

On the Mysterious Origins of Speech: Triangulating Greek, Mayan, and Vedic Glottogonic Myths

Scholars of language and culture are exploring spaces of convergence, liminality, incongruity, and flux. However, critical approaches in some fields still reflect the hull of binary thinking: east versus west, self versus other, stranger versus nonstranger, usage versus nonusage, and so on. Using the field of rhetoric as a case, we offer triangulation as an analytical tool for moving beyond border and bias. Specifically, we use triangulation to read Greek, Vedic, and Mayan glottogonic myths to show that while scientific studies and culturally biased theories have striven to delimit and isolate the nature of language, triangulation multiplies the possibilities for analysis in rhetoric and other comparative studies.

Keywords: *comparative rhetoric, glottogonic myths, communication origins, triangulation*

The origin of language is a mystery. For centuries, linguists, evolutionary biologists, sociologists, and anthropologists alike have sought to explain the origin of language, to no avail (Hauser et al.). Charles Darwin tried his hand at the question. Max Müller contrived speculative theories with amusing names, such as the “bow-wow” theory and the “pooh-pooh” theory. Medieval Muslim scholars proposed five hypotheses (Weiss). In 1866, the Linguistic Society of Paris banned all existing or future studies of the question, deeming it unfit for scientific inquiry (Hauser et al.). The question resurfaced in the late twentieth century. Noam Chomsky suggested a single-step theory: language suddenly appeared with one genetic click (Berwick and Chomsky). The surmising continues. Recent conjectures include “putting-down-the-baby” theory (Falk) and “self-domesticated ape” theory (Ritchie and Kirby). Neuroscience and other advancements explain language learning and evolution, but research fails to account for its origin with any conclusive consensus. To this day, the origin of language remains a mystery.

However, though the origins of language cannot be verified scientifically, many cultures have myths about language origins. And, while myths are beyond the purview of linguistics or evolutionary biology, they lie very much within the realm of rhetoric and other humanistic studies. In fact, myths about language origins are so ubiquitous across time, space, and culture that they comprise a single genre: the glottogonic myth (Żywicznyński). We find it surprising that humanistic scholars have not yet analyzed glottogonic myths as rhetorical touchstones or pursued this subject in earnest, because glottogonic myths are essentially the earliest theories of speech and rhetoric; they offer humanity’s first recorded attempts to understand and articulate the nature of human communication. These origin myths shatter any notion of a speech monomyth, or even of a polarity of human communication theories in which one myth might be contrasted to another. In fact, where we expected to find significant overlap or direct opposition between the myths we examined, we

1 instead found divergence and diversity. One myth could not be used to
 2 generalize a theory of glottogony, and contrasting two myths would likely
 3 result in one myth serving as foil, such that each myth could only be
 4 understood in terms of the other. In either case, analytical perspective was
 5 foreclosed. We needed a way to account for the illimitability of glottogony.

6 In this essay, we argue that triangulation moves the field of rhetoric, and
 7 comparative studies more broadly, beyond some of its critical attachments. We
 8 begin by outlining a brief history of comparative rhetorical analysis, in which
 9 we present triangulation as a methodological intervention. We then use
 10 triangulation to analyze three glottogonic myths: one Greek, one Mayan, one
 11 Indian. There are certainly more myths available for consideration, but as we
 12 will show, three is a minimum threshold number in performing a triangulate
 13 analysis. We conclude by revealing new paradigms regarding the origin,
 14 function, and purpose of speech and by presenting seven implications for
 15 triangulation as an analytical approach.

18 **Comparative Rhetoric: Triangulation as Theory and Method**

20 By nature, comparative analysis must embrace a broader theoretical and
 21 methodological outlook than traditional disciplinary forms of analysis because
 22 it seeks to account for different histories and orientations at once. The very
 23 notion of disciplinary form, let alone identity or nature, may become suspect to
 24 the comparatist. As rhetoricians, for instance, we must ask how critics might
 25 engage texts as rhetorical constructs when the very notion of rhetoric is
 26 mutable from one history to the next. As our own argument unfolds, we will
 27 focus on scholarship within the field of rhetoric, but we are confident that
 28 triangulation can help scholars address similar questions or anxieties in other
 29 humanistic disciplines.

