just described, we may need to incrementally build our understanding of how Arabic persuasion norms influence persuasion strategies used when speaking and writing in Arabic and English, focusing on one Arabic country or region at a time.

Despite these complex language differences and research challenges, one fact that virtually all researchers, intellectuals, and Arabic people agree on is the close connection between Arabic and Islam (Haeri, 2003; Johnstone, 1991; Lundgren, 1998; Said, 2002). Understanding that connection is key to understanding Arabic thinking about persuasion.

The Sacred Nature of Arabic: Language and Truth

Basan, my driver while I was traveling in Jordan, uttered in English after early evening prayer—performed in Classical Arabic—the following words that well describe the relationship between Arabic and Islam: "Arabic sings the truth." That Arabic is seen as the conveyor of truth significantly influences Arabic thinking about persuasion and the strategies people use.

Islam and Classical Arabic are mutually constitutive (Haeri, 2000). As mentioned earlier, what helps support this reinforcing relationship is that the central, canonical texts—religious, philosophical, scientific, and artistic—that many believe define Islamic civilization are written in Classical Arabic. Furthermore, the prevalent view among virtually all social classes is that Classical Arabic is the most "correct," "powerful," and "beautiful" of languages that carry God's "pure" truths to all believers (Gershoni & Jankowski, 1986). The beauty of the language is a reflection of the beauty of God and his word.

The most important and influential canonical text among Arabs is the Qur'an. Understanding the relationship between Arabs' view of this book as the authoritative voice of God and the Classical Arabic in which it is written is essential to understand the power and authority that Classical Arabic has in the contemporary Arab world. The Qur'an, one of the first books written in Arabic (A.D. 652), has served for centuries as the exemplum of style and structure for nearly all prose and poetry that followed it (Atiyeh, 1995).

Qur'an literally means "recitation." Muslims believe that God used Mohammed as his mouthpiece for his truth. Consequently, the Qur'an is Mohammed's recitation in Classical Arabic of God's words revealed to man through the prophet. This belief makes Arabic the language of *revelation*. All that we need to know and understand is revealed in the language of the Qur'an since its words came directly from God. In essence, all knowledge starts with and ends with God. This truth is so profoundly believed that the recitation of God's truth (the Qur'an) remains high art in Islamic

civilization (Gregg, 2005). Skilled reciters' pronunciation, cadence, voice quality, and tone can create such an emotional impact to the Qur'an's stories and images of heaven and hell that often people are moved to tears. In fact, virtually every neighborhood has "reciters" who speak—actually sing more than speak—Qur'anic verses in mosques and at public celebrations; the most talented are on television, radio, cassette tapes, and DVDs heard in homes and even merchant stalls throughout the region.

This belief that the Qur'an reveals God's truth is so strong that the book has not been translated into any of the numerous Arabic vernaculars (Haeri, 2003). In contrast, there are numerous translation of the Qur'an into Farsi, Turkish, and other non-Arabic languages. Many Arab-speaking Muslims strongly believe that a translation cannot be done without gravely distorting God's truths that passed directly to Mohammed. They argue that both the form and meaning of the Qur'an are inseparable; form is part of the meaning, and since form can't be translated, meaning would be distorted by a translation (Haeri, 2000, 2003; Said, 2002). To illustrate this connection between form and content, Nelson (1985) points out that the Qur'an uses the sound of the language (an onomatopoetic use of language) to convey specific meaning; both the image of a metaphor and also the sound of the words expressing the metaphor converge to create meaning. Simply put, the Qur'an's language is God's language; consequently, one must hear or read his word, not a translation of it.

This unique relationship between Classical Arabic and the Qur'an results in an Arabic mental model that Arabic is a sacred language that serves as a *container* for truth. In essence, truth is internal; it already exists in language God revealed to man. Consequently, the search for truth and the desire to know meant understanding the meaning of Qur'anic language through philological and grammatical exegesis. This search has resulted in numerous concordances, some dating back to the early medieval period, that believers continue to use to interpret the language of Qur'anic passages.

Striving to obtain large reservoirs of knowledge outside the sacred was seen as both fruitless and foolish because the essence of what needs to be known is contained in the Qur'an and other sacred texts (Rosenthal, 1995). As a result, the wise man focused on understanding those essential truths contained in the Qur'an, the concordances that interpreted those truths, and other sacred books. A quest for knowledge outside God's revealed truths could lead only to error or knowledge that was insignificant (Shehu, 2008). This view of truth makes the "voice" of the Qur'an both sacred and authoritative.

Not surprisingly, the power that Arab Muslims invest in the Qur'an leads to another primary Islamic belief that the role of people is to serve God, to pursue his wisdom with the help of imams so as to honor him, and to "serve" that knowledge to others (Dawood, 1990). This notion that a person's essential role, particularly an educated male from a well-regarded family, tribe, or "house," is to serve knowledge to others has a profound impact on how Middle Eastern Arabs reason and persuade.

Arabic Persuasion Strategies: A Review of the Literature

The literature, albeit limited, on Arabic persuasion focuses on three important strategies: repetition and paraphrasing; highly ornate, metaphoric language; and emotion.

This section first reviews this literature to provide an overview of current knowledge about Arabic persuasion and, second, briefly contrasts U.S./Western and Arabic macro-level concepts of persuasion to bring in sharp relief fundamentally different mental models of how these two cultures view persuasion processes and strategies.

The Power of Repetition and Paraphrasing

Koch (1983) and Johnstone (1991) have carefully analyzed the texts of Arabic writers viewed as lucid and convincing to determine the persuasion strategies these authors use. The analysis revealed that these writers often persuade by repeating, paraphrasing, reverse paraphrasing (the same action or event described from two opposing perspectives), and rephrasing one's request or claim. This repetition occurs at the phonological, lexical, syntactic, and semantic levels. To put it another way, there is repetition in both form and content. Koch calls this rhetorical strategy "presentation." Fakhri's (2004) research on the rhetorical properties of Arabic research article introductions supports Koch and Johnstone's findings. Fakhri's analysis of 28 introductions to refereed journal articles in economics and the socials sciences found that repetition and highly metaphoric language were rhetorical characteristics of these articles. This result is rather surprising given the well-established rhetorical patterns of article introductions: describing the intellectual territory, establishing a niche by pointing out limitations of the current research, and occupying that niche by indicating the article's purpose and its structure (Swales, 1990).

