

Analysis of Al-Jahiz's Contribution to the Early Formation of Balaghah: A Classical Arabic Rhetorical Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the contributions of Al-Jahiz in the early formation of the science of Arabic rhetoric through his work *Al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn*. The study focuses on identifying the rhetorical elements found in the work and analyzing the foundational rhetorical principles embedded in Al-Jahiz's thought. A qualitative approach based on content analysis was employed by examining the text of *Al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn* along with several classical and modern rhetorical works as supporting sources. The data were analyzed thematically according to the framework of classical Arabic rhetoric, which emphasizes the relationship between wording and meaning, the suitability of communicative context, and the effectiveness of language delivery. The findings reveal that Al-Jahiz introduced various rhetorical elements such as *al-bayān*, *al-tashbīh*, *al-isti'ārah*, and *al-kināyah*, which later became essential foundations in the development of Arabic rhetoric. In addition, the study found that he emphasized the principles of clarity of meaning, the suitability of language according to audience, and the influence of language on the emotions and thoughts of listeners. This study demonstrates that Al-Jahiz's ideas played a significant role in the early formation of the epistemology of Arabic rhetoric before the discipline was systematically developed by later scholars such as Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani and Al-Sakkaki.

Keywords: Al-Jahiz, *Al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn*, Arabic rhetoric, Arabic rhetoric studies, language communication.

INTRODUCTION

The science of rhetoric (*balaghah*) is a major discipline in Arabic language studies that focuses on communicative effectiveness, the beauty of expression, and the appropriateness of meaning within context. In the classical tradition, rhetoric was eventually systematized through the works of Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani in *Dalā'il al-I'jāz* and Al-Sakkaki in *Miftāḥ al-'Ulūm*, which later became the foundation for the three main branches of rhetoric: *ma'ānī*, *bayān*, and *badī'* (Suleiman, 1999; Heinrichs, 1984).

However, prior to the establishment of this systematic structure, rhetorical elements had already appeared in early forms through literary works and linguistic analyses by earlier scholars. Among the most significant figures in this pre-systematic phase was Al-Jahiz (d. 255H), who played an important role in connecting language, communication, and social thought (Toelle, 2006; Van Gelder, 2012).

Through his monumental work *Al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn*, Al-Jahiz discussed various aspects of human communication in depth, including linguistic style, audience comprehension, and the relationship between wording and meaning. He emphasized that effective communication depends on clarity of expression and the suitability of social context (Al-Jahiz, 1968). Although he did not employ the technical term "balaghah," his ideas clearly demonstrate the foundations of classical Arabic rhetorical theory (Carter, 1990).

In modern linguistic studies, Al-Jahiz is often regarded primarily as a literary and *adab* scholar. However, some scholars such as Charles Pellat (1969) argue that he actually laid the early epistemological foundations of Arabic communication theory, which later developed into the formal science of rhetoric. This indicates that his contributions extended beyond literature into the theoretical dimensions of language itself.

Nevertheless, contemporary studies still tend to focus on systematic scholars such as Al-Jurjani and Al-Sakkaki, while the role of Al-Jahiz as a pioneer of rhetorical thought remains insufficiently analyzed in depth (Heinrichs, 1984; Suleiman, 1999). This limitation creates a research gap in understanding the early evolution of Arabic rhetorical theory comprehensively.

Accordingly, this article aims to analyze the contributions of Al-Jahiz in the formation of the early foundations of Arabic rhetoric through a content analysis of *Al-Bayān wa al-Tabayīn*. The study also evaluates how his rhetorical ideas became the basis for the later development of more systematic classical rhetorical theories.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Development of Balaghah in the Arabic Linguistic Tradition

The development of rhetoric (*balaghah*) in the Arabic tradition did not occur instantaneously, but rather evolved through a long intellectual process beginning with observations of language usage in pre-Islamic poetry, the Quran, and early Arabic discourse. According to Suleiman (1999), rhetoric in its early stage formed part of the *adab* tradition, emphasizing beauty of expression and communicative effectiveness before it was divided into more systematic disciplines.