30 Triangulation is widely accepted as an analytical principle in certain fields
 31 of study, especially in qualitative and quantitative disciplines, but it can be
 32 repurposed for comparative rhetorical analysis and other humanistic projects.
 33 Thus, our triangulation of rhetorical origins vis-à-vis glottogonic myths offers
 34 one response to Lu Ming Mao's invitation for rhetoricians to stop asking "what
 35 is rhetoric?" and start asking "what do we do in [comparative rhetoric] and
 36 how do we do it?" ("Beyond Bias" 215). In his famous 2003 essay, Mao
 37 summarizes and critiques comparative rhetoric scholarship prior to the twenty-
 38 first century, "tease[ing] out . . . the logic of Orientalism" in Robert Oliver's
 39 1971 work, *Communication and Culture in India and China* as well as
 40 Kennedy's definitive *Comparative Rhetoric* ("Reflective Encounters" 401).
 41 Viewing comparative rhetoric prior to the twenty-first century, Mao is
 42 concerned about "the deficiency model," the tendency to label a particular
 43 culture as "lacking a concept of rhetoric or, worse still, a rhetorical tradition"
 44 (401). Ten years later, Mao critiques and refines his own theory ("Beyond
 45 Bias"). He describes "the increasingly blurred boundaries between, for
 46 example, the indigenous and the exogenous, the past and the present, and the

1 local and the global” (211). He asserts that “we must begin to develop new
 2 terms of engagement that can capture the contested . . . dynamics” of
 3 comparative rhetoric (214). To develop said new terms, Mao pivots toward
 4 “facts of usage and facts of ‘non’-usage,” and he calls upon comparatists to
 5 “enact the art of recontextualization as a discursive third in pursuing
 6 comparative rhetoric” (215–18). Mao wants the field to shift from “an
 7 ontological bias” to an embrace of the permeability and dynamism in the world
 8 of communication (215–18).

9 The term of engagement we suggest in response to Mao’s call is the
 10 *triangulation*, which originates in the field of surveying and refers to “the
 11 tracing and measurement of a series or network of triangles in order to
 12 determine the distances and relative positions of points spread over a territory
 13 or region” (“Triangulation”). According to Hastings, “the term triangulation
 14 refers to the practice of using multiple sources of data or multiple approaches
 15 to analyzing data to enhance the credibility of a research study” (1537; see also
 16 Bashir et al.). Consequently, triangulation “leads to a more comprehensive
 17 understanding of the phenomenon of interest” (Hastings 1537).

18 While triangulation seems inherently beneficial (more data, more
 19 accuracy), it has a contested status in the world of research. Scholars differ in
 20 their perspectives on the value, purpose, and effect of triangulation (Campbell
 21 et al.). Specifically, “some investigators view [triangulation] as critical to
 22 establishing corroborating evidence” while “others focus on its potential to
 23 provide multiple lines of sight and multiple contexts to enrich the
 24 understanding of a research question” (Hastings 1537). Positivists value
 25 triangulation for verifying objective conclusions, “asserting that if data from
 26 two or more sources converge on the same information, the likelihood of error
 27 is reduced” (1538). Constructivists value triangulation’s “capacity to provide
 28 multiple viewpoints on the phenomenon of interest and to amplify the
 29 perspectives of participants who have been ignored or overlooked in traditional
 30 scientific inquiry” (1538). Interestingly, though triangulation originated to
 31 verify positivistic perspectives, triangulation’s utility for disrupting long-held
 32 assumptions is increasingly recognized—even as an agent of social change.
 33 Patricia Fusch et al. write, “One approach to promote social change, mitigate
 34 bias, and enhance reaching data saturation is through triangulation” (19).
 35 Triangulation’s potential to mitigate bias and advance social change, even as it
 36 encourages accuracy and substantiation, is what we find compelling for the
 37 field of comparative rhetoric and its environs.

