ISSA Proceedings 2002 – Kinâya, A Tropic Device From Medieval Arabic Rhetoric, And Its Impact On Discourse Theory

1 *Introduction*

The present paper **[i]** will endeavour to show that Medieval Arabic Rhetorical sciences enclose a number of concepts of great interest to present-day rhetorical and argumentative studies. Medieval Arabic Rhetoric has been widely overlooked in Western studies on rhetoric and argumentation, owing, on the whole, to the fact that original Arabic treaties (ranging from the VIIIth to the XVth centuries) are extremely difficult to translate, especially when it comes to examples.

This contribution will focus on a tropic device called *kinâya*, which ought, in the author's opinion, to appear as a full entry in XXIst century dictionaries of discourse analysis, rhetoric or argumentation. As will be outlined in the next section, the term has evolved between its first technical use in the VIIIth century and its 'stabilised' definition, due to a XIIIth century rhetorician, Ibn al-'Atîr. This evolution accounts for the need to keep *kinâya* in its original Arabic form rather than introduce it in translation, as English equivalents are bound to be restricted to one aspect or another of the overall notion.

Kinâya will be considered here in a historical perspective, from the beginnings of Koranic exegesis to later rhetoric treaties, which have come to define it as a device in which a word or a phrase can be taken in both what we would call figurative and literal meanings.

The author's assumption is that the notion of *kinâya* is originally related to the difficulties encountered in the exegesis of biblical or Koranic verses including such phrases as "the hand of God", which induced discussions of considerable theological impact as to whether their meaning is to be taken as literal or figurative in early Islamic thought as well as in early Medieval Jewish commentaries.

The second section of this contribution will give evidence on the argumentative

use of *kinâya*, as a tropic device pertaining to 'indirect wording', running on from its original meaning in Arabic rhetoric and exegesis. Examples will illustrate what can be called rhetoric of indirect wording, and its argumentative impact.

2 A short historical view of kinâya

In Western literature on Arabic studies, *kinâya* is very often translated as "metonymy" (Pellat, 1986: 116) or "periphrasis" (Larkin, 1995, index; also: "descriptive periphrasis", p. 75). Pellat goes on to state that:

"kinâya constitutes a particular type of metaphor (isti(âra) and is distinct from trope (ma(âz) in that the latter is only to be supposed if taken in its figurative sense." (1986: 116.)

Contradictory as they may seem, these translations are at least partly true, concerning specific texts or authors. The overall notion of kinâya can only emerge from a close analysis of lexical, rhetoric and exegetic Arabic sources, considered in a historical perspective, which I will now endeavour to outline **[ii]**.

2.1 The lexical meaning of kinâya **[iii]**

The noun kinâya derives from the infinitive form (ma(dar)**[iv]** of the verb kanâ, yaknî, the meaning of which is:

"the concealed expression (tawriya) of a denomination through [the use of] another. One says kanaytu (an ka(â, 'I avoided expressing something', upon using another expression from which the first one [i.e. the one referred to by 'something'] can be inferred." (Ibn Fâris, ob. 1005, Maqâyîs, vol. 5: 139.)

Lexicographers also indicate that the concealing of the first expression can be due to modesty: the expression to be avoided is considered as "abominable, impudent, obscene" (yustaf(a(– Ibn Man(ûr, ob. 1311, Lisân, root k-n-y). They go on to another sense of the same verb (sometimes considered as the original meaning), to which another nominalized infinitive form, kunya, "surname", "agnomen", is attached. The kunya consists of 'abû ("father of") or 'umm ("mother of") followed by the name of the son. It is used – even nowadays – either in order to avoid uttering the actual name of someone in public (commonly, a woman's name), or as an honorific and/or friendly term of address**[v]**. The kunya can also become the surname by which someone is commonly known (his (uhra). Ibn Fâris explicitly considers the surname as a meaning derived from the definition above: "Kinâya stands opposite to explicit expression (mu(âra(a. This is why the surname is called kunya ('surname')**[vi]**, as if it were a concealed expression (tawriya) of someone's name." (Maqâyîs…, vol. 5: 139.)

