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## **Rhetorical Transitions: The Borderlands of Comparative Rhetoric**

*Abstract:* This article provides a broad overview of the development of rhetoric in the Western tradition, showing that the development of rhetorical traditions happens in a systematic and consistent manner. English and Spanish rhetorical traditions are intrinsically different in many ways due to centuries of divergent development. Elements of Spanish literature and rhetoric demonstrate the changes that occur over centuries of divergent development in rhetoric. Modernly, the diverse rhetorical conventions of English and Spanish rhetoric are converging into a more global form of rhetoric. This area of convergence is a borderland of comparative rhetoric.

**H**ow do language and culture affect the way people think and view the world around them? Countless linguists, academics, rhetoricians, and orators have pondered this question now more than ever in a world where a global culture is beginning to become the de facto norm. People are encountering new languages, cultures, ideas, and traditions that challenge their typical conventions and practices more often than ever before. Especially here in the United States, cultural issues appear frequently in journalism and current events. Distinct modes of thought and reason stream into the country constantly with immigrants from all parts of the world. Jorge Luis Borges's adage, "In general, every country has the language it deserves," bear a different meaning in a world where political boundaries are imaginary lines on a map and the decision to speak a particular language is more a matter of preference than necessity.

Victor Villanueva of the Washington State University English Department addresses many questions concerning comparative rhetoric, addressing his personal experience coming from a bilingual linguistic tradition in his book *Bootstraps: From an American Academic of Color*. He assesses the possible transition of rhetorical skills through heritage (86-87). Other areas of academic inquiry are beginning to broach the subject as well. Sociologists James M. Jasper and Michael P. Young introduced their article on "The Rhetoric of Sociological Facts" stating, "It is no accident that the study of rhetoric is the world's oldest tradition of social constructionism" (Jasper 270). Rhetoric as a system of persuasion and influence permeates in all cultures and ethnic traditions and as cultural backgrounds and histories change, so do their respective rhetorics.

Analyzing rhetorical change based on cultural convergence is a sure way to determine how rhetorical convention will change in the future. Spanish and Latin American rhetorical traditions come from a distinct rhetorical background, and they are becoming increasingly more prevalent in the United States. Culturally, rhetoric travels in trends based on people's culture and collective backgrounds. Convergent rhetoric is the trend of rhetoric in our increasingly globalized and interconnected world. Rhetoric changes on the borderlands of different cultures. Determining the trends of rhetorical change is possible through examining the phases or borderlands of rhetorical development the emergence of divergent rhetoric, elements of modern Spanish rhetoric, and rhetorical convergence.

## Rhetorical Divergence

Understanding that rhetorical traditions diverge is essential to understanding the development of alternative rhetoric and the possibility of convergent development in rhetoric. The roots of Western rhetoric divide into branches, which influence the development of distinct rhetorical traditions in Western countries. The different environments and cultural traditions also have marked influence on divergence in rhetoric.

Historically, study of rhetoric included only the classical (or Aristotelian) tradition of rhetoric and paid little or no attention to alternative Greek rhetoric or rhetoric developed by other civilizations. Edward Shiappa of the University of South Carolina in his book about Protagoras (considered the most important Greek Sophist) remarks, "Protagoras' thinking has been neglected by students of rhetorical theory." This neglect has led to generations of misunderstanding because members of the academic community considered the classical (Aristotelian) rhetorical tradition as the only legitimate form of rhetoric. Despite this fact, Protagoras' views directly affected the early development of a diverging form of rhetoric (Shiappa 12-13). Many rhetoricians and scholars now accept various rhetorical traditions now affect modern rhetoric and its development. For example, Carol S. Lipson of the State University of New York wrote, "Increasing numbers of scholars argue for the need to search for rhetorical traditions that don't appear in the standard text" (1), in her book *Rhetoric Before and Beyond the Greeks*. She discusses in depth the origins and conventions of these different ancient rhetorical traditions. Alternative and divergent rhetoric exists and influences modern world culture. Scholars generally agree on the marked difference between classical rhetoric and sophist rhetoric. "A number of scholars give attention to the value of the broader Sophistic rhetorical tradition as opposed to the Aristotelian" (Lipson 1).

Hispanic rhetoric's rhetorical origins come from the alternative Greek rhetoric known as Sophist rhetoric. Villanueva supports this premise because, "Both historical and empirical research suggest that for Spanish speakers, or for those exposed to the ways of a Spanish speaker, [the] preferred rhetorical ways are fundamentally sophistic" (86-87). He upholds that Sophist rhetoric is entirely distinct from the typical classical ideal of rhetoric and establishes his culture's own rhetorical ancestry through Spain and the Arabs to the ancient Sophists (86). This is the cause of the historical and academic difference between modern English and modern Spanish rhetoric.