Khali's (1989) study of Arab English as a Second Language (ESL) college students' writing practices found that they greatly overused reiteration to provide coherence to claims and significantly underused strategies indicating cause and effect relations, contrast, and subordination. Furthermore, these students failed to supply sufficient information to support their claims but merely restated them in different forms. Khali's work suggests that extensive use of repetition characterizes Arabic student writing practice even in English and that support of claims through Western notions of careful reasoning may not be part of these students' mental model.

Koch and Johnstone argue this repetition stems from the Arab perception that argument or persuasion rests on stating established truths. In the Arabic worldview many truths are self-evident, are accepted, and thus are "in" the language that is communicating them. This worldview has its origins, as mentioned in the previous section, in the close connection among Islam, the Qur'an, and the Arabic language, particularly Classical Arabic. The presenter expects the audience *to identify* with the presenter's point of view as a result of the accumulated details: the same point made in a number of different ways. The role of the persuader is *to present* the truth, to proclaim it, to make it available to the audience so that they can identify it as the truth. Consequently, presentation of ideas is proof.

Koch and Johnstone focus primarily on written Arabic (i.e., Classical Arabic); however, they offer a number of personal examples of persuasive strategies used in telephone conversations and face-to-face meetings conducted in English and an Arab vernacular. In these oral exchanges, persuaders used the same presentation as proof approach as in written communication. Unfortunately, Koch and Johnstone do not

explain why this persuasive approach is used in the vernacular. In other words, it remains unclear whether the numerous Arabic vernaculars are also perceived to be "containers of truth" despite their lower status because they lack linguistic connection to the Qur'an and other sacred texts.

My own experiences with graduate students from Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates support Koch and Johnstone's claims. When students from these countries requested a project extension or contested a grade, their support for their claim generally consisted of repetition and paraphrasing their initial claim. Here is an abbreviated version of a typical exchange I've experienced:

> Student: Professor, I need to have a better grade on this paper.
> Professor: Why do you believe you deserve a better grade?
> Student: It is very important to me that I have a better grade.
> Professor: Explain to me why you deserve a better grade. Have you read my comments? Do you understand them? Use what you've learned in class to persuade me.
> Student: Grades are very important to me.
> Professor: I can understand that, but why do you deserve a better grade. Convince me . . . explain why . . . give me some evidence.
> Student: My evidence . . . ? [confused expression] My evidence is that I work hard, others received a better grade, and I'm very interested in a better grade.

When asked to explain why they should receive an extension or a better grade, most students appeared puzzled by the request because they believed they had provided clear explanation. These students were skilled English speakers; furthermore, a number of them had finished a module on persuasion. Despite their command of English and their exposure to a U.S. graduate school and its academic culture, this "presentation as proof" mode of reasoning persisted.

The Importance of Highly Ornate Language

Arabic writers and in special circumstances speakers use highly metaphoric language and what Westerners would call overstatement and exaggeration to persuade. Zaharna (2009) suggests one source for this highly metaphoric language is the Qur'an and other sacred texts. To inspire followers to lead an "elevated" way of life, the Qur'an extensively uses metaphors, similes, and analogies. Virtually every Arab has been imprinted between the ages of 6 to 9 with the language in these stories when they attended schools attached to community mosques designed to inscribe proper recitation of the Qur'an. This imprinting is ongoing, occurring during daily prayer and weekly services at mosques; on the radio, cassettes, and DVDs; and even during interactions in the market place.

Oft-cited Arabic proverbs provide additional insight about the importance of ornate language to persuade.

- Kiss the dog on his mouth until you get what you need out of him.
- Kissing hands is fooling beards.
- Your tongue is your horse; if you take care of it, it'll take care of you, and if you offend it, it will offend you.
- Raise your voice; otherwise their arguments will beat you.

These proverbs suggest that language we might perceive as manipulative is a key to persuasion. For example, the "kiss the dog on the mouth" proverb instructs that "sweet talk" is key to getting one's needs met. The "kissing hands is fooling beards" saying indicates that flattery and indirect communication approaches can be successful with elders (beards) and by implication people of greater power and status. Because of this highly rhetorical use of language, ways of talking—viewing your tongue as your horse (one of the most valued possessions among early nomadic Bedouins)—may include self-congratulation, self-praise and describing one's accomplishments in detail, the superiority of one's abilities, and the high status of one's friends (Haeri, 2003). These persuasive strategies provide important clues to the values and identity of the speaker. They indicate one's place in the hierarchy through connections; one's education, knowledge, and social status through clever, skillful ways of speaking; and ironically (from a Western perspective) the sincerity and emotion a speaker brings to the communication situation.

Gregg (2005) provides perhaps the most thought-provoking insight about Arab's use of ornate, highly metaphoric language. He links this language use to the unique psychology of Arab males: the urgent need to be first among equals. Ornate language accompanied by dramatic gestures and an emphatic tone of voice becomes a means to power—a form of verbal aggressiveness—designed to dominate, to clearly demonstrate that one is first. This dominance is ideational,one's language and ideas dominating another's through skillful rhetoric,psychological,the projection of confidence, complexity of character, and self-assuredness,and in some respects physical:strong voice, physical closeness to the listener, and dramatic gestures. This rhetorical tactic complements the larger scale building of relationships of domination and submission within the family, clan, tribe, or even religious and political organizations (Khuri, 1990).

Gregg (2005) also points out that honor, an essential Arabic personality factor, is linked with the use of highly metaphoric language to persuade. In the Middle East, honor not only is a code of values that one adheres to but also represents a social personality, a persona, and ultimately the ideal type of man. As Peristiany (1966) observes, honor is fundamentally performative in nature; a person constantly has to stand out—to prove and assert himself or herself to his or her family and the larger group. The Arabic adage "everyone watches the shepherd's first quarrel, the first chance to prove himself" provides one key to conceptualizing honor's psychological dimension.

This means of standing out takes two forms: the assertion and defense of one's self-image and the protection of one's home and lineage, particularly women (Bourdieu, 1966). One way to stand out, to assert one's self-image, is through highly

metaphoric language. Although many Westerners may see this language as boastful, self-aggrandizing, flamboyant, and even egotistical, most Arabs would interpret this language as proof of mastery of thought, a clear indication of being a "literate" Arab who has not been influenced by the language of former colonial powers, and a symbol of connections with God and a past golden age alluded to through metaphors connected with the Qur'an and other sacred texts (Haeri, 2003; Said, 2002). In short, ornate language is expected if one is to be persuasive. Furthermore, this heightened language complements the previously discussed notion of argument as presentation. Presenting claims (the "truth") in elegant language and an ornate style "dresses" the idea to make it more presentable and its truth more obvious.