2.2 Kinâya in early exegesis and rhetoric

Early metalinguistic uses of kinâya are very much akin to Ibn Fâris's definition (see Sîbawayhi, ob. circa 796, Kitâb, vol. 2: 170, 415). In one of the oldest commentaries of the Koran to have reached us, the Ma(âz al-Qur'ân of Abû (ubayda (ob. 825), the term occurs in the gloss of verses that include indirect expression of sexual intercourse with women (such as II, 223 or IV, 43).

In the famous rhetorical treaty and anthology of al-(â(i((ob. 868), al-Bayân wa-t-tabyîn, the word kinâya occurs for the first time in the expression al-kinâya wa-t-ta(rî((vol. I: 117), which can be roughly translated as "unexplicit expression (kinâya) and indirect intimation (ta(rî()". From the viewpoint of a history of Medieval Arabic Rhetoric, the quotation can be considered as crucial for the two following reasons:

• Kinâya appears here – as opposed to earlier uses, which remained close to the lexical general meaning of the word – in a definitely rhetorical sense.

• Consistent with its original meaning, the word is brought to denote a tropic device of 'indirect expression'.

Other occurrences of the word in al-(â(i('s writings relate kinâya to other means of expression opposed to 'explicit utterance' (ta(rî(). Kinâya can thus be used in the sense of what we would call an understatement. Al-(â(i(gives the example of: (1) "declaring somebody moderate (muqta(id), as an 'unexplicit expression' (kinâya) of his being a miser." (Bayân, vol.1: 263.)

Gesture and silence are also magnified, along with kinâya,when they come to "bring forth what spoken utterance (qawl) is unable to [express]." (Rasâ'il, vol.1: 308.)

2.3 'Interpretative rhetoric' and the question of 'anthropomorphic verses'

As the above discussion does suggest, the definition of kinâya is related to the question of whether language is, or not, a transparent, straightforward mode of conveying meaning. Contrary to what has sometimes been asserted, al-(â(i(and other Arabic rhetoricians do not belong to a tradition of confidence in a 'plain and simple' functioning of language (Dichy, 1982, 1993).

To understand this, one has to remember that rhetoric is part of the overall development of Medieval Arabic Linguistic sciences, the fundamental motivation of which is the conservation and the (scholarly) use of the language of the Koran – i.e., that of the linguistic community to which the Prophet of Islam belonged. Abû (ayyân al-Taw(îdî (ob. 1023) mentions among different kinds of rhetoric, "the

rhetoric of interpretation" (balâ(at at-ta'wîl), which is specially concerned with the interpretation of the Koran and the teaching of the prophet (al-'Imtâ(wa-lmu'ânasa, vol.2: 142).

Muslim theology was very soon confronted with the fact that some Koranic verses mentioned the "hand", the "face" or the "throne" of God (e.g., Koran, III, 73, V, 64, XLVIII, 10 or XX, 5) in a way that entailed the risk of anthropomorphic interpretation**[vii]**.

The question was also related to that of Divine Attributes (Allard, 1971; Corbin, 1986: 160-4, 169-70; in Medieval Judaism, see Fenton, 1997: 95-118). Ibn (aldûn (ob. 1406) recalls that many verses speak of God negatively, whereas a much smaller number may "induce [anthropomorphic] comparison" (tûhimu t-ta(bîh – Muqaddima: 831). Rhetoric and exegesis are closely related sciences in Medieval Islam (Larkin, 1995; Nouiri, 2001: 76-80, 88-91, 221-35) and Judaism (Fenton, 1997), because the need of interpreting

verses of either the Koran or the Bible involved considering that words could sometimes lead to meaning through discursive processes that had to be categorised and

described In a modern view, the Mu(tazilî position according to which God can have no limbs or position in space could, of course, be considered as a metaphoric reading.

Mu(tazilî ideas were discussed by the great theologian al-A((arî (ob. 935), according to whom 'anthropomorphic verses' should be believed in without any questioning of how God – whose power supports no limit – could have a hand or a throne. This is known as bilâ kayf, "without [asking] how". The bilâ kayf doctrine, which remains, even today, widely admitted in Islam, implies in fact that the verses under consideration support reading in a literal and/or figurative way. As will be seen in the next paragraph, this 'inclusive' reading coincides with the later 'stable' definition of kinâya (although, for theological reasons, the link does not seem to be explicitly discussed in texts dealing with kinâya**[viii]**).