Early divergence in Greek rhetoric between the Aristotelian and Sophist traditions is a historical fact that has repercussions in modern alternative rhetorical traditions. Hispanic rhetoric comes from a Sophist background and English rhetoric comes from a primarily Aristotelian tradition. This borderland of diverging rhetoric traditions shows that rhetoric is not static but evolutionary.

Another important factor to investigate when considering the development of the alternative rhetoric is environment. Components of a rhetorical environment include cultural history, political environment, and socio-economic factors. These different elements can cause further deviation between formerly similar rhetorical traditions, or they can even cause dissimilar rhetorical tradition to converge becoming more similar.

Theorists on the origins of narrative have argued that distinct narrative traditions emerge in direct response to distinct environmental factors. Richard Delgado, Professor Emeritus of Law, remarks on the effect of political background and social status on the development of Spanish narrative:

Stories told by underdogs are frequently ironic or satiric... There exists a Spanish tradition of the picaresque novel or story, which tells of humble folk piquing the pompous or powerful and bring-

ing them down to more human levels... stories build consensus, a common culture of shared understandings, and deeper, more vital ethics. (2414)

Elements of the culture like class distinctions and the need for solidarity and consensus within social classes in Spanish provokes certain satirical and ironic forms of narrative. These same conditions provoke similar qualities in other forms of rhetoric as well.

The same background that influences the formation of a culture's stories and narratives also affects the conventions of its rhetoric. Donald Braid of Butler University says that creating coherence in narrative is the act of providing meaning to life experiences through discourse (12). Since rhetoric is a form of discourse, the cultural background and personal experiences of the individual affect its development and coherence. Furthermore, rhetoric which is perfectly coherent in one rhetorical tradition is less coherent, meaningful, and persuasive to members of another rhetorical tradition because creating coherence from life experiences is different in different cultures with dissimilar habits and lifestyles.

The background and political environment of Spain and Latin America have differed greatly from those of Great Britain and the United States. For example, in the late Middle Ages, after England's departure from the Catholic Church academic discourse in England turned toward more scientific and humanistic philosophies; whereas, Spain remained more inclined toward traditional, medieval religious modes of discourse.

Even before the developments in England, Spain was in many ways a unique country in Western Europe because Muslim Moors, Arabs, and Berbers ruled most of Spain for hundreds of years influencing all academic studies and discourse. This influence played a major role in the development of Spanish rhetoric. Villanueva argues the sophistic rhetorical traditions passed through Byzantine and Arabian discourse eventually arriving in Spain (84). Arabian and other Semitic rhetorical traditions have marked impact on modern Spanish. Some of the best academic, philosophical, and theological rhetoric in the early middle ages comes from Moors, Arabs, and Jews who lived on the Iberian Peninsula. The Semitic rhetorical tradition undoubtedly contributed to the divergent development of modern Spanish rhetoric.

Another important rhetorical tradition to consider when discussing modern Spanish is ancient American rhetoric. Most Spanish speakers live in Latin America, and of those Spanish speakers many have ancient American ancestry. Archeological evidence and historical records suggest a thriving literary and poetic tradition among the Nahuatl (Aztec) and Maya civilizations. Researchers still know little about these rhetorical traditions, but some aspects of these traditions have definitely had an influence on Latin American literature.

In an article about a short story written by the prolific Argentine writer Julio Cortázar, literary analysts Thomas J. Knight and Alice H. Krull emphasize the influence of "indianismo" or "Indianism" in Latin American writing (488). They describe subjects of the story as having "Indian stoicism" (489). They also mention the "Aztecness" of the poetry of other important Latin American writers (492). This and many similar article not only show that many Latin American writers use Indian themes in their poetry and prose but also reveal a deep inclination toward using ancient American discourse in their writing. The essence of ancient American rhetoric also influences the divergent development of modern Spanish rhetoric.

Modern Spanish rhetoric diverges from the traditional or classical forms of rhetoric because it originates from the Sophistic tradition. Elements of Spanish cultural and linguistic history also broadened the divergence of rhetoric in the Spanish and American English traditions. This divergence proves that rhetoric undergoes periodic changes, indicating a borderland between alternative rhetorical traditions.

### Elements of Hispanic Rhetoric

Understanding elements of modern Spanish's current values and trends in literature and oratory indicate a thriving rhetoric with remarkable originality and resilience when encountering other rhetorical traditions. Although current elements of comparative Spanish rhetoric are not necessarily the borderlands of Spanish rhetoric, these elements provide an important view into the nature of modern Spanish rhetoric and its susceptibility to rhetorical convergence.