Eloquence and the Role of Emotion

Arabs have always highly prized eloquence. We see this value in pre-Islamic poetry, the language of the Qur'an and other sacred texts, and the speeches of contemporary Arab leaders (Ayish, 1998). In fact, eloquence is so highly valued that the Saudi Arabian version of *American Idol* involves Saudis (including women) reciting ornate, highly metaphoric, and very emotional poetry they have composed to win the top prize of approximately $800,000.

   For Arabs eloquence takes on two forms: linguistic ability and emotional resonance. The person who uses language cleverly is well educated; a person who is well educated is qualified to make judgments and, therefore, his or her advice should be followed. However, linguistic ability is not enough; information alone that is well presented may appear cold, impersonal, and ultimately unpersuasive. An eloquent communicator is skilled in using language to emotionally connect with others and to move them to a different position (Zaharna, 2009). The Arab expression "words from the heart fall in the heart, those from the tongue reward only the ear" captures the importance of emotion in Arabic interactions. We hear this emotional connection not only in the speeches of both political and religious Arab leaders but also in greetings or compliments. For example, after I had tea with a Bahraini educational leader, he ended the conversation with a heartfelt "I wish your daughter well in her new position; I'm sure she will be very successful and you and your wife will be very proud" rather than the simple "I enjoyed our talk." The Bahraini gleaned this information during small talk about family before we discussed business issues. Needless to say, his words had a strong emotional impact on me, and I thought highly of him.

   Emotion becomes a way of building deep interpersonal relationships. These relationships at the dyadic, group, and even organizational level create "group feeling" (*asabiyah*). This feeling builds and maintains the social networks that are critical, indeed essential, to being effective and successful in a wide variety of activities—business, marriage arrangements, social favors, and psychological sustenance. Furthermore, each person *becomes* the network of relationships and obligations that he has worked hard to create (Said, 2002). Consequently, when a senior person persuades, he or she represents not merely his or her own ideas but those of an entire social, business, and perhaps even religious network. Representing a network of people and the historical associations that are a part of that network carries significant emotional impact.

Table 1. Comparison of U.S. and Arabic Thinking About Persuasion.

U.S. thinking	Arabic thinking
Knowledge provisional, contested, and searched for	Knowledge firmly established; reveals beliefs people should embrace
Knowledge constructed through common language interpretation, careful message framing, and up-front reasoning	Language contains truth and reveals knowledge
Persuasion audience-centric: evidence framed to meet audience's concerns	Persuasion writer/speaker-centric: presentation and repetition of preexisting knowledge is proof
Claim validity based on careful, fact-based evidence	Highly metaphoric language carries and "dresses" a claim's truth to make it clear
Emotion backgrounded to not undermine objectivity and appear unreasonable	Strong emotion foregrounded to indicate commitment, involvement, and "heart"
Many forms of credibility: expertise, track record, organizational position, likeability, and the persuasion process	Social position basis for credibility: past patrilineal relationships, current social networks, number of patron-client relationships, age

A Brief Comparison Between U.S. and Arabic Thinking About Persuasion

A useful way to summarize what the literature either directly states or implies about Arabic persuasion and to bring Arabic persuasive practices in sharp relief is to compare them with typical U.S. managerial practices. This comparison is not designed to summarize the complex field of persuasion but merely to highlight what is distinctive about Arabic thinking about persuasion. Table 1 compares these two ways of thinking

Undoubtedly, the most significant difference is how the United States and the Arab-speaking world view knowledge. We see knowledge as something that is provisional and contested; we search for it through a variety of means: dialectic reasoning, dialogue, hypothesis testing, and so on (Perloff, 2003). In short, knowledge is external; it is out in the world to be found, or as a number of modern rhetoricians believe, to be created or constructed. Barry Eckhouse (1999) extends the notion of knowledge as something to be contested when he argues that all communication, particularly persuasive communication, is competitive. Writers and speakers must first compete for their audience's attention and, second, win them over. In fact, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) point out that we commonly use "war" metaphors—the ultimate competition—to describe persuasion:

- He *shot down* my arguments.
- She *attacked* my position.
- His argument was *indefensible*.
- Her criticism of my claims was *right on target.*
- I need to better *defend* the points I want to make.
- I *demolished* his arguments during the meeting.

- I need to better *buttress* my points if I'm going to *win* this argument.
- We *battled hard* to make our points.

In short, we compete or battle to create new knowledge and have established norms and procedures in various communities (business, science, engineering, law, politics, etc.), called by rhetoricians argumentative fields, that define through implicit and explicit rules and norms how that persuasive battle is to be waged.

In contrast, Arabs view knowledge as "truth revealed" that exists in language. In short, language is a "container" of truth. The process for making truth clear is to enable the audience to see into the container from various angles or perspectives. Consequently, paraphrasing, reverse paraphrasing, and repetition are all means of providing the audience with different angles to recognize truth. This approach toward knowledge and persuasion is speaker/writer-centered and authoritarian and perhaps even autocratic. All knowledge worth knowing starts with Mohammed's recitation of God's word inscribed in the Qur'an and clarified in other sacred texts. This perception of where knowledge is located is extended within the hierarchical structure of Arabic families, clans, tribes, urban neighborhoods, and nation states. The locus of power and influence by and large still resides in males with social, political, and religious authority (fathers, uncles, sheiks, imams, and monarchs). These individuals and their words have power and credibility; consequently, there's need only for these people to present the truth (proof as presentation), not prove that a claim is true.

This Arabic view of knowledge also results in significant differences between the cultures' approach toward language and emotion in persuasive interactions. For example, most U.S. companies highly value facts, particularly if they can be quantified and measured. Organizational members generally expect carefully framed, fact-based analysis to build arguments in support of claims (Reardon, 1991). A facts-based approach signals our arguments are "rational" and unbiased, since many believe, particularly in technical areas, that facts have an independent existence; they reside outside the communicator, the group, or organization the person represents. This mode of thinking influences language used to describe and analyze facts. In attempts to be clear and unbiased, we tend to use nonmetaphoric, stripped-down language. For example, when giving presentations to senior officers in the military services, presenters need to be careful to avoid highly metaphoric language, otherwise they will be perceived as "used car salesmen" (a common, very derogatory metaphor used in all the services) who lack credibility because they have "not let the facts speak for themselves." The same is true within the academic publishing world. A researcher who uses highly metaphoric language will be viewed as nonscholarly and the credibility of his or her arguments will be compromised.

