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Title: A Look at Turkish Rhetorical Tradition to Explore Diversity and Performance in the Teaching and Research of Writing

Institutional Description:

I am currently an independent Scholar based in Anchorage, Alaska. My research project is influenced by my current position as a volunteer teacher at Alaska Literacy Program and my previous teaching experience in Turkey at the Middle East Technical University. I taught composition in Turkey to both Turkish and international students who brought to the classroom their unique experiences with writing. Currently, I teach English and writing to adult immigrant and refugee populations in Anchorage and engage with a diverse student body that brings into the classroom a rich combination of traditions and performances.

Key Theorists/ 2 Main Perspectives

- 1) Non-western / non- Greco-Roman rhetorical traditions
- 2) Writing Instruction in Non-western Contexts

- 1) Mao, Lu Ming
- 2) Gilyard, Keith
- 3) Lipson, Carol

Recent scholarly conversations on rhetorical theory and practice draw attention to the newly evolving studies on non-Western rhetorics and their intersections with cross-disciplinary critical perspectives (Gilyard and Nunley; Lipson and Binkley; Gilyard and Taylor; Mao and Young; Bailif; Bernard-Donals and Fernheimer; Lu). A central premise in these conversations is that different theories and methodologies are embodied in specific cultural, linguistic, and social contexts and that recovering these practices help us expand our understanding of rhetoric and writing beyond the classical Greco-Roman tradition – rooted in Aristotle’s definition of rhetoric as the available means of persuasion in any given case – to include various ethnic, non-western, alternative, or cultural rhetorics. Hence, an understanding of various performances that are available globally and across cultures is possible by looking at the rhetorical traditions of non-Western cultures.

My research focuses on the Turkish context and on the various aspects of rhetoric and writing instruction that is informed by Turkish intellectual and political life. Hence, I look at the assumptions and stylistic features of Turkish rhetoric and critically address the social, historical, and political contexts in which it is practiced. I am interested in opening up the conversations on broader themes of composition and rhetorical theory such to contemplate and rethink rhetoric and writing within a multicultural and global frame.

In addition, Turkish rhetorical practices can provide us with new models in conceptualizing rhetoric and composition theory. Hence, historical and contextual considerations are crucial in reflecting upon the ways in which rhetoric in the Turkic and Turkish contexts evolved and came to be practiced. By offering these models, I hope to inspire rhetoric and

composition scholars to further reflect upon alternative theoretical frameworks for new critical perspectives in rhetoric and composition studies.

An important feature of my work is the term ‘Turkish rhetoric’ which specifically denotes rhetorical principles and writing instruction that were developed by Turks in their material conditions and discourse communities. To date, there is no work dedicated to a unified discussion of Turkish peoples’ rhetorical perspectives and practices—possibly because of the long and rich history attached to their rhetorical and literary traditions as well as the scarcity of rhetoric scholars with an expertise in Turkish studies. To address this gap, my work uncovers the three historical periods of the Turkish rhetorical tradition (pre-Islamic, Islamic, and republican) by bringing together a collection of works that reflect on the conceptual lens through which Turks saw and discursively interpreted the world throughout their history until the foundation of the present-day Turkey.

Rather than a systematic study of practices and techniques that are named and defined as in the Greek rhetorical tradition, Turkish rhetoric is actually less methodical where oral and written texts provide a comprehensive picture of the study and function of language in society. This is similar to Xing Lu’s analysis of Chinese rhetoric. Lu explains that although rhetorical terms are defined with clear phrases in the study of Western rhetoric, such definitions in Chinese rhetoric do not exist and that “rhetorical themes are embedded in texts which do not treat rhetoric as an explicit topic of discussion” (2). For example, Turkish texts from the pre-Islamic era (i.e., the Orkhon inscriptions) consider ‘*özsöz*’, plain and truthful language, essential in writing and addressing audiences. However, neither the texts of the period, nor contemporary studies on those texts have given a specific name to this communicative preference or elaborated on it as a rhetorical theme of the pre-Islamic era. That being said, the terms *belagat*, *fesahat*, and *hitabet* that enter the Turkish lexicon with the Islamic period are the closest to the Western notions of rhetoric and define the ways in which language is used and studied in written communication and speech. *Belagat* is considered as the foundation of the art of *hitabe*—the art of speaking influentially (*etkili söz söyleme sanatı*), and can best be understood by mastering *fesahat* concerned with the flow and clarity of language.

The first part of my study on the pre-Islamic era conveys a rigorous reflection of rhetoric that is concerned with notions of community and nationhood and captures non-discursive rhetorical practices that are worthy of our attention in terms of analyzing Turkic ethical principles that converge with rhetoric. Compelling the individual to speak the truth, Turkic rhetoric during this era features a non-linear progression of thought which is embodied in daily activities such as ceremonies. Of special interest to my colleagues will be my discussion of the syllabic verse utilized in Turkic ceremonies as they mark cyclic, non-linear thought processes and have interesting implications for rhetorical practice and writing.