Spanish and English rhetorical traditions do show some remarkable similarities. Michael S. Halloran draws connections between past and present rhetoric. He remarks on traditions of rhetoric and oratory in the Colonial and early American period. Early English speaking Americans perceived rhetoric "the art through which all other arts could become effective" (188). The other studies and sciences became clearer by applying conventions of rhetoric to them. By writing or speaking (arguing) on a specific topic truth and reason became clearer and public and scholarly opinion more resolved (188). Similarly, Spanish rhetoric pays special attention to art and eloquence in rhetoric and acknowledges its purpose in conflict settlement an ideological influence.

Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, an influential Mexican writer, emphasized the benefit to society if women had rhetorical education remarking, "how many abuses would be avoided in our land if the older women were as well instructed as Leta and knew how to teach" (4). She knew that instruction in rhetoric held the key to personal independence and personal *ethos*. She asserted good rhetoric induces reasoning and noble thought into the human character. Similarly, English rhetoric values education and honors the power of rhetoric in favor of a particular cause: for example, Thomas Payne's "These are the time that try men's souls."

The notions of *ethos*, *pathos*, *logos*, and *kairos* exist in both forms of rhetoric, although they are often given different levels of importance and emphasis. The structure of argument is also related in both. The main differences between the rhetorical traditions lie in the more detailed and specific realms of philosophy and aesthetics.

Literary critics have long remarked upon the inherent differences in Spanish and English literature. Mostly, the differences focus on the creative aspect of literature. The Latin American literary tradition tends to be more experimental in form and writing. Many important Latin American authors have the propensity to play with the elements of time, character, plot, and narration in the story. Inclinations towards fatalism, naturalism, and magic realism perform a greater role in popular Spanish fiction than in English fiction. Each of these differences represents an element of Spanish rhetoric as well.

Mario Vargas Llosa, a recent winner of the Nobel Prize for literature and one of the most influential living Latin American writers in the world, wrote a book about the nature of literature and his views on literature entitled *Letters to a Young Novelist*. One of the themes he addresses in the book is coherence stating, "the story a novel tells can be incoherent, but the language that shapes it must be coherent if the incoherence is to be genuinely and convincingly stimulated" (32). With this statement, he shows that the coherent (rational) plot of the novel is less valuable than the aesthetic and compelling quality of the language. On the same point, Vargas Llosa also cites examples of Cortázar's boast of writing, "worse all the time" (qtd. 33). Cortázar constantly use elements of dialect in his writing. This demonstrates the definite Latin American tendency to write spoken language how it sounds, giving poetry to every-day language.

Vargas Llosa also addresses the game of perception, reality, and identity that are so prevalent in Latin American literature. He specifically lists Borges, Cortázar, and García Marquez as

writers with inclinations toward incorporating "fantastic" elements into realism (78). Similarly, Miguel de Unanumo, a Spanish author, wrote *Niebla*, a novel about a character in a book who discovers that he is a character in a book. These elements of "magic realism" and "metafiction" have long been popular in Spanish literature, but have yet to catch on in American English literature.

Granted, Vargas Llosa's ingenuity and genius is individual as is the creativity of the authors he cites in his book. However, certain tendencies in literature that he discusses appear essentially cultural in nature. For example, the Nicaraguan poet Ruben Darío exonerates a purely fatalistic standpoint attributing the events of life to the acts of fate or nature and absolving the individual of responsibility and stewardship over personal destiny. Not only does Darío do this. Lillo, Echeverría, Quiroga, and many others tend to describe the events of life an entirely beyond the control of the individual. Similar to Poe, they write about the gloomy and sorrowful circumstances of life and rhetorically argue for acceptance of events rather than struggle against them. The philosophies of fatalism and naturalism have strong ties to Spanish literature and rhetoric.

Another related example is the existence of the blurred narrator or a line of narration that passes frequently between characters in a story is a characteristic of Juan Rulfo's writing. This form of narration effaces the importance of the individual in the story signifying a rejection of individualism and sometimes an argument for more interdependence.

Speech and grammar also show many of the same elements of Spanish rhetoric even when they are spoken in English. Villanueva commented on this fact in his book. He writes of his son having certain tendencies he had in speaking in English, and the most remarkable thing is that Villanueva's son speaks English as his first language and has little or no knowledge of Spanish language, grammar, or usage (87). Grammatical conventions and sentence structures are not exclusive to one language.

Elements of Spanish literature and language, although similar in purpose to conventional American rhetoric, suggest a unique rhetoric with its own highly developed themes and values. Elements of aesthetics and philosophical fatalism play a larger role in Spanish rhetoric than in English rhetoric. Spanish rhetoric in literature, narrative, and essay has a distinct and original point of view.