In Arabic cultures, though, highly metaphoric language is viewed very positively when stating claims. As mentioned earlier, ornate language "dresses" a claim; it helps make the truth residing in the claim more accessible to the reader/listener. Furthermore, the highly metaphoric language calls attention to the writer/speaker and signals the person's status, education, and knowledge of Classical Arabic (most metaphors are drawn from classical sources), all of which enhances the communicator's credibility. In addition, this use of language indicates a person is "eloquent," which is highly

valued, indeed expected, among older males from established families. Finally, as has been discussed, metaphoric language permeates Arabic culture. People are constantly exposed to this type of language during the hearing, reciting, and reading of the Qur'an. Also, one hears it in greetings, in often-cited aphorisms, and sprinkled throughout everyday conversation. To reiterate what Basan, my driver, said, "Arabic *sings* the truth" (emphasis mine).

This ornate, highly metaphoric language directly invokes strong emotion, which plays an important role in Arabic persuasive interactions. Emotion signals strong conviction, a genuine involvement with the issue, and most importantly "heart." Heart, often described as sentiment in the literature on Arab psychology, indicates personal authenticity; most Arabs would find it inconceivable to stand "outside" of their ideas by, for example, making opposing claims—the Arabic equivalent of arguing both sides of a point (Haeri, 2000). Words matter; they are directly connected not only to the writer/speaker but also to the network of familial and social relationships that person represents.

Emotion is also triggered by numerous references embedded within the Arabic language to sacred texts, stories, moral exemplars, and historical events. There are no clear distinctions between sacred and secular language in Arabic, particularly Classical Arabic; the sacred is embedded in all types of interaction. Language, with its rich set of associations, becomes an important way of preserving and reinforcing the established wisdom of the family, community, tribe, and, most importantly, Islam and its cultural values. Consequently, the language that taps these associations creates strong sentiment that seems very natural to Arabs.

In contrast, many U.S. organizational members believe that in most persuasive interactions strong emotion indicates bias and clouds judgment. We generally assign higher credibility to communicators who appear to present facts objectively, using tightly structured cause and effect arguments as scaffolding for those facts in the specialized language of their discourse community. This perception is particularly true in business interactions, which we tend to see as pragmatic and instrumental; language is a "tool" to get work done and then move on to the next task. People who are overly emotional are seen as "out of control," "screamers," "touchy-feely," and a number of other demeaning metaphors that diminish their credibility. The exception is circumstances when leaders try to inspire or to transform an organization due to unique factors in the external environment. In other words, strong emotion is appropriate only at prescribed times in many organizations and can be expressed when appropriate by people in power. Furthermore, unlike most Arabs where the professional, personal, and religious are intertwined, we tend to draw sharp demarcations between work, personal, and religion/spiritual lives. We relegate strong emotion to the personal and perhaps religious.

Case Study: Establishing a Partnership Between a U.S. and Jordanian Organization

This case describes the persuasive interactions between a U.S. and a Jordanian public sector organization attempting to form a partnership to provide Gulf region clients

with high-quality services. Negotiations continue on a number of related issues; consequently, the names of the organizations and the principle players in the discussions have been changed. The U.S. organization's pseudonym is Far West; the Jordanian organization is called Jaresh, an ancient Jordanian city with extensive Roman ruins. Because this analysis focuses primarily on Jaresh members' persuasion strategies, I provide only enough details about organizational context to inform the discussion about persuasion. Furthermore, I have limited the case to include only those interactions I personally viewed: Far West's initial meeting with Jaresh and summaries of several two-way video and audio teleconferences. What follows is a brief background about both organizations and the research methodology I used to gather and analyze case data

Far West and Jaresh Background

The Jaresh entrée was arranged through senior-level government officials who were to "socialize" Jaresh about the Far West team and its goals. Far West had a narrow window to act on this entrée; consequently, the team had limited time to prepare for the Jaresh visit. Team members spent the time they had—all were juggling multiple tasks with tight deadlines typical of administrators—clarifying team roles and responsibilities, gathering information about Jaresh's strengths and weaknesses, determining how Far West strengths could complement Jaresh's shortcoming, and framing briefing content in an open-ended manner to spur discussion about the partnership.

Potential cultural differences were discussed; however, most team members believed that Jaresh leaders' U.S. and British educational backgrounds, the organization's somewhat similar missions, and the intermediaries' "socialization" of Jaresh about Far West goals would mitigate these differences. Unfortunately, Far West's bureaucratic contracting processes made it unrealistic to secure before the visit a consultant with Middle East negotiation expertise. The initial meetings were held in Amman, Jordan at the Jaresh headquarters. The Far West team was composed of 5 members, 3 of whom held senior leadership positions. Four members were male, one female. The senior team members had between 22 and 31 years of Far West experience, the two junior members 3 and 6 years. All team members had advanced degrees from a variety of areas: hard sciences, social sciences, and the humanities. Far West is a relatively flat organization with power and credibility based primarily on expertise rather than position. Furthermore, interactions are very informal with people at all levels addressing each other by their first names rather than by job title. All Far West team members participated actively in the meeting with Jaresh.

The Jaresh team was composed of 14 members, all of whom were male. They had between 14 and 33 years of Jaresh organizational experience. Jaresh is a hierarchical, bureaucratic organization with power centralized at its apex. Interactions are very formal, with titles used as means of address. Because of hierarchy and Jaresh-Arabic cultural norms, only the most senior people had the right to speak at these meetings.

Discussions were conducted in English without translators. Jaresh senior leaders had good command of English. These leaders were very well educated and, as I learned

later, skilled writers of Classical Arabic. Sidebar discussions among Jaresh leaders were conducted in Levantine Arabic. These discussions broke out when misunderstandings or disagreements occurred over the nature of the partnership. One member of the Far West group, a native of Palestine fluent in Levantine Arabic, provided, when possible, a summary of these sidebar conversations.

Research Methodology: Participant Observation

Participant observation was used to gather information for this case. As Jorgensen (1989) points out, this methodology is appropriate when the research problem concerns human interaction and meaning generation, the interaction occurs within an everyday organizational life setting, the research issue is appropriate for case study, and the research issue can be addressed by qualitative data gathered by direct observation and other means pertinent to the field setting. Furthermore, participant observation is appropriate for an exploratory study of this type and for determining the legitimacy of other researchers' knowledge claims about Arab persuasion practices (Jorgensen, 1989).

During the Far West and Jaresh meetings, I took very detailed notes. Although my note taking was to map for the Far West team the discussion direction, issues generated, and discussion themes, I also viewed negotiations in Jordan opportunistically as a potential "research problem space." Immediately after the meetings, I reviewed my notes, added more details, looked for additional themes, and created some initial generalizations. I shared the detailed notes with Far West team members—a pseudo triangulation attempt—to ensure my observations were accurate and to gather additional details.