38 Importantly, triangulation is not an entirely novel approach for
 39 comparative studies generally or rhetorical studies specifically. Already, many
 40 conscious researchers naturally triangulate, analyzing, for example, images,
 41 their captions, and their contexts (Finnegan) or looking at presences as well as
 42 absences and then looking again, “awry” (Ott et al.). Others analyze
 43 intersectional aspects of identity, such as race, class, and gender, and/or employ
 44 mixed methodologies, such as combining rhetorical analysis with ethnographic
 45 research (Engelson). However, *intentional* triangulation is even more likely to
 46 mitigate the biases and binaries that frustrate comparative scholars by

1 fundamentally disrupting the dyadic nature of comparative methodology. For
 2 example, Bo Wang incorporates insights from postcolonial and feminist/gender
 3 studies to advocate a global geopolitical perspective in comparative rhetoric. Mary
 4 Garrett advocates self-reflexivity via constant triangulation. The three common
 5 tactics for increasing self-reflexivity, “monitoring one’s responses” (self), “asking
 6 the ‘natives’” (other), and “putting oneself in the position of the other” (blurring
 7 that boundary between self/other) discourage binary thinking (Garrett 245). Other
 8 triangulations in her analysis include “text, interpreter, and reader” and self-
 9 reflexivity “of individual psychology to historical circumstances to webs of power
 10 and privilege” (243–46).

11 In this very journal, examples of a triangulation abound. Alexandra Reuber
 12 explores the concept of the articulation of otherness across not one or two but
 13 three of Mauric Blanchot’s novellas (Reuber). Fawziah Ali Alshehri examines
 14 the prevalence and breadth of different translation strategies employed to
 15 introduce English texts into the Saudi literary system (Alshehri). And D
 16 Pugazhendhi examines single concepts and their semantic uses in the literatures
 17 of Tamil, Greek, Hebrew, and Sanskrit traditions (Pugazhendhi 2021 and
 18 2022). Not coincidentally, Pugazhendhi also performs a comparative study of
 19 the Greek play *Ion* by Euripides and the Sanskrit epic “Mahabharata” largely
 20 for the very purpose of revealing that the dual comparison’s many neat and tidy
 21 parallels and binary oppositions are, in reality, inconstant “variables” that are
 22 “unstable” and prone to “deconstruction” (Pugazhendhi 2022).

23 In rhetorical studies, Charles Bantz established the importance of “multiple
 24 technique analysis” or the use of mixed methodology for analysis by
 25 employing both fantasy-theme criticism and computer-assisted text analysis,
 26 even if that bifurcated approach results in a simple comparison of “similarities
 27 and differences” between the two (27). George Cheney’s application of
 28 identification to organizational communication likewise relied on
 29 “triangulated” methods (342). Humanists, on the other hand, have only
 30 occasionally used three texts, methods, or theories for analysis relative to the
 31 frequency that more empirical studies explore three case studies or three
 32 aspects of a phenomenon (see Rowland; McCroskey et al.). These early
 33 attempts at fusing qualitative and quantitative research were largely based on
 34 the assumption that triangulation could reduce researcher subjectivity. That
 35 may be, but more importantly for our purposes triangulation can also challenge
 36 rigid positivistic description. We see evidence of this productive challenge in
 37 the world of comparative scholars like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, whose
 38 groundbreaking work on feminist and post-colonial studies engages with
 39 languages and texts in Western literature but also in Arabic and Bengali so that
 40 the field may not remain “imprisoned within the borders it will not cross” (7).
 41 We note these same efforts in traditional rhetorical scholarship. Ceccarelli, for
 42 instance, troubles the Gorgias/Plato, aesthetic/epistemic dichotomy of classical
 43 rhetoric by incorporating Isocrates and his political ends of rhetoric as a
 44 discursive third, complicating former binaries. By examining difference and
 45 overlap between three nonrigid categories, her article exemplifies the

sophistication, complexity, and nuance facilitated by triangulation. Persistently operating in threes reduces the damage of dichotomies and the bias of binaries.

So, what does deliberate triangulation look like when examined and articulated explicitly as an analytical approach? First, it invites the examination of three or more texts for analysis. Consequently, it engages three or more artifacts, cultures, traditions, nations, or geographic locations. As it engages these multiple texts and histories, it uses terms of relativity, degree, proportion, and relationship rather than dualistic comparison and contrast. Rather than forging negative foils or overselling similarities, it contextualizes via conversation with multiple other independent and/or interdependent traditions. It avoids forcing the square pegs of one tradition into the round holes of another; it transcends the difficulty of comparing apples to oranges by incorporating bananas. Triangulation is more challenging for the researcher and does not always afford neat conclusions like those found in unitary or dualistic analyses, but the results are more likely to comport with comparative scholarship's call for dynamism, permeability, and heterogeneity.

