

10 **Brevity, Verbosity and Balance** **(*īḡāz*, *iṭnāb*, *musāwāt*)**

Summary 10.1 Utterance Length. – 10.2 Brevity (*īḡāz*). – 10.3 Verbosity (*iṭnāb*). – 10.4 Balance (*musāwāt*).

10.1 Utterance Length

The final part of the science of meanings is the section on brevity (*īḡāz*), verbosity (*iṭnāb*) and balance (*musāwāt*). After dissecting the components of the utterance in search of context-driven changes of meaning, manuals tackle the issue of the length of the utterance and how it can be manipulated. Ellipsis, clarification, combination of sentences, as well as other operations, are now considered for their effect on length. By moving from smaller to larger units, the science of meanings gradually passes from syntax and semantics to a style guide.

Different utterances have different length. The manuals present such variations as a matter of proportion between wording (*lafz*) and meaning (*ma‘nā*). The proportion may favour the former, the latter, or neither. On this basis, three styles of utterance formulation are identified: *īḡāz*, *iṭnāb* and *musāwāt*. The idea of brevity and verbosity as two poles of eloquence in Persian is already mentioned in the earliest tradition of rhetoric. That tradition, mainly interested in matters

of *badī'*, generally recognised the merits of brevity.¹ The science of meanings, on the contrary, does not hunt for the best style in absolute terms. One style is not necessarily superior to the others. There will be situations recommending more or fewer words depending on the needs of the different communicative goals.

10.2 Brevity (*iğāz*)

A brief utterance is shorter than what is usually expected or required but expresses everything necessary. There are many ways to obtain brevity. Manuals describe a first typological subdivision which distinguishes two approaches: a concise style expressing much with a few dense-meaning and well-chosen words (*iğāz-i qaṣr*, also spelt *iğāz-i qīṣar*, 'brevity by means of shortness') and an elliptical speech that drops all the unnecessary words or phrases (*iğāz-i ḥaḍf* 'brevity by means of ellipsis').² The two strategies achieve brevity through contrasting means. One insists on the meaningfulness and expressive potential, and the other on a specific cohesive device.

The conciseness of the first type succeeds in summarising a concept in a highly effective manner. It relies on the ability of the speaker to use meaningful words and adopt an incisive style. It would still be possible to lengthen the statement, but the message's core would not change. It is the style one expects in aphorisms, proverbs, and impressive lines of poetry such as:

guftam-aš silsila-yi zulf-i butān az pay-i čī-st
guft Ḥāfiẓ gila-yī az dil-i šaydā mikard³

I asked, "What are the chain-like curls of idols for?"

He replied, "Ḥāfiẓ has been complaining of the heart madly in love."

This line is considered an example of effective conciseness. The poet tacitly alludes to physically restraining people considered insane. Mentally ill people were kept in chains to prevent them from causing damage to themselves or others. Accordingly, it is not strange that a heart that is madly in love – and causes the poet Ḥāfiẓ to complain – would face restraining with chains. With their chain-like shape, the

¹ On brevity in classical Arabic literary discourse, see van Gelder 1981.

² It should be noted that the word *qaṣr* does not have the same meaning here as it had in the section on restriction (see chapter 6). In the science of meanings, in fact, the term *qaṣr* presents two different technical meanings: 'restriction' and 'shortening, abbreviation'.

³ Quoted in Aḥmadnižād 2003, 148. Ḥāfiẓ 1983, 288-9, *ğazal* 136, v. 8. Adapted from Avery 2007, 185.

curls of the beloved are apt to enchain the insane, which is the ultimate reason for their existence. Ḥāfiẓ conveyed such a complex meaning with a handful of dense and evocative words.

Conversely, in the case of *īǧāz-i ḥadḥ*, the speaker abridges the utterance by dropping words or phrases. When choosing an elliptical style, the speaker must ensure that the element dropped from the surface structure is otherwise recoverable. As we have seen, syntagmatic and extra-syntagmatic context plays a significant role in the acceptability of ellipsis. Clues for the addressee to retrieve the elided information depend on the contextual frame of reference (*qarīna*). Consider the following line by Sa'dī, which has been quoted earlier to discuss the ellipsis of the predicate (see § 5.2):

*dīda-yi ahl-i ṭama' ba ni'mat-i dunyā
pur našawad hamčunānki čāh zi šabnam⁴*

The eye of the greedy, with the wealth of the world,
Is not filled. Likewise the well with the dew of the night.

Sa'dī adopts an elliptical style where one element, the predicate of the second sentence, is missing. The first sentence provides enough context to suggest that an unspoken predicate *pur našawad* 'is not filled' also applies to the predicand *čāh* 'the well'. Repetition is unnecessary since the lexical connection (*qarīna-yi luǧawī*) between the two sentences guarantees a proper understanding of the elided element. Here brevity is considered the result of deleting one element from the surface structure while it remains in the underlying one.