I also used informants I developed in Jordan to help me analyze my field notes, understand Arabic cultural underpinnings to Jaresh members' interactions, and comment on the validity of my generalizations. After interviews with Jordanian informants, I reviewed my initial field notes, reorganized my material, and often noticed new patterns. Finally, I used the literature to help me interpret the data and push farther my analysis. During the drafting of this article and its multiple revisions, I returned often to the literature to better understand the cultural underpinnings that influenced Jaresh communication interaction.

Case Details: The Sumptuous Breakfast

The meeting started with a sumptuous breakfast at Jaresh headquarters. This breakfast took the Far West team by surprise since its members were expecting task oriented meetings. Numerous hot and cold dishes were served representing the best Jordanian cuisine. Jaresh leaders explained the dishes, urged the Far West team to try them all, and briefly alluded to the importance of hospitality in a country that has its roots in nomadic Bedouin tribes. Although there was a brief welcoming speech by the senior leader, the breakfast was not overly formal. Jaresh senior leaders did not give ceremonial speeches and gifts were not exchanged. In fact, the breakfast conversation was

very informal focusing heavily on family and to a lesser extent on travel, football (soccer and U.S. football), leadership and management books that were in vogue, and other noncontroversial topics. Jaresh representatives appeared to listen very carefully to Far West team members during this "small talk." This breakfast created in Far West members the expectation that the upcoming meetings would be informal, low-key, and relatively conflict free.

The Meeting

The meeting started with the Jaresh second-in-command giving a PowerPoint briefing in English about the Jaresh organization and its capabilities. The briefing lasted 50 minutes. The briefing's purpose, which was not directly stated, seemed to be merely descriptive, a way of providing context about the organization for the discussion about forming a partnership. The structure of the briefing was elliptical and repetitive. Similar points about Jaresh's organizational strengths were made in a number of different ways. Furthermore, the Jaresh speaker often used superlatives to describe his organization, people, and their capabilities. For example, the organization was described as "the best," "the most efficient," the "most knowledgeable" in the Gulf region. Its people had "motivation that surpasses all others," "training that others want to have," and "education of the highest caliber." These superlatives surprised Far West, particularly their frequency and the rather formal syntactic structures that contained them. Several Far West members described the briefer as "bombastic" and "over the top." Most Far West members lost interest in the briefing because of its repetitive structure. Very few questions were asked.

The Far West team then provided a PowerPoint presentation designed as a catalyst for discussion about the nature and terms of the partnership. In Far West organizational culture, virtually every meeting—informal or formal—includes PowerPoint slides to provide background and help shape discussion. Far West covered about five or six slides before two of Jaresh's senior leaders interrupted and began making claims that echoed the ideas in their earlier PowerPoint presentation. The Far West team was initially perplexed because they weren't sure what question was being asked about specific material on the slide or the possible partnership in general. The Jaresh leaders were confused by Far West members' repeated requests to clarify the question they were asking or the difficulty they were having with the information Far West was presenting. What also confused Jaresh was Far West's request to dialogue about ideas presented in an effort to begin to work out the nature of the partnership. At this time, numerous sidebar conversations in Arabic broke out among Jaresh members. The conversations sounded very emotional and the body language was animated. The Far West member fluent in Levantine Arabic was able to translate bits and pieces of these conversations. In essence, Jaresh leaders were both puzzled and upset by what Far West was trying to accomplish in its presentation because its content appeared to question Jaresh's service expertise.

After the initial sidebar conversations ended, Jaresh's senior leader attempted to take control of the meeting. He asserted, for example, that the Jaresh organization had

significant expertise in providing financial management and logistics services. When a Far West member asked him to describe the reason for that assertion, the Jaresh leader basically paraphrased what he just said; Jaresh works hard to develop and maintain its expertise in financial management and logistics. Puzzled by the response, the Far West member asked what specific actions Jaresh was taking to develop and maintain that expertise. The Jaresh leader replied that the organization employs people with expertise in financial management and logistics. The Jaresh leader believed he was convincingly supporting his claim. The Far West team was puzzled by the claim because they believed Jaresh lacked that expertise. In fact, one of Far West's major contributions to a partnership was its expertise in supply chain management, material logistics, and financial management.

The meeting, which lasted almost three hours, veered far off course. Both Far West's and Jaresh's confusion about each other's presentations, the questions asked, the claims made, and the support for the claims made it difficult to find common ground for discussion and thus to determine how to proceed. As a result, the meeting became disjointed and ended at an impasse. Both groups agreed to schedule a two-way audio and two-way video teleconference in 3 weeks. Furthermore, they agreed to think about the issues raised during the meeting and expressed gratitude for the opportunity to meet with each other.

The Far West group returned to their hotel confused, dejected, and angry. At a postmortem meeting that evening, one Far West member blurted, "What's wrong with those people? Can anyone tell me what this was about?" Another added, "I sat on a plane for 18 hours for this?" Far West members spent the next 30 to 45 minutes venting their anger and frustration. Finally, the meeting turned to discussion of next steps and possible ways to develop the partnership. After much discussion, one member pointed out that Far West had a number of influential "friends" in Jordan and the Gulf Region. He recommended that Far West use a powerful intermediary to "socialize" Jaresh about the advantages of a Far West partnership, to learn what caused Jaresh senior leadership to be so upset during the meeting, and to determine if areas of common interest existed that would enable partnership discussion to proceed.

Choosing an intermediary was surprisingly easy. Far West had developed a relationship over the years with a very senior (early 70s), influential business leader in the Gulf Region financial services business. This person not only had built a large and profitable company but also had powerful allies in senior government positions in Jordan and several other Gulf countries. Salem, a pseudonym, was pleased to help Far West and indicated he would be able to speak with Jaresh senior leaders. Before returning to the United States, the Far West team met with Salem to discuss the partnership and to describe the meeting events.

Two-Way Video and Audio Teleconference (VTC)

The interactions during three 1-hour VTC meetings were unsatisfactory for both Far West and Jaresh. The medium was too lean to communicate nonverbal cues and the emotions essential to emphasize points. Furthermore, Jaresh was inexperienced in

using this technology to facilitate interaction. They had limited knowledge of where to place the camera and how to use camera presets to get medium close-up shots of the person speaking; also, the number of people attending the meetings was too large (14), and the room setup (one long table) made interaction difficult. Finally, the time lag between speaking and hearing caused people often to talk over each other. Clearly, the technology frustrated Jaresh; however, Far West was not asked for help, even though it was clear its members were experienced VTC users. After three VTC meetings, both parties agreed to abandon the meetings in favor of individual discussions between the senior leaders of both teams.