Triangulating Glottogonic Myths

Origin myths tend to have multiple versions since they have been transmitted orally over generations. Therefore, the analysis that follows focuses on broader conceptual patterns in these texts, such as mythological archetypes and creative motifs, rather than on linguistic and syntactical details. Instead of making sweeping claims about what the versions we have selected say about the cultures from which they derive, we will limit our interpretations mostly to what the myths say about human speech, which is of course the parent of rhetoric. We specifically analyze the *origin of speech*, the *character of speech*, and the *purpose of speech* in the three myths. Along the way, we introduce terms that better account for the complexity and diversity of these myths and the phenomenon of speech as a whole. We then discuss seven major takeaways for communication studies.

Speech Is from God: Recontextualizing the Greek Hymn to Logos¹

Of the three texts, Isocrates's fourth-century BCE "Hymn to Logos" is likely the most familiar for Western readers. It articulates some of the most taken-for-granted assumptions in rhetorical studies: speech is a productive and instrumental art, designed for building civilized communities; speech is

¹For the Greeks, logos was a global concept. It meant speech, as in oral communication, but it also referenced the content of oral communication—the word or words being used, the tale being told, the discourse being shared. It implied the reasoning powers that informed speech communication, the arguments and ideas that gave rise to physical speech. Thus, with the advent of written communication, logos became no less significant, because its powers infused all human language and communication. Any Greek grammar will bear out these definitions, but for a specific comment on Isocrates's affinity for the concept, see David Timmerman and Edward Schiappa (43–66).

dissociative, distancing its user from primitive, wild nature; speech is virtuous, destined to improve its user; and speech is sacred, derived from the gods for the purpose of refining and exalting humankind. Given these premises, the hymn is an encomium, written as a letter to Isocrates's former student Nicocles and published in the public treatise *Antidosis*. As Takis Poulakos points out, Isocrates uses the hymn to "rescue rhetoric from the ill repute it had received" in classical Athens amid the antagonism between philosophers and sophists (3; see also Jaeger, *Archaic Greece* 293).

Following the call of comparative rhetoricians to attend to gaps, erasures, and elisions within and across rhetorical traditions, we first quote a rendition of the Greek glottogonic myth from Plato's dialogue *Protagoras*. One cannot understand Isocrates's hymn without recognizing the myth to which it responds. Protagoras's rendition retells a traditional story from even more ancient texts, such as Hesiod's *Theogony*. As such, Protagoras's version focuses on the *origin* of speech, whereas Isocrates's version focuses on the *character* and *purpose* of speech. From this point, then, our discussion will proceed in that order.

Origin of Speech

Notably, Plato's version of the myth of speech's origins is presented as a narrative. Protagoras tells the origin story of human wisdom and, ultimately, language: "As he was casting about, Prometheus arrived to examine his distribution, and saw that whereas the other creatures were fully and suitably provided, man was naked, unshod, unbedded, unarmed; and already the destined day was come, whereon man like the rest should emerge from earth to light" (Plato 321b–321d). Per Socrates's rules in such settings, long, didactic speeches are discouraged. There is an innocence to this rendition, as if Protagoras has no agenda but to lay out a history. This is not an argument but a simple story that has been long recorded in Greek mythic sources. Protagoras's listeners must explore the implications on their own. Nevertheless, Protagoras suggests a certain significance to the myth: "And now that man was partaker of a divine portion," he elaborates, "he . . . was the only creature that worshiped gods, and set himself to establish altars and holy images; and secondly, he soon was enabled by his skill to articulate speech and words, and to . . . band themselves together and secure their lives by founding cities" (321b–22b). Protagoras knows the powers of speech, and he reveals what humans can accomplish with it, but he does not explain its significance. He is mainly concerned with origins. The takeaway is that speech is a divine attribute received by humans from the gods.