2.4 Kinâya in later Medieval Arabic Rhetoric
In later treaties, kinâya receives more technical and accurate definitions.
These range along two general lines:
• direct vs. indirect reference to meaning (ta(rî(vs. kinâya and ta(rî(),
• figurative vs. non-figurative expression (ma(âz vs. (aqîqa)**[ix]**.

As will be seen, these are in fact two fundamental aspects of the notion of kinâya,

which will only be included in a unified definition by later Medieval Arabic rhetoricians.

2.4.1 Kinâya with regards to explicit vs. indirect discourse
The first general line goes back to the lexical meaning of the word kinâya as well as to earlier clearly rhetorical uses, which we have already come across. One can, in addition, quote one of the most ancient work on the style of Arabic poetry, due to the poet Ibn al-Mu(tazz (ob. 904), who mentions, as al-(â(i(had done, kinâya in connexion with ta(rî((Kitâb al-Badî(: 64). In his famous anthology and rhetorical treaty al-Kâmil, the grammarian and rhetorician al-Mubarrid (ob. 898) has elaborated on the lexical definition of kinâya and introduced some rhetorical considerations (vol. 2, 290-2). His prime definition was further developed by the grammarian and lexicographer Ibn Fâris (ob. 1005, al-(â(ibî 439-43).

2.4.2 Earlier texts considering kinâya from both aspects above
• The other general line (kinâya with respect to ma(âz vs. (aqîqa), which is more technical, slowly emerges from the Xth century onwards. In his much quoted work on the rhetoric of poetry (Kitâb Naqd al-(i(r), Qudâma bn. (a(far (ob. 949) considers two tropes, the description of which will be taken up by later scholars in the definition of kinâya (although Qudâma himself does not use the term):
• The first trope, which is called by him 'irdâf, "implication", consists in referring to a meaning through an expression that 'implies' or 'entails' it, but does not denote it directly (Naqd: 88).
• The second one is that of 'i(âra, which he defines as a general tropic process by which an expression can take a number of meanings, through hinting and alluding ('îmâ' and lam(a).
Meaning through allusion is, in addition, said to be the distinctive feature of balâ(a, "eloquent discourse" (Naqd: 85).
Qudâma opposes both notions, within the group of chapters dealing with "the combination of expression and meaning" ('i'tilâf allaf(wa-l-ma(nâ, to the case where meaning and expression are in a relation of "equivalence" (musâwât – Naqd: 84). In modern terms, the notion of musâwât refers to non-tropic meaning.
Abu Hilâl al-(askarî (ob. 1005) gives a single definition of kinâya and ta(rî(, as opposed to explicit expression (ta(rî(– Kitâb al-(inâ(atayn: 407-10), and develops the tropes of "implicitation" (ta(rî() and 'i(âra in terms very close to that of Qudâma (id.: 383-8). Ibn Ra(îq (ob. 1064) includes kinâya in the general category of 'i(âra, which designates in his work various tropes of 'indirect wording' (Al-

(umda, vol. 1: 302-13).

2.4.3 Kinâya with regards to figurative vs. non-figurative discourse

The second aspect above (kinâya and the ma(âz vs. (aqîqa opposition) only seems to emerge in the writings of (abd al-Qâhir al-(ur(ânî (ob.1082), who elaborated on earlier developments about figurative vs. non-figurative expression, particularly that of al-Qâ(î(abd al-(abbâr (ob. 1024). Al-(ur(ânî defined kinâya as a rhetorical device in which an expression is used in a different meaning than its own (i.e. than its expected lexical usage), and the 'other meaning' has to be inferred through a link that can be established "in the existent world" (fî l-wu(ûd10 – Dalâ'il: 52).