Jaresh interactions during these VTC meetings mirrored those during the Amman discussion: repetition of key claims, strong emotion to support points, and overstatements using highly metaphoric language. Due to the intervention of Salem, our mediator, the discussion content changed. The focus was now on developing a written charter between both organizations that expanded partnership boundaries. This expansion enabled Jaresh to offer Far West areas of expertise (e.g., Islamic banking processes) that Far West lacked. A key factor that helped partnership discussion to move forward was Far West's request that Jaresh write the initial charter draft. Once that draft was written, two Far West team members returned to Amman to discuss the draft and revise it. Charter negotiations are ongoing, though proceeding from Far West's perspective at a painfully slow pace.

Case Discussion

The case clearly demonstrates that neither organization had done the necessary ground work to learn about the other's strengths, organizational culture, and their respective communication norms and expectations through their contacts. However, this discussion focuses primarily on Far West's communication biases, inaccurate perceptions about the power of written language and PowerPoint, and lack of sensitivity to Arab concepts of saving face and honor. Far West unconsciously assumed that since discussions would take place in English, the interactions would follow patterns with which they were familiar.

As the case shows, the first breakdown was caused by Far West's perception and interpretation of PowerPoint presentations and its unconscious attempt to impose Far West organizational norms about language and presentation organization on Jaresh member interaction.

The Far West team misinterpreted the purpose of the Jaresh briefing and the symbolic importance of a PowerPoint presentation in the Jaresh-Arabic cultural context. Far West, operating within low-context cultural assumptions, expected explicit, detailed language that made clear Jaresh's ideas and beliefs. In contrast, Jaresh assumed the briefing intent and the symbolic importance of PowerPoint was obvious to Far West because of context: Jaresh was a powerful organization, its reputation was stellar, and its senior people were highly regarded throughout the region.

Not until after the Jaresh meeting and during their discussion with Salem, the intermediary, did Far West members realize that Jaresh's goal was not to provide context

for discussion but to present a strong argument for the organization to take the lead in the partnership and to be its primary voice in interactions with other Gulf-region stakeholders. That goal was implied by the repetitive emphasis on Jaresh's organizational strengths. Far West missed what in retrospect seemed like a clear signal of intent. Furthermore, in Jaresh's culture writing in general and the PowerPoint brief in particular had symbolic importance. Ideas put in writing have weight and finality to them; a briefing is not merely a starting point for discussion but represents a position that the organization has taken. Far West did not understand the weight and seriousness that Jaresh gave to information in PowerPoint presentations because Far West often used the software informally as a tool to help generate discussion.

Furthermore, Far West did not anticipate how Jaresh would interpret Far West's PowerPoint presentation and its material. Jaresh saw this information as the position that Far West was taking about the partnership. Despite repeated tries to disavow Jaresh leaders of this idea, they continued to act as if the slides represented a Far West position rather than some notional ideas for discussion. In Far West culture, PowerPoint slides often represent provisional ideas that are to be discussed and "battled over" to create new ideas and courses of action. However, within Jaresh culture words contain the truth of one's position; they are taken very seriously.

Not only did Far West misinterpret the symbolic nature of PowerPoint and the power and permanence of written language but also the team was unprepared for the Jaresh persuasion processes and the patterns of interaction to support a claim. Throughout the lengthy meeting, the pattern of a Jaresh senior leader making a claim, paraphrasing it, and restating it recurred. Far West members' requests to support claims by providing facts, details, and explanations proved confusing even when the Far West member of Palestinian descent made the requests in Arabic and tried to explain Far West team members' confusion. This pattern of repetition also occurred during follow-up video teleconferencing meetings. This method of argument as presentation, discussed earlier, was both a pattern of thinking and a dominant persuasive strategy during these interactions. However, Far West was unaware it was experiencing a method of persuasion based on the unique influences of Classical Arabic and Islamic-Arabic culture until the second or third video teleconference. In fact, Salem, our intermediary, did not notice these differences in persuasion strategies until one Far West team member, who had started researching Arab communication patterns, pointed them out.

These Jaresh–Far West interactions suggest that patterns of thinking and action created by a person's primary language and culture strongly influence the strategies that person uses in a second language. Although Jaresh senior leaders were thinking in English when interacting with the Far West team, they were acting based on the mental model developed as a result of the Classical Arabic language, Islam, and Arabic-Jordanian social and political culture.

Another characteristic of the Jaresh–Far West meeting was what most U.S. team members described as "over the top," "bombastic," "egotistical" language. Initially, Far West attributed this language use to Jaresh's inability to understand the nuances of English and to the borrowing of catchphrases from popular U.S. management and

leadership books that Jaresh leaders spoke highly of during breakfast. However, these explanations do not seem valid. Jaresh senior leaders were educated in British and U.S. schools; their command of English was very good. A more likely explanation is provided by the characteristics of Classical Arabic and the meeting context. As stated earlier, Classical Arabic uses language that sounds exaggerated and ornate to a U.S. audience. This mental model about appropriate Arabic language use may have carried over into English. Furthermore, Far West team members were not known to Jaresh, though the organization had an excellent reputation in the region. Initial contact with Jaresh to introduce the possibility of a partnership and arrange the initial meeting was made through an intermediary. Consequently, the constantly repeated superlatives may have been a way of establishing the importance and value of Jaresh and ensuring it was not in a "one-down" position during negotiations. Finally, senior leaders' use of hyperbolic language may reflect hierarchy—organizational and religious—and the need to project the power, authority, and capability of the Jaresh organization.

The final characteristic of Jaresh persuasion strategies was the strong use of emotion. To Far West team members, Jaresh senior leaders sounded overly passionate when they spoke about the capabilities of the organization and the qualities of its people. That passion was exhibited in tone of voice, body language, and eye contact. For example, when the Jaresh senior leader broke into the Far West briefing after the fifth or sixth slide, he did so by raising his voice, gesturing grandly to call attention to himself, and continuing to speak with seemingly exaggerated shifts in voice pitch and intonation. This method of interruption and emotional speaking style initially stunned Far West members. As this method of interruption and emotional speaking style continued throughout the remainder of the meeting, Far West viewed this senior leader as bombastic, out of control, and insensitive. Eventually, Far West abandoned its briefing and attempted to respond to the emotionally driven concerns of Jaresh senior leaders. Most Far West members believed that Jaresh had "hijacked" the meeting.