Sometimes ellipsis does not point to previously stated lexical items but rests on a solid logical connection (*qarīna-yi ma'nawī*). Of course, some hints should point to the ellipsis' content. Even a well-known use would do. One example is the conventional use of expressions such as 'in the name of God', or equivalent opening, to mark the beginning of Persian literary works. In such events, the speaker, in fact, generally omits to state *what* he intends to begin in the name of God. The opening line of the *Šāhnāma* (The Book of Kings) by Firdawsī provides one example of such an ellipsis:

*ba nām-i ḥudāwand-i ǧān u ḥirad
k-az-īn bartar andiša bar nagḍarad⁵*

In the Name of the God of Soul and Reason!
For beyond this, (human) intellect cannot reach!

⁴ Quoted in Aḥmadnižād 2003, 148. Sa'dī 1937b, 172.

⁵ Quoted in Aḥmadnižād 2003, 148. Firdawsī 1988-2008, 1: 3, v. 1. Dabashi 2019, 2.

The poet and his audience share a common background knowledge. The expression ‘in the Name of God’ is reminiscent of the first words of the opening phrase of the Qur’ān, an Islamic formula with which Muslims often begin their activity. In the line above, for brevity, Firdawsī does not specify what he will start. Nevertheless, he does not break communication rules. In place of the ellipsis, the poet could explain the activity he was going to start, but since the text is not cryptic in any regard, any additional wording would be unnecessary and not conforming to brevity.

The section on brevity in the manuals of the science of meanings approaches ellipsis from a peculiar point of view. It tackles notions already appearing in the previous sections dedicated to the ellipsis of predicand (see § 4.2), predicate (see § 5.2) and complements of the verb (see §§ 6.2 and 6.3), but it rearranges the concepts. The discussion is widened to cope with the stylistic purposes of brevity. In this view, the ellipsis is a cohesive feature and may affect any component of the utterance, such as the first element of *iḍāfa* construction (*ḥaḍf-i muḍāf*), the second element of *iḍāfa* construction (*ḥaḍf-i muḍāf ilayh*), the qualified noun (*ḥaḍf-i mawṣūf*), the quality (*ḥaḍf-i sifat*), the if-clause (*ḥaḍf-i šarṭ*) and the main clause in a conditional sentence (*ḥaḍf-i ġawāb*), or even a complete sentence.

Concision should not impair the utterance’s informativeness. Notwithstanding the possibilities mentioned above, radical attempts to economise words, either by shortness or ellipsis, at the expense of contents, are considered flawed kinds of brevity (*iğāz-i muḥill*). Brevity should always ensure understanding of the content of the utterance. Otherwise, linguistic efficiency is compromised. If the amount of signifier expressed is insufficient to convey the meaning, the attempt at brevity does not achieve the desired result.

10.3 Verbosity (*iṭnāb*)

In the science of meanings, verbosity (*iṭnāb*), as a technical term, means an effective way of using many words to express a concept. The term does not seem to express negative connotations. However, in contrast to brevity, a lengthy style must be justified more carefully to be acceptable. Verbosity must ensure that no expression is superfluous in the utterance. Manuals have codified a series of lengthening techniques, many of which I will display in the following paragraphs with examples taken from Persian manuals. Some techniques resemble those listed in earlier manuals of *badī’*, but a different approach applies here. The desire to beautify a sentence, which is what *badī’* is mainly about, is not the main point. The focus here is on the pragmatic and context-driven reasons behind the choice. The context suggests the rationale behind adding extra words.

One technique, usually the first listed in manual inventories, consists of the clarification of what was uttered earlier in an obscure way (*iḍāḥ ba'd az ibhām* or *iḍāḥ pas az ibhām*). Any vague reference later clarified comes under this label. The category mainly includes uses of unclear antecedents and cataphors, whose referent appears only later in the discourse. Some examples include utterances where a cardinal numeral appears before a noun to express quantity, and a one-by-one list of the entities encompassed by that noun follows. In the Arabic science of meanings, a particular technical term, *tawšī'* 'dual enumeration', defines occasions in which a dual form appears, and then the speaker enumerates the two items.⁶ Although the dual does not exist in Persian, a similar discourse lengthening strategy applies where the numeral is a determiner, as in:

dar mawsim-i zimistān Sa'dī du čiz ḥwāhad
*yā rūy-i āftāb-ī yā āftābrūy-ī*⁷

In the winter season, Sa'dī desires two things:
The face of the Sun or a face like a sun.