Character of Speech

When Isocrates takes up the myth in his letter to Nicocles, there is diminished concern with the *origin* of speech and pronounced concern with its *character* and *purpose*. He writes, "But because we were endowed with the

1 power of persuading one another and explaining our thoughts, we were not
 2 only released from bestial way of living, but came together and founded states
 3 and established laws and invented arts. It was speech which enabled us to
 4 perfect almost everything we have achieved in the way of civilization”
 5 (Isocrates 75). For Isocrates, speech sets humans apart from animals. Speech is
 6 divine *and* liberates humanity from bestial ways. It facilitates meta-
 7 consciousness, giving humans the capacity for abstract thought and awareness,
 8 which are leveraged to realize civilization. In *Protagoras*, speech makes
 9 humans “akin to deity” and enables worship of the gods via “altars and holy
 10 images.” Isocrates reveals the implication of this new capacity: speech is a
 11 marker of quality in an advanced human soul. Protagoras narrates speech’s
 12 divine origins; Isocrates shows *why* speech must be venerated. He concludes
 13 his hymn as follows: “Therefore, those who despise education and culture must
 14 be hated just as we hate those who blaspheme against the gods” (75). Indeed,
 15 Werner Jaeger argued that Isocrates essentializes speech *as* a deity, which he
 16 names Logos (*The Conflict* 89). Importantly, this god has a very particular
 17 purpose. It is “the creatrix of culture,” a function that we will treat in more
 18 detail below (90).

19 Isocrates must exalt the character of speech beyond what Plato and other
 20 critics would have their audiences believe, which is that speech is merely a
 21 knack or, at best, a formal tool for manipulating the ignorant masses. Unlike
 22 Protagoras, who is merely telling a story, Isocrates delivers a true hymn,
 23 written, as Jaeger observed, “in lofty prose, and fully worked out in the
 24 severely formal patterns of poetry” (*The Conflict* 89). But it is didactic as well
 25 as celebratory, for also unlike Protagoras, Isocrates is making a case. He
 26 reasons in clear syllogisms, beginning with premises, providing evidence, and
 27 arriving at conclusions. In his view, speech must be rendered innocent of the
 28 accusations leveled against it—and not just innocent but sanctified as the very
 29 source of cultural virtue. He concludes, “If we sum up the character of this
 30 power, we shall find that no reasonable thing is done anywhere in the world
 31 without logos, that logos is the leader of all actions and thoughts, and that those
 32 who make most use of it are the wisest of mankind” (Isocrates 75). For
 33 Isocrates, communication’s qualities are far more important than its origins.

34 *Purpose of Speech*

35
 36 For Isocrates, the purpose of communication is to build social and political
 37 worlds: “For it was speech which laid down the standards of right and wrong,
 38 nobility and baseness,” praise and blame, education and ignorance, wisdom
 39 and foolishness. Without these standards the very species would devolve back
 40 into its scattered, pre-civilized, bestial ways and be “unable to live together”
 41 (Isocrates 75). Isocrates knows that in pursuing this objective, there will be
 42 disagreements; “with the help of speech we dispute over doubtful matters and
 43 investigate the unknown” (75). There is no seamless path from speech to
 44 utopia. These affairs will be messy at times. Communication is a tool for
 45 navigating disputes, not for eliminating the presence of disputation altogether.
 46 This acceptance by Isocrates of ongoing disputes in society is somewhat

unique in comparison to the other myths considered below. Overall, the Greek glottogonic myth frames speech as a divine attribute, even an unofficial deity itself (origin), an instrument or tool of virtue (character), designed to build civilized societies (purpose).

Speech Is for God: Rhetorical Ritual in the Mayan *Popol Vuh*

Indigenous ancient American rhetorics remain significantly understudied.² Scholars are still discovering archeological, historical, cultural, and rhetorical touchstones rendered invisible by colonialist occupation. Fortunately, some key texts like the *Popol Vuh* have survived. Rendered in a sublime, poetic style, the *Popol Vuh* is a Mayan account of world creation.³ Though written in the sixteenth century, it derives from centuries-old, mythological traditions of the K'iche (or Quiche) Mayans, whose generational “canon of common oral literature” preserved their founding narratives (Sachse 49). According to legend, including the *Popol Vuh* itself, these narratives are based on an even more ancient text, long lost or hidden, that came from “across the sea,” presumably the lowlands of the Yucatan Peninsula where Mayans had maintained a sophisticated hieroglyphic “tradition of literacy dating back to at least AD 200” (Christenson, *Popol Vuh* 21–22). Given the time it has traveled and the devastation it has survived, the myth has proven to be remarkably durable. As Frauke Sachse observes, the sixteenth-century text corroborates ancient Mayan cosmology and remains “a pivotal source for our understanding of Prehistpanic [*sic*] religious traditions and the perception of history in Maya culture” (48). The word *vuh* refers to the Mayan notion of books, and one way of translating *popol* is as “community,” making the *Popol Vuh* the “book of the community,” or council book (Christenson, *Popol Vuh* 54). Indeed, the *Popol Vuh* seems to engage with competing Christian texts of the time as an indigenous response to occupation (Sachse 49; Sparks 322–73; Tedlock 30). As translator Allen Christenson puts it, “the *Popol Vuh* is the most important example of Precolumbian Maya literature to have survived the Spanish conquest” (*Popol Vuh* 14).