In retrospect, this emotion had two closely connected functions: to save face and to protect individual and organizational honor. Jaresh interpreted Far West's presentation as a veiled indictment of its organizational capabilities, particularly since Jaresh had spent so much time during its presentation describing and emphasizing its strengths. Salem, our intermediary, later pointed out that Jaresh's senior leader *had* to strongly intervene in the presentation and speak forcefully and with emotion—from the heart. His subordinates expected him to protect their and the organization's good name. If he hadn't done so in the style he used, he would be seen as weak and unworthy of his position—he would have lost face. Furthermore, his network of organizational relationships would be weakened and his role of patron (providing help and favor to those who depended on him) could be compromised if he did not react strongly and exert what we would call leadership. Inadvertently, Far West's briefing had questioned Jaresh's expertise, which was particularly troubling to Jaresh because Far West was to act as "guests." Within the Jaresh-Arab cultural context that represented a challenge. To protect individual and organizational honor, this perceived challenge had to be met with power, emotion, and strong language.

Obviously Far West was unprepared to interpret and respond appropriately to Jaresh leaders' emotions. The tone of the breakfast meeting had caused Far West to expect a low-key, nonconfrontational, fact- and analysis-driven conversation about partnership possibilities. Furthermore, Far West's organizational culture values and expects cool-headed, polite discussion where claims are carefully backed with detailed analysis. In fact, Far West has devised specific criteria they use when negotiating partnerships that serve as the framework for their briefings and informal and formal discussions. Far West viewed emotion through a narrow lens. Their belief was that heightened emotion was unprofessional and clouded judgment. That lens was not adjusted to account for patterns of thinking about emotion endemic to the Arabic language and Jaresh-Arabic culture.

Final Observations and Research Limitations

Determining the factors that influence Arabic persuasion strategies is complex. The fundamental differences between spoken and written Arabic—what linguists call diglossia—suggest that persuasion strategies may vary significantly depending on the medium used. In addition, the significant variation between written Classical and Classical-Modern Arabic may result in different persuasion strategies. Unfortunately, the research literature doesn't address the effect on persuasion these issues may have.

What the literature does indicate is that Arabic communicators rely on repetition, hyperbolic language, and emotion to persuade when writing or speaking. The importance of repetition stems from the close connections between Classical Arab, the Qur'an, and other sacred texts. The language of these sacred texts is truth revealed to man. Consequently, persuasion entails presenting ideas that the writer/speaker knows to be true. The proof is in the presentation and contained in the language and form (grammar and syntax) of the idea. As Haeri (2000, 2003), Johnstone (1991), and Said (2002) have pointed out, the Western mental model of actively pursuing the truth and using cause-effect reasoning, careful framing of evidence to meet audience's needs, and evidence appropriate for the situation to argue the validity of a claim are not part of the Arabic mental model for persuasion.

The literature merely suggests the reasons for the use of vivid metaphor and strong emotion. The use of metaphoric, hyperbolic language may echo the ornate, florid language and style characteristic of Classical Arabic. Furthermore, many scholars and commentators observe that Arabs love their language and use it in a "showy," exuberant manner. Finally, this bold, highly charged language may reflect the hierarchies deeply embedded in all aspects of Arabic culture. Senior leaders may use grand, bold language to reflect the power and authority that come with their social role and occupational status. Finally, language and emotion are closely connected. Emotion indicates commitment to an idea or position. Also, it can be used to intimidate and reinforce one's power in a relationship.

The research literature's accounts of Arabic persuasion strategies primarily focus on their use in Arabic. However, will these same strategies persist when Arabs use English? The Far West–Jaresh case study indicates that they do. This finding is

surprising because it runs counter to research conducted by Du-Babcock (1999, 2006) and Kameda (1996). These researchers have found that bilinguals do vary how they organize information based on differences in their primary language and their second language. Specifically, Du-Babcock found that Hong Kong bilinguals followed spiral or circular topic management strategies when communicating in Cantonese, but linear strategies when communicating in English. This research supports Whorf's linguistic relativity principle, which states that speakers of a different language construe the world based on the language they are using (Hunt & Agnoli, 1991; Whorf, 1956). However, as we have seen, Jaresh leaders constantly used repetition, paraphrase, restatement, and elaboration to support their points, even when supporting claims in English. These leaders also used superlatives and bold, showy language when speaking. Finally, leadership exhibited high levels of emotion in their body language and voice intonation when communicating their major points and their concerns. This question of to what degree Arabic persuasion strategies carry over into English requires additional research. The Jaresh interactions suggest the Arabic mental model toward persuasion persists even when English is spoken.

The Far West team was not adequately prepared for their initial interactions with Jaresh. Team members viewed themselves not as Jaresh's guests but primarily as potential business partners. Consequently, the team did not adopt the role guests are to play in a culture whose origins are nomadic. Rather than carefully building a relationship and being mindful that their ideas did not cause Jaresh to "lose face," most Far West members assumed that Jaresh senior leadership's U.S. and European education and the organizations' similar missions would result in Jaresh being task focused and using Western modes of analysis and reasoning

In fact, some team members dismissed the Jaresh interactions as peculiar, odd, unreasonable, and "un-business-like" rather than suspending judgment and actively trying to understand the language and cultural factors that caused these interactions. That reaction is not surprising. We often have the tendency to dismiss forms of logic, reasoning, and expression fundamentally different from our own, particularly when we wish to be efficient and do business. Not surprisingly, this lack of awareness and understanding of Arabic modes of knowing and the logic to support claims or generalizations made it extremely difficult to take the coordinated organizational action necessary to establish the partnership.

Like any study, this research has limitations. The most obvious is my interpretation of Jaresh interactions are viewed through a U.S. lens and cultural schema despite my attempts to learn as much as possible about Middle Eastern culture through on site visits, discussions with Arabs living in the United States, and reading the academic literature on Arabic persuasion psychology, and cultural history. Second, the literature I reviewed is limited to articles published in English. In all likelihood there are descriptions and analyses of Arabic persuasion strategies in Arabic. Third, the case study is limited to Jaresh. Multiple case studies would have been ideal; however, the financial resources, organizational entrees, and, quite frankly, the time were not available to examine multiple organizations. Furthermore, the inability to tape the interactions made careful discourse analysis, a useful complement to participant observation, virtually impossible. Finally, Jaresh may be a unique Arabic organization; its senior

members come from prestigious families, the organization is one of the most successful in the Middle East, its senior leadership was educated in European and U.S. universities, and Jordan is one of the more progressive Arabic counties. Despite these limitations, this research lays useful groundwork for understanding Arabic thinking about persuasion and the interaction patterns that represent their norms. Its integration of the Arab-Islam historical-religious context, review of the literature, and use of actual persuasive interactions within a complex organizational setting provide a useful start to exploring in more depth not only Arabic persuasion strategies but also a range of other Arabic communication interactions.