The referent intended by the phrase *du čiz* 'two things' is unknown. The speaker has not yet mentioned what he intends with it, and one may wonder what those two things are. The second half-line, where two expressions actualise the unclear antecedent and reveal the intended meaning, clarifies the matter. In contrast to what is generally expected, the numeral points forward, as the entities referred to appear only later in the utterance. Although the author could have expressed the concept more briefly, the statement does not contain any redundant elements.

Repetition (*tikrār*), a different technique, makes the discourse occupy more words than required. To guard against redundancy, reiterated elements should not be superfluous but should add a nuance of meaning. For instance, a valid aim of repetition is to add emphasis (*tikrār ba ġihat-i ta'kid*) as in the following line:

dāda payambar na ba čašm-ī digar
*balki bad-īn čašm-i sar īn čašm-i sar*⁸

The Messenger of God had seen not with different eyes,
But with these eyes in his head, these eyes in his head!

⁶ See al-Taftāzānī 1911, 292.

⁷ Quoted in Riḍānižād 1988, 451.

⁸ Quoted in Šamīsā 1994, 149 (with some variation). Nizāmī 1956, 18, *Maḥzan al-asrār*.

The phrase *in čašm-i sar* ‘these eyes in his head’ (literally, ‘this eye of the head’) appears twice for emphasis, and the repetition makes the whole sense of *in čašm-i sar in čašm-i sar* closer to ‘these very eyes’.

Passing from the general to the specific (*ḡikr-i ḡāšš pas az ‘āmm*), or vice versa from the specific to the general (*ḡikr-i ‘āmm pas az ḡāšš*), is another way to formulate extended utterances. In the following line, the poet first mentions the general *hama čiz u kas* ‘all the things and persons’ and later specifies examples of the elements falling within the intended set:

*parastār-i amr-aš hama čiz u kas
banī ādam u murġ u mūr u magas*⁹

The servant of His order every thing and person:
The son of Adam, and fowl, and ant, and fly.

Perfecting (*takmīl*) consists in partially amending a previously stated assertion. The speaker adjusts his utterance by integrating it with some words that aim to reject possible unintended interpretations. The overall purpose seems to be preventing false impressions. An example is the following line where the connotation of the first occurrence of the word *šāh* ‘the king’ is open to misinterpretation. Since the qualities the word ‘king’ may subsume may be in opposition, as the king may be just or oppressive, the poet perfects the first sentence with an additional refinement to efface any misunderstanding:

*sāya-yi kirdiġār bāšad šāh
šāh-i ‘ādil na šāh-i ‘ādilkāh*¹⁰

The king is the shadow of God [on the world].
The just king, [I mean,] not the unjust king!

Further, completion (*tatmīm*) is another practice of expanding the utterance. It differs from the previous technique in that the addition is not motivated by a need for amendment. It consists of a different, unessential expression following the main sentence when the latter is free of obscurities. Such an elaboration, however, improves the utterance. In the following example, *arči darwiš and* ‘although they are poor’ exemplifies *tatmīm*:

⁹ Quoted in Riḡānīzād 1988, 450. Sa’dī 1937a, 2; Clarke 1879, 3.

¹⁰ Quoted in Kazzāzī 1991, 272. Awḡadī 1961, 529, *Ġām-i ġam*, v. 11312.

*nīk rād and arči darwīš and
pas ba māl and u dar dihiš piš and*¹¹

They are very generous, although they are poor.
The lowliest ones are the most liberal in giving.

Adding a coda (*taḡyīl*) means that the speaker adds a further statement at the end of the utterance in support of the previous one, whose contents he reiterates with different wording. It is an addendum to an utterance whose content the speaker formulates differently or from a more general point of view, enlarging the speech to confirm the main idea or argument. In the following line, for example, Ḥāfiẓ approaches the themes of shame, repentance and illicit behaviour from two distinct sides: a personal side in the first half-line and a universal side in the second. The latter exemplifies a coda to the speech. It is a different manner of posing the content exposed in the previous utterance while confirming it:

*ba waqt-i gul šudam az tawba-yi šarāb ḥağīl
ki kas mabād zi kirdār-i nāṣawāb ḥağīl*¹²

In the time of the rose I became ashamed of repenting of wine.
May no one be ashamed of improper conduct!

Final hyperbole (*iğāl*) is an additional phrase, without which the utterance would still be complete, that appears at the end of the utterance to boost the main idea, especially to exaggerate one's argument in support of it. The detailed and emphatic account *pur gawhar u bā qaymat u pur lu'lu'-i lālā* 'full of gems, precious and shining with pearls!' ends the following line with hyperbole:

*daryā-yi suḥanhā suḥan-i ḥūb-i ḥudāy ast
pur gawhar u bā qaymat u pur lu'lu'-i lālā*¹³

The ocean of words is God's excellent word.
Full of gems, precious and shining with pearls!