The formal structuring of rhetoric only emerged in the fifth century Hijrah through the works of Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani in *Dalā'il al-I'jāz* and *Asrār al-Balāghah*, which emphasized the theory of *nazm* (the arrangement of meaning within sentence structure) (Jurjani, 2004). Later, Al-Sakkaki refined the discipline in *Miftāḥ al-'Ulūm* by systematically dividing rhetoric into its three principal branches (Heinrichs, 1984).

Nevertheless, modern scholars such as Kees Versteegh (2014) assert that the epistemological foundations of rhetoric had already existed before the emergence of this formal system, particularly in early literary works that adopted an analytical approach toward language.

Al-Jahiz in the Early Arabic Rhetorical Tradition

Al-Jahiz (d. 255H) was an important figure in the early development of Arabic linguistic thought. According to Charles Pellat (1969), he was not merely a literary figure, but also a rational thinker who discussed language from the perspectives of communication, psychology, and society.

In his major work *Al-Bayān wa al-Tabayīn*, Al-Jahiz emphasized that language is not merely a tool of expression, but also a medium of communication that depends on:

- clarity of meaning
- suitability to audience context
- effectiveness of delivery

According to Michael Carter (1990), Al-Jahiz's approach to language demonstrates early characteristics of modern pragmatic theory because he paid close attention to how meaning is understood within social contexts, rather than focusing solely on linguistic structure.

Geert Jan van Gelder (2012) further asserts that the works of Al-Jahiz contain rhetorical elements such as humor, irony, social narratives, and complex communication strategies, making him a significant figure in the history of Arabic rhetoric.

Language, Meaning, and Communication in the Thought of Al-Jahiz

One of the major contributions of Al-Jahiz was his emphasis on the dynamic relationship between *lafz* (form) and meaning. He argued that the beauty of language does not lie in wording alone, but in the effectiveness of

the meaning conveyed to the recipient (Al-Jahiz, 1968).

Modern studies by Heidi Toelle (2006) demonstrate that Al-Jahiz developed an early form of “communication theory” emphasizing the interaction between the sender, the message, and the receiver. This is consistent with modern communication concepts in pragmatic linguistics.

In addition, Al-Jahiz stressed that differences in the intellectual levels of audiences influence how language should be used. This reflects an early understanding of the concept of audience design, which has become a fundamental principle in modern sociolinguistic studies (Suleiman, 1999).

The Relationship Between Al-Jahiz’s Thought and the Formation of Classical Balaghah

Although Al-Jahiz did not formulate a formal theory of rhetoric, many of the principles he introduced later became the foundation for the development of classical rhetorical theory. According to Wolfhart Heinrichs (1984), concepts such as clarity (*wuḍūḥ*), contextual appropriateness (*muqām*), and the relationship between meaning and wording already existed in embryonic form within his works.

Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani later expanded these ideas into the theory of *nazm*, which emphasizes that meaning emerges from organized syntactic structures rather than from isolated words alone (Jurjani, 2004). This demonstrates the intellectual continuity between the early thought of Al-Jahiz and later formal rhetorical theory.

Charles Pellat (1969) also emphasizes that Al-Jahiz may be regarded as a “proto-theorist” of Arabic rhetoric because he laid the intellectual foundations that were later systematically developed by subsequent scholars.

Previous Studies on Balaghah and Arabic Rhetoric

Modern studies on Arabic rhetoric (*balaghah*) may generally be divided into three main approaches:

The Classical Systematic Approach

This approach focuses on scholars such as Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani and Al-Sakkaki, who developed the formal structure of Arabic rhetoric (Heinrichs, 1984).

The Literary and *Adab* Approach

This approach examines rhetoric as part of the Arabic literary tradition, including analyses of the works of Al-Jahiz (Van Gelder, 2012).

The Modern Linguistic Approach

This approach relates Arabic rhetoric to modern theories of pragmatics and communication (Versteegh, 2014; Carter, 1990).