Discussion of the literal or figurative nature of kinâya will go on with Fa(r al-Dîn al-Râzî (ob.1210 – Nihâyat al-'î(âz...: 190-2), and al-Sakkâkî (ob. 1229, Miftâ(: 400-12). However, a 'stabilised' definition – still prevalent in the Arab education systems today – will only be reached in the works of Ibn al-'A(îr (ob. 1240, al-Ma(al al-Sâ'ir: vol. 2, 180-201). Kinâya is defined by him as: "any expression indicating a meaning liable to be taken both as literal and figurative, and combining between these two [interpretations]." (Id.: 194.)

Treaties on Arabic rhetoric often quote the example of:

(2) na'ûm a(-(u(â, "a [regular or deep] morning sleeper", said (in good part) of a well-off woman. The figurative meaning to be inferred is that of affluence and the service of housekeepers, so that the woman described by the expression does not – or no longer – have to wake up early in the morning.

The kinâya effect also includes the possibility that the person in question effectively sleeps late (non-figurative meaning).

Both meanings are born by the expression na'ûm a(-(u(â. A clearer, but somewhat impoverished, rephrasing will be given around a century after Ibn al-'A(îr, by al-(a(îb al-Qazwînî (ob. 1338):

"The kinâya is an expression indicating a meaning directly related to it (lâzim ma(nâhu, together with the possibility of indicating its own meaning, here and there." Al-'î(â(, vol. V: 158.)

This definition is still reproduced today in current grammarschools manuals (such as al-(ârim & 'Amîn, repr. 1979: 125). It is to be noted on the other hand that Al-Qazwînî does not consider the other aspect of kinâya (its relation to explicit vs. indirect wording).

Ibn al-'A(îr also gives what is seemingly the first explicit definition setting a distinction between kinâya and ta(rî(("indirect intimation", "implicitation"): both

belong to what I call the rhetoric of indirect wording ("une rhétorique de l'indirection", Dichy, forthcoming), the difference laying in the fact that kinâya admits both tropic and non-tropic interpretations. As will be seen, ta(rî(is included in the complex rhetorical process brought about by kinâya.

3 The impact of kinâya on present-day Rhetoric and Argumentation studies
Let us take a further look at the way in which kinâya casts light on the definition of the rhetoric of indirect wording. The above definition, being that of a general rhetoric device, is not restricted to the Arabic culture (be it Medieval or modern), and can be exemplified in other languages. One of the candidates to the June 2002 Parliamentary elections in France11 had chosen for a motto:
(3) La gauche a besoin d'une bonne droite.
This is a perfect case of kinâya, bearing the two features presented in Ibn al-'A(îr's definition:
• It admits both figurative and 'plain' or literal interpretations.

On the non-figurative side, the motto just means: "The Leftwing needs (or deserves) a good Right-wing", i.e., a strong, high-level one. On the figurative side, one must take into account that in French une droite is also a boxing term, meaning "a right-hand punch". This interpretation is substantiated by the adjective bonne, meaning, in the context, "good and strong", strong enough, in fact to turn the Right-wing into a 'winner by KO'.
• It belongs to the rhetoric of indirect wording, which is apparent here in the fact that the reader or listener is deemed responsible for the interpretation he or her chooses to give the sentence in consideration.
Let us now consider the structure of the relation between these two aspects.

3.1 Kinâya as a complex rhetoric device coming under 'indirect wording'
It is essential to note that the figurative meaning actually corresponds to the trope of "implicitation" (ta(rî()12. When a kinâya is taken in its non-figurative sense ((aqîqa), it corresponds to an "explicit expression" (ta(rî(). The antonym of "explicit expression" is ta(rî(, which accounts for the fact that kinâya and ta(rî(often
appear to overlap in Medieval Arabic rhetorical texts.

The main consequence of the fact that the two interpretations of kinâya are inclusive, is that complex semantic processes are liable to develop through the combination of the figurative and non-figurative meanings. This complex

combination of meanings is related to indirect expression, and includes operations of inference.