Finally, parenthesis (*i'tirāḡ*) is the insertion of a parenthetical clause, generally introduced in an intermediate position inside the sentence. While it does not affect the meaning, there are reasons to consider it effective and eloquent, notably when it adds a prayer, blessing, curse,

11 Quoted in Kazzāzī 1991, 273.

12 Quoted in Āq-Iwlī n.d., 130. Ḥāfiẓ 1983, 614-15, *ğazal* 299, v. 1. Avery 2007, 372.

13 Quoted in Kazzāzī 1991, 269. Nāṣir-i Ḥusraw 1928, 3, v. 16.

eulogy, or other subtlety. Examples of this type are the insertion of *gufta* and ‘they say’ and *ki dīkr-aš ba ḥayr bād* ‘may his mention be good’ in the following two lines:

surūd-i mağlis-i Ğamšīd gufta and īn būd
*ki ġām-i bāda biyāwar ki Ğam naḥwāhad mānd*¹⁴

The anthem of Jamshid’s assembly – they say – was:
“Bring the bowl of wine because Jam won’t remain.”

dī pīr-i mayfurūš ki dīkr-aš ba ḥayr bād
*guft-ā šarāb nūš u ġām-i dil bibar zi yād*¹⁵

Yesterday the wine-selling Elder – may his mention be good –
Said, “Drink wine and the heart’s regret banish from memory.”

Not all additions fall under the techniques mentioned above. Any addition which is uninformative or lacking in finesse falls outside of lengthening strategies and impairs utterance effectiveness. In this regard, it is interesting to note the status assigned to the embellishment device called *ḥašw* ‘pleonastic interpolation’. According to the science of embellishments (*ilm-i badī*), it consists of one or more unnecessary words, with little or no informative content, incorporated in a line of poetry to create an artifice. In terms of aesthetic merit, it can be ranked as *malīḥ* ‘elegant, gracious’, *mutawassiṭ* ‘average, neutral’ or *qabīḥ* ‘ugly, incorrect’. Blessings and good wishes are considered gracious. Metrical fillers in a line of poetry are neutral. Pleonasms proper are ugly. From the point of view of the science of meanings, the *mutawassiṭ* and *qabīḥ* types seem not to qualify as appropriate lengthening strategies because a low level of informativity is detrimental to utterance effectiveness. The *ḥašw* of the *malīḥ* type is usually a prayer or an apposition. Šamīsā (1994, 154 and 164) considers it a form of *iṭnāb*.

A fault in the application of lengthening techniques may result in *taṭwīl* ‘long-windedness, prolixity’. The concept of *taṭwīl* is different from both *ḥašw* and *iṭnāb*. Unlike pleonastic interpolation, prolix utterances are unnecessarily long but one cannot isolate the elements where lengthiness exactly lies. It is the whole utterance that occupies too much space compared to what it communicates. The difference between *iṭnāb* and *taṭwīl* is a matter of effectiveness. While *iṭnāb* is a suitable communicative strategy in appropriate contexts, *taṭwīl*

¹⁴ Quoted in Kazzāzī 1991, 277. Ḥāfīz 1983, 368, *ğazal* 176, v. 5. Adapted from Avery 2007, 235.

¹⁵ Quoted in Kazzāzī 1991, 275. Ḥāfīz 1983, 208, *ğazal* 96, v. 1. Avery 2007, 138.

is not. The latter describes the over-long style of a wordy and uninformative utterance. The following rule applies for qualifying a long utterance as effective: extra words should not appear as pure fillers but also as bearers of meaning.

10.4 Balance (*musāwāt*)

Another strategy used in many Persian texts in prose and poetry is called *musāwāt* ‘balance, equilibrium, proportionate length’. The utterance contains nothing more and nothing less than what is needed to express what the speaker intends to convey. The achievement of balance accounts for equivalency in signifier and signified, or, according to a different definition, the intermediate condition between brevity and verbosity.

Balance is the strategy that best resembles plain speech, but possibly with a twist. The science of meanings considers it possible to manipulate a proportionate utterance for reasons of effectiveness. One technique is choosing short words. Manuals distinguish then between two kinds of balance: *musāwāt bā iḥtiṣār* ‘balance with shortening’ and *musāwāt bidūn-i iḥtiṣār* ‘balance without shortening’. The two strategies highlight the importance of a conscious choice of words and the speaker’s attention towards word length. The basic idea is that utterances that employ long words tend to seem lengthier. Short words give the false impression that the passage tends towards conciseness. The practice of abbreviating is positively evaluated. So, the quest for shortening (*iḥtiṣār*) may be considered a piece of stylistic advice. Once more, the choice of the most effective utterance resides in various strategies, techniques and finely tuned literary practices.