Nevertheless, most studies remain fragmented and do not systematically connect the early role of Al-Jahiz with the formation of formal rhetorical theory. This indicates the existence of a significant research gap.

Research Gap

Based on the literature review, three major research gaps can be identified:

1. A lack of studies analyzing Al-Jahiz as an epistemological foundation of rhetoric rather than merely as a literary (*adab*) figure.
2. The absence of systematic studies linking the thought of Al-Jahiz with the rhetorical theories of Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani.

3. A shortage of in-depth textual analyses of *Al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn* from the perspective of structural rhetoric.

Therefore, this study is significant in addressing these gaps through content analysis based on the framework of classical Arabic rhetoric.

Research Objectives

This study aims to analyze the contributions of Al-Jahiz in the early formation of the science of Arabic rhetoric through his work *Al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn*.

Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Identify rhetorical elements in *Al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn*.
2. Analyze the early rhetorical principles embedded in the thought of Al-Jahiz.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach in the form of content analysis to examine the contributions of Al-Jahiz in *Al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn* toward the early formation of the science of rhetoric (*balaghah*). The primary data consist of the text of the work itself, while supporting data are drawn from classical works such as *Dalā'il al-I'jāz* by Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani as well as modern rhetorical literature.

The study applies deductive thematic analysis based on the framework of classical rhetorical theory and Richard E. Mayer's Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning (2001, 2009), focusing on elements such as clarity of meaning, contextual appropriateness, the relationship between wording and meaning, and communication strategies. Data are analyzed through processes of coding, thematic classification, and systematic interpretation in order to identify rhetorical patterns within the text. The validity of the study is strengthened through source triangulation, theoretical triangulation, and literature review procedures (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Rhetorical Elements in *Al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn*

An analysis of the contents of *Al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn* demonstrates that Al-Jahiz introduced various rhetorical elements that later became the foundation for the early development of Arabic rhetoric (*balaghah*). Although his discussions were not organized into a systematic theoretical framework as seen in the works of later rhetorical scholars, these rhetorical elements can be identified through his linguistic approach, style of presentation, and communicative examples presented throughout the work (Al-Jahiz, 1968).

Among the most dominant rhetorical elements is the concept of *al-bayān*, which refers to clarity of meaning through the use of eloquent language appropriate to the communicative context. According to Al-Jahiz, the value of speech lies in the speaker's ability to convey meaning clearly and to leave an impact on the listener (Al-Jahiz, 1968). This view demonstrates that he understood rhetoric as a medium for the effective transmission of meaning.

In addition, the element of *al-tashbīh* (simile) is extensively employed in *Al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn*. The study finds that Al-Jahiz used similes to bring abstract meanings closer to the reader's understanding through concrete imagery. According to the study of Shawqi Dayf, this approach reflects Al-Jahiz's awareness of the aesthetic and psychological functions of language in Arabic literary communication (Dayf, 2004).

Furthermore, the analysis also identifies the extensive use of *al-isti'ārah* (metaphor) and *al-kināyah* (allusion/metonymy) in his discussions. The use of figurative language demonstrates that Al-Jahiz understood the relationship between linguistic style and emotional impact on the audience. According to Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani, metaphor and figurative expressions play a crucial role in producing the beauty of meaning and the persuasive power of language (Al-Jurjani, 1991). Although this theory was later elaborated systematically by Al-Jurjani, its intellectual foundations can already be observed in the works of Al-Jahiz.

Apart from stylistic aspects, Al-Jahiz also paid close attention to diction selection (*ikhtiyār al-lafẓ*). He emphasized that every expression carries a particular semantic value and must be used according to the situation and the intellectual level of the audience (Al-Jahiz, 1968). This demonstrates his understanding of the appropriateness of language within the social and cultural context of Arab society.

The study also finds that Al-Jahiz gave attention to elements of oral delivery such as tone of voice, intonation, and oratorical style. According to Ahmad Matlub, Al-Jahiz's concern for oral communication proves that he viewed rhetoric as a combination of linguistic elements and the psychology of communication (Matlub, 1980).