The *Popol Vuh* explains that the K'iche have been set apart as vessels of the original creator gods by virtue of their ability to speak. The preamble reads, “THIS IS THE BEGINNING OF THE ANCIENT TRADITIONS of this place called Quiche. / HERE we shall write. We shall begin to tell the ancient stories of the beginning, the origin of all that was done in the citadel of Quiche, among the people of Quiche nation” (Christenson, *Popol Vuh* 48). This is a text of

²For more on indigenous rhetorics in the Americas, see Abraham Romney.

³A note on translation: Although the K'iche language remains alive and well in the Guatemalan highlands, the most original version of the text of the *Popol Vuh* comes from a seventeenth-century transcription by Father Francisco Ximinez, a Franciscan priest who transcribed the myth into the K'iche language from an unknown K'iche source, possibly a phonetic written account and/or oral accounts provided by his parishioners. It is widely believed that a sixteenth-century, original K'iche text source did in fact exist. Ximinez created the K'iche transcription still used today, which he then translated into Spanish. See also Morley and Goetz.

sacred origins and cosmological teleology. The preamble adds that this textual version is meant to be “the means of seeing clearly [what] had come from across the sea—the account of our obscurity, and the means of seeing life clearly” (52–54). The myth has largely served this rhetorical purpose, and the K’iche people still see themselves through its sacred lens. Most relevant for our purposes, the *Popol Vuh* is a glottogonic myth that articulates a unique worldview on the origins, character, and purpose of speech—thus also offering rhetoricians a new lens with which to view extant narratives and assumptions regarding communication.

Origin of Speech

THESE, then, are the first words, the first speech. There is not yet one person, one animal, bird, fish, crab, tree, rock, hollow, canyon, meadow, or forest . . . There is not anything standing erect. Only the expanse of the water, only the tranquil sea lies alone. There is not yet anything that might exist. All lies placid and silent in the darkness, in the night. (Christenson, *Popol Vuh* 56)

The *Popol Vuh* reveals that before the foundation of the world there were several deities who together “gave voice to all things” (Christenson, *Popol Vuh* 53). These deities were led by the Framer and the Shaper (also known as the Mother and Father; giver of breath and giver of heart), who had many children and were concerned with preserving themselves and their lineage. They germinated the sky and the earth and the seas as a kind of laboratory for creating vessels through which they could be preserved indefinitely. The human being—specifically, the K’iche—is the culmination of this effort, but it took several failed attempts. First were the animals, then the “mud people,” then the “wood people” (Christenson, *Popol Vuh* 65, 71). In each case, the creature was unable to speak or think properly, which meant they could not invoke the gods, which in turn meant the gods would have no means of self-preservation. For the K’iche gods, this is the exigence for the creation of speech.

The quotation above describes the first efforts of the deities to build this place where their speaking creature could thrive. Here, the poetic nature of the text is relevant. The authors want to emphasize cosmogonic order and embody this order to aid memory and oral delivery. This purpose makes pacing and cadence essential, demonstrated by the text’s ubiquitous use of parallelism. Christenson writes, “[P]arallelism is . . . the primary means used by Quiche authors to give order to their thoughts” (*Popol Vuh* 42). It also serves as incantation. To recite the *Popol Vuh* is to summon creator gods, such that the speaker embodies the deity, making it immanent. Imagine a small K’iche village or family sitting in the night, reciting the above lines as though they were the original tellers of the story, in the same dark and tranquil expanse before creation. To hear the cadence of the repeated phrases “There is not . . . , There is not . . . , Only . . . , only . . . There is not . . . in the darkness, in the night” would be to feel cosmic structure taking shape from nothingness (56). This rendering is ritualistic. For the K’iche, the origin of speech is not merely told, it is lived. The gods make this point: “There can be no worship, no reverence given by what we have