In example (3) above, the tropic interpretation needs to be inferred. There are in fact four degrees of inference (the fourth of which subdivides into two disjunctive choices):

• Inference 1: Une (bonne) droite = "a (good and strong) right-hand punch".
• Inference 2: Right-wing = 'winner by KO' (Left-wing = 'KO', 'looser').
• Inference 3: Right-wing = 'political force capable of knocking down adversative political forces'.
• Inference 4: Either one (or both) of the following sub-inferences is (are) validated:
• Sub-inference 4a (pessimistic look at the candidate's campaign):
'Knocking down adversative political forces' suggests violence in a way that should appeal to Extreme-Right voters.
• Sub-Inference 4b (optimistic look at the candidate's campaign):
'Boxing is a fair sport, and the winner is an honest champion'.

As can be seen, the result of the kinâya effect is to render both the literal meaning ("The Left-wing deserves a Right-wing of good level") and the figurative one ("The Left-wing deserves a good right-hand punch") true at the same time. It also results in the suggesting of another set of tropic inferences, mainly, here, that "a good Right", such as the Left-wing "deserves", corresponds to the tropic meanings under inferences 2 to 4 above, including 4a and 4b. The disjunction between sub-inferences 4a and 4b is in
turn blocked by the kinâya effect: the Right-wing is here both an honest champion and a political force that 'knocks down' its political opponents.

This last point is a good illustration of how indirect wording included in kinâya casts responsibility for all inferred interpretations on the reader or listener: would you admit equivalence between 4a and 4b?

3.2 Disjunctive kinâya, as a paradox of sophistic nature
One must, on the other hand, remark that kinâya is also likely to include a paradox of a sophistic nature. Its inclusive definition does, in a number of cases, depart from logic. Kinâya is therefore liable to lead to a paradox that can be phrased as follows: both figurative and literal interpretations cannot be true at the same time – – and yet, they are said to be. In other words, the logical disjunction between the figurative and non-figurative meanings in the utterance

under consideration is disregarded by speech13.

The paradox clearly appears in the theological discussion of the 'anthropomorphic' verses, and the A((arî doctrine of bilâ kayf (believing "without [asking] how") mentioned in § 2.3. God, in this case, either has a hand or a position in space, and stands comparison to human beings, or is considered immeasurable by worldly standards or comparisons, in accordance with the Mu(tazilî doctrine of Divine Unity (taw(îd). The bilâ kayf consists in adding something like: 'and yet, so the Sacred Word has it'.

A modern example of 'paradoxical' or 'disjunctive' kinâya is the sentence:

(4) Tobacco is poison.

The figurative meaning here relies on the fact that tobacco is a threat to one's health, but does not have the actual effect of poison – even of slow poisoning substances. The effect of tobacco can only be compared to that of poison to some extent – which is sufficient for the "implicitation" (ta(rî() included in the kinâya, i.e. the fact that smoking may eventually bring death.

The non-figurative meaning would be that tobacco includes poisoning substances, the point of which could also be made. In this case, though, the meaning is that smoking does effectively bring death, in the same way as poison inevitably does. The two meanings are in a relation of logical disjunction.

'Paradoxical kinâya' thus refers to cases in which either one of the two meanings can be true, as opposed to cases where both meanings are. The reader's intuition, on the other hand, would be to resist the idea that this double statement is contradictory, on the solid grounds of the feeling that 'this is how speech goes'. The kinâya effect by which the logical disjunction is overlooked is supported in example (4) by the emotional impact of death-danger.

Kinâya thus brings us very close to the original paradox of rhetoric and discourse. It is, in the author's eyes, a fundamental concept of theoretical Rhetoric, directly related to such issues as direct and indirect speech (Searle, 1979) and the compatibility of figurative and non-figurative interpretations of a given utterance. Both aspects, as has been shown, are crucially interwoven in that rhetorical process, over a thousand years old and still very much in use, which is a trope and not a trope.

Transliteration conventions.

The transliteration used here is that of Arabica, review of Arabic studies (E. J. Bill, Leiden). 'Emphatic' (pharyngalized) consonants as well as the voice-less pharyngeal (â' are dotted. The constricted voiced interdental consonant is, in the

Arabic studies tradition (and unlike the International Phonetic Alphabet), transcribed (. The symbol (notes, as in the IPA, the constricted pharyngal consonant.

'Long' vowels bear a circumflex accent.