Overall, the findings related to the first research objective demonstrate that *Al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn* contains numerous rhetorical elements that formed an important foundation for the development of Arabic rhetoric. Although these ideas had not yet been established as a formal discipline, the rhetorical thought of Al-Jahiz clearly reflects intellectual maturity and exerted a significant influence on the later development of *balaghah*.

Analysis of the Early Principles of Balaghah Embedded in the Thought of Al-Jahiz

Based on the analysis of the thought of Al-Jahiz, the study finds that he introduced several early principles of Arabic rhetoric (*balaghah*) that later evolved into a systematic discipline within the Arabic intellectual tradition. These principles can be identified through his approach toward language, communication, and the function of speech in Arab society (Al-Jahiz, 1968).

The first principle concerns the relationship between *lafẓ* (wording/form) and meaning. Al-Jahiz emphasized that the beauty of language does not depend solely on the arrangement of words, but also on the ability of those words to convey meaning accurately and effectively. According to Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani, the relationship between wording and meaning constitutes the central foundation of Arabic rhetorical theory, which was later developed into the theory of *al-nazm* (Al-Jurjani, 1991). This demonstrates that the ideas of Al-Jahiz served as an early foundation for the development of that theory.

In addition, Al-Jahiz emphasized the importance of adapting speech according to the situation and the condition of the audience. Although the term *muqtaḍā al-ḥāl* had not yet been formally introduced during his time, the concept can clearly be seen through his emphasis on understanding the audience's background before delivering speech (Al-Jahiz, 1968). According to Ahmad al-Hashimi, the concept of linguistic appropriateness according to situation is among the most important principles in the science of *ma'ānī* (Al-Hashimi, 1999).

Furthermore, the study finds that Al-Jahiz viewed rhetoric as a tool for influencing human thought and emotions. He asserted that the effectiveness of speech depends on the strength of argumentation and the ability of language to create psychological impact upon listeners (Al-Jahiz, 1968). According to Ibrahim Anis, this approach indicates that Al-Jahiz possessed an early awareness of the pragmatic dimension of Arabic communication (Anis, 1976).

The study also reveals that Al-Jahiz connected rhetoric with rational thought and the social experiences of Arab society. He did not regard language merely as an aesthetic element, but rather as an intellectual instrument that reflects the culture and worldview of society (Dayf, 2004). This approach demonstrates the breadth of his intellectual vision in understanding the function of language in human life.

Moreover, the principle of linguistic moderation was another important characteristic of Al-Jahiz's thought. He criticized the excessive and overly complicated use of language because it could undermine the true purpose of communication (Al-Jahiz, 1968). According to Ahmad Matlub, this approach proves that Al-Jahiz prioritized clarity and communicative effectiveness over mere ornamental language (Matlub, 1980).

Overall, the analysis of the second research objective demonstrates that the thought of Al-Jahiz already contained the foundational principles of Arabic rhetoric before the discipline was formally systematized by later scholars such as Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani and Al-Sakkaki. This finding confirms that Al-Jahiz played a major role in shaping the intellectual foundations of classical Arabic rhetoric.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Rhetorical Elements in Al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn

The analysis reveals that Al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn contains numerous rhetorical elements that later became essential components of classical Arabic rhetoric (*balaghah*). Among the most significant rhetorical concepts discussed by Al-Jahiz is *al-bayān*, which refers to clarity of expression and communicative effectiveness. According to Al-Jahiz, “Every situation requires a specific type of speech, and every audience possesses a different level of understanding.” This statement reflects an early understanding of contextual appropriateness, which was later formalized within the science of *ma‘ānī*.