### Rhetorical Convergence

Hispanic rhetoric is likely to affect changes in conventional American rhetoric because the socio-demographic data suggests the adoption of conventional rhetoric into Hispanic American culture, but also suggests that adoption of these rhetorical values only occurs after the passage of generations and that some rhetorical values do not change. Furthermore, English language, as it takes on more global role, faces altercations to its forms of rhetoric. These events both demonstrate rhetorical traditions are converging into more global forms.

A recent study by the Pew Hispanic Center surveyed American Latinos on political views and philosophical issues. The data from this study appears in Table 1. The data show an unmistakable trend of changing political views of Latinos in the United States. Views of the Latinos who speak Spanish as a dominant language reflect the values of their nations of origin, and views of Latinos that are completely bilingual or who speak English as a dominant language more closely reflect the mainstream views of Americans who are not Latinos. For example, the row that discusses fatalism is especially interesting. When asked if they agree with the statement, "It doesn't do any good to plan for the future because you don't have any control over it" (Table 1) most of the Spanish-dominant Latinos agreed, while most of the English-dominant Latinos disagreed. This shows a remarkable force of assimilation at work in the Latino community where their tra-

ditional fatalistic views are becoming increasingly more similar to the views of most American. Much of this change is due to exposure to English language and rhetoric. Table 2 shows the shift from Spanish to English shifts with every generation in the United States.

However, other elements of Hispanic rhetoric are more resilient to the influence of English rhetoric (Table 1: Attitudes Towards Government). With the Hispanic minority growing greater every year, the influence of Spanish rhetoric affects elements of English rhetoric. Adrián D. Pantoja described the Latino electorate in the United States as “a sleeping giant” that has recently awoken and it gaining influence and political power (730). Latinos’ increasing power and influence has begun to enter politics and effect changes in American rhetoric.

English’s emerging role as a lingua franca for the global community is also taking a toll on tradition English conventions and rhetoric. A recent review of a Spanish text featuring some incorrect English language posed the following questions, “since English has now become the preferred medium of international communication, is the language really ‘ours’ any more? Are we entitled to complain, even if we do spot a few departures from our insular norms?” (Brener 382). The global role of English is exposing it to different rhetorical traditions all over the world including Latin America. This process will continue to influence English and Spanish in a process of converging rhetorical traditions.

Traditions of rhetoric, once considered immutable, are now in a modern world becoming more similar and are gaining influence in cultures and regions where they have never been before. These processes prove that rhetoric is not a timeless and immutable as once believed and that our modern world it provoking faster convergence of rhetorical traditions than ever.

### Conclusion

The case of Spanish and English rhetoric presents many new and interesting facts about the evolution of rhetoric. Rhetoric is not single entity without regard for cultural background or political boundaries. Nor are separate rhetorical traditions immutable and unchanging systems that never exchange ideas or influences. Historically, rhetoric has moved in phases and cycles of divergence and of convergence. They develop their own independent theme and mannerisms. And now, in a modern world of mass communication the rhetorical traditions are changing and converging constantly. More study and investigation is necessary to fully comprehend how evolving rhetoric will affect the way people influence one another and view the world around them. Conducting further research on the trends and patterns of rhetorical change on the borderlands of comparative rhetoric will improve intercultural relations around the world and help academics all social field to forecast even more rhetorical change in an increasingly multicultural world.

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## GLOSSARY

Comparative Rhetoric	the study of different rhetorical tradition comparatively showing similarities and differences.
Contrastive Rhetoric	Another term for comparative rhetoric that focuses more on how rhetorical traditions differ from conventional rhetoric in the United States. This document only uses the term comparative rhetoric.
Convergent Rhetoric	The processes, trends, and patterns through which one rhetorical tradition assimilates into another, or the theory that rhetorical traditions in close association tend to combine.
Divergent Rhetoric	The processes, trend, and patterns through with alternative rhetorical traditions develop.
Fatalism (Naturalism)	Philosophy that all life events are dictated by fate or nature and that the individual can do little or nothing to alter his or her destiny.
Hispanic	In this document, Hispanic refers to anything of Spanish origin whether it is in Spain, Latin America, or the United States.
Indianism	A cultural movement in Latin America towards using Ancient American themes and motifs in literature and other forms of discourse.
Latin American	In this document, Latin American refers only to Spanish speakers from the Americas outside of the United States. This term also excludes non-Spanish speaking Latin America.
Latino	A person of Latin American heritage living in the United States. Magic Realism A literary or artistic style that incorporates fantastic elements in otherwise realistic works.
Metafiction	A literary device aimed at helping the reader appreciate the fine line between reality and fiction.
Rhetoric	Any form of communication seeking to persuade or influence an audience.