Here is a short presentation:

• Short vowels: a, u, i.

• Long vowels: 'alif = â; wâw = û; yâ' = î.

• Consonants (in Alphabetic order): hamza (glottal stop)= '; bâ'= b; tâ'= t; (â' = (; (îm=(; (â' = (; (â=(dâl=d; (âl= (; râ'=r; zây = z; sîn = s; (în = (; (âd=(; (âd=(; (â'=(; (â'= (; (ayn =(; (ayn= (; fâ'=f; qâf =q; kâf=k; lâm=l; mîm=m; nûn=n; hâ' = h; wâw = w; yâ' = y.

NOTES

[i] Transliteration conventions are given at the end of the paper.

[ii] I will set aside here the meaning of kinâya as referring to a declaration of intent expressed in indirect terms in Islamic law.

[iii] As shown in Dichy, 1998 and 2001, the Arabic language is characterised, on the whole, by a conservative lexicon, in which neological processes do not always erase the previous meaning of words (as is usually the case in European languages), but tend to go along with them. This is due to the fact that words (especially nouns) travel through

centuries carrying along the memory of successive meanings attached to them by texts. Successive meanings of the word kinâya thus coexist in the lexicon – and the related textual memory – of the language. As opposed to most European languages, in the Arabic culture, textual memory goes as far back, for the least, as the VIIth century.

[iv] Infinitive forms of the fi(âla pattern often denote the producing of an artefact (implying a human agent), e.g., kitâba, "writing" (i.e. "the act of –", hence "the art of –"), (ilâqa, "shaving", hence "the barber's art", siyâsa, "the managing of people", hence "the art of –", "politics".

[v] Ibn Man(ûr (Lisân, root k-n-y)quotes the use of the kunya at war, by competing fighters (mubârizîn) whose surname is thus to be remembered. Palestinian

leaders nowadays are still commonly known by their kunya: Abu Ammâr ('Abû (ammâr) remains the wellknown surname of Chairman Yasser Arafat (Yâsir (arafât).

6 The explanatory statement introduced by the phrase "this is why…" is based on

the fact that kinâya and kunya share the same three-consonants root k-n-y, to which Ibn Fâris has attached the fundamental meaning ('a(l) mentioned at the beginning of § 2.1.

7 See, e.g., the discussion by the Mu(tazilî thinker al-Qâ(î (abd al- (abbâr (ob. 1024) of the question of "ambiguous verses" (muta(âbih) in the Koran (al-Mu(nî, vol. 16: 272-5).

8 See the question mentioned in note 10.

9 "Non-figurative (i.e. literal or 'true') vs. figurative" expression is a very rough translation of (aqîqa vs. ma(âz. I will nevertheless keep to it in this paper, in order to avoid lengthy technical discussion.

10 This may – at first sight – appear very close to a modern definition of metonymy (based on contiguity, after R. Jakobson's wellknown description). Such an interpretation, though, is very likely to be mistaken: al-(ur(âni's restriction to worldly inferences is much more probably related to al-A((arî's position on 'anthropomorphic verses' and the doctrine of the believer's obligation to have faith in them bilâ kayf, "without [asking] how" (see § 2.3 above). The "hand" or "the throne of God" are, as a consequence of al-(ur(ânî's definition, de facto excluded from the discussion on kinâya, since they do not belong to "the existent world".

11 The candidate, who actually lost the election, was Charles Millon, in the Rhône Department. To fully understand example (3) above, one has to remember that this local political leader has become famous a few years ago for his political alliance with Extreme-Right representatives.

12 A rough example of "implicitation" or "indirect intimation" (ta(rî() is the story, going back to the 1970ies, in which a Czech citizen went to the Police and reported a theft: "A Swiss soldier has stolen my Soviet watch. – You mean, the policeman replied, to say that a Soviet soldier has stolen your Swiss watch. – You said it, Comrade. I didn't." Indirect intimation thus allows the speaker to reject, or pretend rejecting, responsibility for the interpretation of what he has actually said figuratively, and not
said directly.

13 Paradoxical kinâya can indeed be described as 'sophistic' because it is related to the ambiguous nature of human language.

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