

LANGUAGE IN INDIA

Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow

Volume 11 : 8 August 2011

ISSN 1930-2940

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Some Rhetoric Devices That We Can Use in Our Writing

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When you write your paper or dissertation, you need to have clarity of writing. You also need to keep the attention of your reader on what you want to communicate to him or her. You can do this through several ways: you give life to what you write, enliven your writing, animate it, and give spirit to it. An excellent example is given in the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary: **Fresh flowers enliven the room.** It means providing or offering something new, something colorful or attractive, something most desirable, etc. In essence, you should induce in them an emotive response. All these aim at winning or gaining and capturing their mind and intellect to your side! While doing so, you also restate, that is, state the information in different ways, which will emphasize your points.

These techniques or devices are generally called **rhetorical devices**. These devices include the following;

1. **Alliteration.** When we alliterate, we use a consonant, a vowel or a combination of these two repeatedly in the words in a sentence or a number of sentences that occur/recur.

Merriam-Webster Online defines alliteration for English as follows: "the repetition of usually initial consonant sounds in two or more neighboring words or syllables (as *wild and woolly, threatening throngs*) —called also *head rhyme, initial rhyme.*" Indian languages use consonants, vowels, and syllables for this purpose. **Alliteration** has been a major device used by political leaders, orators and even heroes and heroines in movies and plays in India. If you want to be a great demagogue writer, Indian languages provide you with great facilities. However, be always moderate in the use of this device. Otherwise you will be easily carried away by the mesmerizing sounds. Moreover, you should also know that a demagogue is defined as "a leader who makes use of popular prejudices and false claims and promises in order

to gain power; a leader championing the cause of the common people in ancient times” (Merriam Webster Dictionary). Truly, a dangerous doubled-edged sword!

2. **Hyperbole.** Hyperbole is exaggeration. Often we resort to this to emphasize the importance of an item we talk about. Politicians, fans of cine stars, children, et al. are known to use this feature frequently. Mothers use this often while narrating stories for their children. *A bear as big as the elephant* is a simple hyperbole.

3. **Euphemism.** A simple and excellent definition is provided by the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary: “the substitution of an agreeable or inoffensive expression for one that may offend or suggest something unpleasant.” Sanskrit and Tamil grammars insist on using euphemistic expressions for various purposes: to show respect, to bring in *mangal* or prosperity, to increase sales of produce, etc. *Prison* is referred to as *maamiyaar viiDu*, mother-in-law’s house in colloquial Tamil (perhaps this one should be labeled as a sarcastic expression?), a *latrine* may be referred to as *Restroom*, instead of using a native word for personal gender-related body parts, one may use a Sanskrit word, etc. I am always amused to read the translation for *latrine* in Tamil at the airports in Tamilnadu: it is called *Make-up Room, oppanai aRai*. Both in English and Indian languages, use of euphemism is a must and it needs some special skill apart from childhood socialization practices to achieve success in using the device. Families and communities may differ from each other as to the extent of the use of euphemistic expressions for various purposes.

4. **Metaphor.** We create a metaphor when two different things are compared in the same sentence. But, while comparing, we do not use words such as *like, as*. It is a figure of speech. A word such as *faceflower* in Tamil or other Indian languages is a good example. *She blossomed into a beautiful woman* is another expression. Note we also need to use metaphor in a measured manner, as metaphor is very much culture-bound, and our readers may have difficulty in following what we say or want to focus upon. In fact, all rhetorical devices need to be carefully chosen and used to bring in more relevant effect.

5. Parallelism

This brings out the correspondence or resemblance between contents expressed. It is expressed syntactically by the repeated use of similar sentence type. When such repetition is presented, correspondence, similarity, resemblance, etc., are brought out easily. Benjamin Franklin’s sentence is often quoted in English to illustrate this use. “Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I may remember. Involve me and I will learn.” A powerful statement that succinctly states a fundamental truth about teaching and learning.

6. Rhetorical Question

You ask a question but you do not expect a response. Everyone knows the answer as it is obvious and/or implied. How do you do? is a frequently used without expecting a real answer! Shylock’s statement in *Merchant of Venice* is a famous quote that is given to illustrate rhetorical questions:

Hath not a Jew eyes?

Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions?

If you prick us, do we not bleed, if you tickle us, do we not laugh?

If you poison us, do we not die?

We use rhetorical questions often to deliver our retorts.

7. Paradox

The statement is apparently contradictory as it contains opposing elements/content. However, a paradox may present a higher level of meaning. For example, *We all want to be in limelight, but we also want privacy.*

Some Suggestions

Please get a school dictionary as well as a school grammar to look up and refresh your knowledge and understanding of these devices. You also need to learn how to use these rhetorical devices by actually using these in a deliberate manner in your chapters and papers. If you start doing it, these devices will come to you in a natural manner and your writing will have arguments that capture the attention of your readers.

However, please note that rhetorical devices are not effective in themselves to persuade others to accept your presentation, arguments and conclusions. You should not also use these devices excessively. How do you decide whether you are given to their use excessively? If you have used several devices and used them repeatedly in the same paper or chapter, or even across chapters, the reader will notice that you indulge in these ornamental devices to convince him of the truth of your arguments. He or she will soon start resisting your rhetoric and then you lose your reader and gain a bad name!

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