A-14: Ellipsis

Page | Discussion | Read

From The Encyclopedia of Arabic Rhetoric

Definition

The omission of certain lexical items to create a rhetorical effect,[1][2][3][4] such as:

- Making the sentence more succinct
- Where the omitted information is already known to the addressee
- To convey emotion more succinctly
- To evoke an immediate response from the addressee
- For the sake of rhyme, metre or musicality
- Evoking suspicion or interest by concealing the identity of the subject
- To convey some fixed expressions

There are several specific types of ellipsis as described below.

الذكر والحذف

A14: Ellipsis	
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Inferential Sufficiency (al-iktifāʾ)

The selective use of part of a word or sentence, relying on the listener to infer the missing part. It differs from **A-14: Ellipsis** in that the completion intentionally relies on the listener's knowledge of the missing part. This technique relies on the shared knowledge of idioms, expressions and famous sayings to create a sense of suggestiveness, subtlety, or wit.[5]

Example 1

> سيد القوم...
>
> The leader of the people...

Explanation

The listener is expected to know the ending of this idiom: "...خادمهم" ("...is their servant.") This idiom encapsulates the idea that true leadership is based on humility and service.

Example 2

> إذا طاح الجمل...
>
> When the camel falls...

Explanation

The listener is expected to know the ending of this idiom: "...كثرت سكاكينه" ("...the knives multiply.") This idiom is used to describe betrayal or opportunism when someone powerful is in decline. Quoting only the beginning is stylistically sufficient, and carries a loaded irony that the full explanation would ruin.

Interweaving ((al-iḥtibāk))

A rhetorical device involving omitting parts of a sentence or verse in such a way that what is omitted in one part is clarified by what is mentioned in the other. This causes an interweaving of sentences, due to the mutual dependency between two semantic parts.[5]

Example

> قَالَ لَهُم مُّوسَىٰ وَيْلَكُمْ لَا تَفْتَرُوا عَلَى اللَّهِ كَذِبًا فَيُسْحِتَكُم بِعَذَابٍ ۖ وَقَدْ خَابَ مَنِ افْتَرَىٰ
>
> Moses warned the magicians, "Woe to you! Do not fabricate a lie against Allah, or He will wipe you out with a torment. Whoever fabricates lies is bound to fail."
>
> Qur'an 20:61 ↗

Explanation

In the first clause ("Do not fabricate a lie against Allah, or He will wipe you out with a torment."), there is a threat of punishment for fabrication — but no statement about it being wrong. In the second clause ("Whoever fabricates lies is bound to fail"), there is condemnation of the act — but no mention of punishment. Each clause has part of the meaning with the other part being suppressed, but understood from the opposite side. So, the complete meaning — fabricating lies is both morally wrong and leads to destruction — emerges only by combining the two halves.

See also

- A-13: Brevity, Verbosity and Moderation which apply on the sentence or paragraph level, whereas Ellipsis applies at the word level.

References

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5. ↑ ᵃ ᵇ Basil Hatim, *Arabic Rhetoric: The Pragmatics of Deviation from Linguistic Norms* ↗, LINCOM Studies in Communication 04 (Munich: Lincom Europa, 2010), 182, ISBN 9780415386098.

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