The second part of my study will feature the Islamic era in the Turkish rhetorical tradition and will address notions regarding rhetoric that were produced around textual practices. During a crucial time of religious conversion to Islam, the intellectual milieu of the period reveals deep engagement with rhetoric and deliberative uses of language use. The concern with the reading and interpretation the Quran and other religious texts cultivated an interest in practical matters related to language and was at the core of the rhetorical tradition during this period. However, vernacular rhetoric also became a concern among scholars, and large-scale writings by Yusuf Has Hacib and Mahmud al-Kashgari point to the depth of this endeavor. This section of the study will also consider Turkish oral epic tradition from a rhetorical perspective to further delve on notions regarding speech, oratory, and eloquence that developed in the Islamic era. Predicated

upon the idea that the Turkish language offered better opportunities in self-expression over Persian and Arabic, the vernacular speech movement extended into the 19th century. However, it is also the integration of music into the rhetorical tradition that brings into critical view ideas associated with rhetoric during the Islamic era. My discussion of Ottoman army *mehter* music looks into the social, political, and historical underpinnings of bringing music into the battlefield and foregrounds the rhetorical principles that enabled them. My discussion ends with a look at the Islamic era with the rhetorical principle of improvisation in shadow plays to explore notions regarding spontaneity, innovation, timeliness, and opportunity in speech.

The third part of my study will account for rhetorical models that reconcile with the pre-Islamic era and harmonizes them with the values and interests of the republican period. This final part presents the development of civic rhetoric in the context of an independence war and the founding of a constitutional government following the collapse of a 700-year absolute monarchy. During this period, oratory gained momentum and public speeches strategically increased to revitalize the cause for national independence and against colonialism. Public oratory of this period is the touchstone for Turkish republican rhetoric that worked against 19th century Western colonial ideology. In particular, women's intellectual works and rhetorical activities provided a progressive orientation towards the national cause. Hence, my analysis in this section follows the processes of deliberation, argumentation, and intervention that foreground the verbal and visual rhetorical tactics of the period.

My use of the term 'tradition' in the title of my project is not an attempt to uncover a single comprehensive "Turkish" rhetorical tradition. Thomas P. Miller defines the Rhetorical Tradition as a fiction that has outlasted its usefulness; he suggests that we need to be using history to pursue broader inquiries into the dialectical relationship of intellectual and social change (1993). Miller adds that a broader scope can include the traditions of more diverse groups so that Rhetoric is not canonized and studied as the practice of the white male European. My project, then, is an effort to move towards unfolding the rhetorical practices that have historically and traditionally occupied the Turkish social, political, and historical space across centuries. In fact, the terms associated with rhetoric and rhetorical practice in the Turkish language point to the diversity of the intellectual and political milieu that make-up the foundation of the Turkish discursive and non-discursive practices.

By no means do the texts and practices that I analyze in this study serve as a comprehensive or totalizing collection; rather, they draw on discursive and non-discursive models that operated and transformed Turkish rhetoric across centuries. My plight is to direct the readers' attention, without using Western rhetorical concepts, to the historical narratives and people's encounters with language in the Turkish contexts in order to consider the ways in which Turkish individuals' and society's attitudes towards the use of language mobilized, idealized, and visualized rhetorical concepts. In doing so, I provide scholars with an opportunity to contemplate and rethink rhetoric and composition within a global frame. Recognition of Turkish rhetorical practices can add to scholars' repertoire of new discursive tools and models in conceptualizing rhetorical and composition theory. By offering these models, I hope to inspire rhetoric and composition scholars to further reflect upon alternative theoretical frameworks for new critical perspectives especially in the teaching of writing.

I presented the initial studies on this topic at the CCCC 2017 Portland, Oregon annual meeting. The title of the panel "Searching Global Rhetorics, Recovering Alternative Discourse Communities" featured excerpts from the initial studies. The focus of the panel was on global, non-western, and alternative rhetorical traditions and moves beyond canonized works that are

based on the Greco-Roman tradition. Its goal was to explore implications of non-Western rhetorical traditions in the US writing classroom and for composition theory. Hence, the panel looked at alternative discourse communities that global and non-western rhetorical practices can afford in the writing classroom.

I also presented a paper titled “*Bal Bal* Stones: Seeking Alternative Discourse Communities in Turkic Visual Rhetoric” which looked at the non-discursive rhetorical practices that have been employed by Turkic communities in the 10th century CE. Starting from the 8th century CE, Turkic tribes of Central Asia built stone sculptures called *Bal Bal* by the burial place of Khans or prominent members of the community to represent the enemies killed in combat by the deceased. The paper looked at the rhetorical nature of these memorials and addressed the ways in which the visual rhetoric produced during this era elaborated on notions regarding strength and courage. The rhetoric of the Balbal sculptures not only create political spaces to convey messages about Turkic civic and political life but are interventions in creating public memory and Turkic identity formation. The paper critically considered how the *Bal Bal* images can enlarge our understanding of non-western discourse community formations and how they can help us in presenting our students with alternative discourse strategies and rhetorical forums in the writing classroom.

Overall, my project is premised on the idea that introducing international rhetorics into the US writing classroom can challenge the status quo in teaching Western rhetoric based on the classical Greek and/or Anglo-American traditions and help us consider different forms of rhetorical traditions in the national context. Learning to analyze and practice international discourses can also help students develop as internationally-acclimated citizen leaders.

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Glossary:

Turkish: Referring to present-day Turkey, its peoples, and language.

Turkic: Referring to Turks as an ethno-linguistic group originally from Central Asia.

Bal Bal: Stone sculptures built in the Central Asian steppe in the 5th century BCE

Khan: Turkic ruler/king

Özsöz: Plain and truthful language

Fesahat: Clear and Flowing language

Belagat: Art of speaking and writing beautifully and influentially

Hitabet: Art of speaking influentially

Mehter: Music to persuade and inspire the Ottoman army