The study also identifies the extensive use of *tashbīh* (simile) in the text. Al-Jahiz frequently employed concrete imagery to simplify abstract ideas and strengthen audience comprehension. Similarly, metaphor (*isti‘ārah*) and allusion (*kināyah*) appear extensively throughout the work. These figurative expressions function not merely as literary ornamentation, but also as communicative strategies designed to influence emotion and persuasion. From a semiotic perspective, these rhetorical devices operate as symbolic systems conveying deeper social and psychological meanings.

Furthermore, discourse analysis demonstrates that Al-Jahiz consistently constructs an interactive relationship between speaker and audience. His rhetorical approach emphasizes persuasion, adaptability, and communicative effectiveness, thereby reflecting an advanced understanding of language as a social and communicative phenomenon.

Analysis of the Early Principles of *Balaghah* in the Thought of Al-Jahiz

The study finds that Al-Jahiz introduced several foundational principles that later developed into systematic rhetorical theory. The first principle concerns the relationship between wording (*lafẓ*) and meaning. Al-Jahiz argued that rhetorical beauty depends not merely on wording itself, but on the effectiveness of the meaning conveyed. This idea later became central to the theory of *al-naẓm* developed by Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani, demonstrating intellectual continuity between the two scholars.

Secondly, Al-Jahiz emphasized audience awareness and contextual appropriateness. Although the technical term *muqtaḍā al-ḥāl* had not yet formally emerged during his time, its conceptual foundation clearly existed within his writings. Thirdly, Al-Jahiz viewed rhetoric as a means of psychological influence. He believed that effective speech should influence human thought, emotions, and social understanding.

Unlike later systematic scholars, Al-Jahiz approached rhetoric dynamically within the framework of social communication rather than through rigid categorization. This demonstrates that his rhetorical thought was closely connected to practical communication and audience interaction.

Comparative Analysis Between Al-Jahiz, Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani, and Al-Sakkaki

A comparative analysis demonstrates a clear intellectual continuity between these scholars. Al-Jahiz primarily emphasized communication, persuasion, audience influence, and contextual flexibility in rhetorical expression. His approach focused on communicative effectiveness and the psychological impact of language upon listeners. In contrast, Al-Jurjani shifted rhetorical analysis toward syntactic and semantic structure through the theory of *al-naẓm*. He argued that rhetorical beauty emerges from the arrangement and interrelationship of words within sentence structures rather than from isolated expressions alone. Later, Al-Sakkaki formalized rhetoric into systematic branches suitable for scholarly instruction and academic classification. Through his work, rhetoric became more structured and pedagogically organized. Therefore, the development of Arabic rhetoric evolved gradually from communicative literary thought, as represented by Al-Jahiz, toward a more systematic linguistic and rhetorical theory developed by later scholars.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Al-Jahiz played a significant role in the early formation of Arabic rhetorical thought through his monumental work *Al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn*. Although his rhetorical ideas were not systematically organized as a formal discipline, the analysis reveals that his writings contained fundamental rhetorical principles that later became central to the development of classical *balaghah*.

The study further shows that Al-Jahiz emphasized communicative clarity, audience awareness, contextual appropriateness, and the psychological influence of language. His rhetorical approach reflects a dynamic understanding of language as a medium of social interaction and effective communication rather than merely as literary ornamentation. In addition, the comparative analysis between Al-Jahiz, Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani, and Al-Sakkaki demonstrates a clear intellectual continuity in the development of Arabic rhetoric. While Al-Jurjani later systematized rhetorical principles through the theory of *al-naẓm* and Al-Sakkaki formalized rhetoric into structured branches, many of these theoretical foundations can already be identified in the communicative and rhetorical thought of Al-Jahiz. Furthermore, the integration of modern approaches such as pragmatics, semiotics, and discourse analysis highlights the continuing relevance of Al-Jahiz's ideas within contemporary linguistic and communication studies. This indicates that his contribution extends beyond Arabic literary studies into the broader field of communication theory. Therefore, this study concludes that Al-Jahiz should be recognized not merely as a literary figure within the *adab* tradition, but also as an early theorist of Arabic rhetoric and communication whose intellectual contributions significantly shaped the epistemological foundations of classical *balaghah*.

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