Undoubtedly, this study raises more questions than it answers. Fundamental differences between spoken and written Arabic as well as differences in forms of written Arabic create a complex set of language variables that are challenging to understand. Furthermore, the close connection between Classical Arabic and Islam and the pervasive influence of both Classical Arabic and Islam on every aspect of written and spoken Arabic add another challenge to understanding how Arabs think about and practice persuasion. Listed below are a number of questions that surfaced while researching and writing this articlethat require careful examination. These questions can be extended to negotiation, managing conflict, building consensus, and several other communication interactions.

- Do differences in Arabic dialects—such as Egyptian, Levantine, Peninsular, and Iraqi—influence differences in persuasion strategies?
- If persuasion takes place in English—the most common second language among urban educated—will Arabic thinking about persuasion change because of the unique structure and properties of English?
- How does the Middle East's polychronic perception of time affect persuasive interactions, particularly relationship building, and task completion?
- What influence do the collectivist values of Middle Eastern people have on persuasive strategies, particularly the degree of personal and organizational risk that people and the group are willing to take in persuasive interactions?
- What constitutes communicative formality among various Middle Eastern groups? Is that formality significantly different if persuasive interactions are carried out in English, written Classical-Modern or Classical Arabic, or one of the vernaculars?
- What specific impact does this formality have on influence style, communication style (forceful versus an ameliorative style), and communication organization (degree of directness) when English is used?
- What impact does fatalism (if God wills, as God pleases) have on people's willingness to take responsibility for the persuasion process and the outcomes?
- Are there fundamental stories, moral exemplars, and sacred texts that Westerners should be aware of during persuasive interactions?
- Are there expectations as to how Westerners should respond to these stories and texts?

References

Atiyeh, G. (1995). *The book in the Islamic world: The written word and communication in the Middle East*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Ayish, M. I. (1998). Communication research in the Arab world: A new perspective. *The Public*, *15*, 33-57.

Bourdieu, P. (1966). The sentiment of honor in Kabyle society. In J. Peristiany (Ed.), *Honor and shame: The values of Mediterranean society* (pp. 191-241). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Dawood, N. J. (1990). *The Koran*. London, UK: Penguin.

Du-Babcock, B. (1999). Topic management and turn taking in professional communication: First versus second-language strategies. *Management Communication Quarterly*, *12*, 544-574.

Du-Babcock, B. (2006). An analysis of topic management strategies and turn-taking behavior in the Hong Kong bilingual environment: The impact of culture and language use. *Journal of Business Communication*, *43*(1), 21-42.

Eckhouse, B. (1999). *Competitive communication: A rhetoric for modern business*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Fakhri, A. (2004). Rhetorical properties of Arab research article introductions. *Journal of Pragmatics*, *36*, 1119-1138.

Ferguson, C. (1991). Epilogue: Diglossia revisited. *Southwest Journal of Linguistics*, *10*(1), 214-234.

Ferguson, C. (1996). Diglossia. In T. Huebner (Ed.), *Sociolinguistic perspectives: Papers on language and society, 1959-1994/Charles Ferguson* (pp. 25-39). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Gershoni, I., & Jankowski, J. (1986). *Egypt, Islam, and the Arabs: The search for Egyptian nationhood*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Gregg, G. S. (2005). *The Middle East: A cultural psychology*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Haeri, N. (2000). Form and ideology: Arabic sociolinguistics and beyond. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, *29*, 61-87.

Haeri, N. (2003). *Sacred language, ordinary people: Dilemmas of culture and politics in Egypt*. New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan.

Hitti, P. K. (2002). *History of the Arabs* (10th ed.). New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hunt, E., & Agnoli, F. (1991). The Whorfian hypothesis: A cognitive psychology perspective. *Psychological Review*, *98*(3), 377-389.

Johnstone, B. (1991). *Repetition in Arab discourse: Paradigms, syntagms, and the ecology of language*. Amsterdam, Netherlands: John Benjamins.

Jorgensen, D. L. (1989). *Participant observation: A methodology for human studies*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Kameda, N. (1996). *Business communication toward transnationalism: The significance of cross-cultural business English and its role*. Tokyo, Japan: Kindainbungeishai.

Khali, A. (1989). A study of cohesion and coherence in Arab EFL college students' writing. *System*, *17*(3), 359-371.

Khuri, F. (1990). *Tents and pyramids: Games and ideology in Arab culture from backgammon to autocratic rule*. London, UK: Saqi.

Koch, B. J. (1983). The language of Arabic rhetoric. *Anthropological Linguistics*, *25*(1), 47-60.

Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Lundgren, L. O. (1998). The technical communicator's role in bridging the gap between Arab and American business. *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication*, *8*(4), 335-344.

Nelson, K. (1985). *The art of reciting the Quaran*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Peristiany, J. (1966). *Honor and shame: The values of Mediterranean society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Perloff, R. (2003). *The dynamics of persuasion: Communication and attitudes in the 21st century*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Reardon, K. (1991). *Persuasion in Practice*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Rosenthal, F. (1995). Of making books there is no end: The classical Muslim view. In G. Atiyeh (Ed.), *The book in the Islamic world: The written word and communication in the Middle East* (pp. 33-55). Albany: State University of New York Press.

Said, E. (2002). Living in Arabic. *Raritan*, *21*(4), 220-236.

Shehu, A. (2008). Intra Muslim conflicts: A linguistic representation. *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, *25*(1), 1-19.

Suleiman, Y. (2006). Charting the nation: Arabic and the politics of identity. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, *26*, 125-148.

Swales, J. (1990). *Genre analysis: English in academic and research settings*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Whorf, B. (1956). *Language, thought, and reality: Selected writing of B. L. Whorf* (J. B. Carroll, Ed.). New York, NY: John Wiley.

Zaharna, R. S. (2009). An associative approach to intercultural communication competence in the Arab world. In D. K. Deardorff (Ed.), *The Sage handbook of intercultural competence* (pp. 179-195). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Author Biography

Jim Suchan is professor of management in the Graduate School of Business and Public Policy at the Naval Postgraduate School. He has published his research in *Management Communication Quarterly, Journal of Business and Technical Communication, Journal of Business Communication*, and *IEEE Transactions in Professional Communication*. He is currently interested in Arabic persuasion and negotiation practices.