framed and what we have shaped, until humanity has been created, until people have been made” (59). The origin of human speech is the existential angst of the gods. Humans who can speak must be created for the gods to be sustained. This perspective is very different from the origin of speech in the Greek myth. The origin of speech is an accidental afterthought to the Greeks, or the result of clever thievery, but not a divine necessity as it is for the K’iche. Already, a monolithic conception of speech’s origins is fracturing into communicative diversity.

Character of Speech

Of earth and mud was its flesh composed. But they saw that it was still not good. It merely came undone and crumbled . . . Its face was hidden. Neither could it look about. At first it spoke, but without knowledge. (Christenson, *Popol Vuh* 65)

In the above lines, the character or qualities of speech are being discussed in negative terms. Unique to the *Popol Vuh* is the fact that the gods required several attempts to create a creature who could properly invoke their presence through speech. The animals they created could make sounds, but the sounds were inarticulate. As the quotation makes clear, the subsequent mud people were also insufficient. They represent a certain progress in form, but that form lacks sufficient character: a face, but hidden; a body, but crumbling; a speech, but ignorant. Their penultimate attempt is not much better. They create the wood people, who “had the appearance of people and spoke like people as well, . . . but their faces were all dried up” (Christenson, *Popol Vuh* 70). In other words, though the wood people are an improvement, their character and quality still lacks something fundamental. Finally, the gods create the maize people, a people from a living crop, who “were able to speak and converse. They were able to look and listen. . . . They were an excellent and chosen people” (183). The maize people represent the character of speech the gods need to be sustained across time. Importantly, maize has form and life and, perhaps above all, is cyclical. It will continually experience birth and rebirth, making it a proper material for the humans who will in turn ensure the perpetual rebirth of the gods. Thus, unlike the Greek myth, the K’iche glottogonic myth has nothing to do with accidents or trickery. In the *Popol Vuh*, the speaking human is the product of a highly intentional and deliberate process.

Purpose of Speech

[I]t shall be discovered how we are to create shaped and framed people who will be our providers and sustainers. May we be called upon, and may we be remembered. For it is with words that we are sustained, O Midwife and Patriarch, our Grandmother and our Grandfather, Xpiyacoc and Xmucane. Thus may it be spoken. May it be sown. May it dawn so that we are called upon and supported, so that we are remembered by framed and shaped people. (Christenson, *Popol Vuh* 67)

1 The K'iche gods rely on human speech; speech is not a gift for the human
 2 creature. The role speech might play for humans is entirely unimportant for the
 3 gods. The people recognize the benefits—"truly we thank you doubly, triply
 4 that we were created. . . . We are able to speak and to listen"—but they also
 5 recognize that their primary purpose is to the gods (Christenson, *Popol Vuh*
 6 184). Realizing their purpose, the humans do exactly what they were created to
 7 do: they worship and praise the gods, but they also become conscious of the
 8 advantages speech entails. They continue,

9
 10 You are the god in the sky and on the earth, you, Heart of Sky, Heart of Earth.
 11 May our sign, our word, be given for as long as there is sun and light. Then may
 12 it be sown, may it dawn. May there be true life-giving roads and pathways. Give
 13 us steadfast light that our nation be made steadfast. May the light be favorable
 14 that our nation may be favored. May our lives be favored so that all creation may
 15 be favored as well. (192–93)

16
 17 From *sow* to *dawn*, from *steadfast* to *favored*, and from *nation* to *all*
 18 *creation*, these parallelisms take the form of small crescendos. The humans
 19 reach for ever higher praise of their gifts, recognizing that they, too, will be
 20 sustained in this transaction; as they invoke and sustain the gods, they will be
 21 favored as a nation. Like the gods, they will be preserved from annihilation.
 22 Christenson comments, "In turn, the gods are thus given regenerative power to
 23 create new generations of maize people to continue the cycle" ("For It Is with
 24 Words" 45). This back and forth occurs only by the spoken word, which
 25 invokes the presence of deity in the world. Without it, the gods—not merely
 26 the humans as in the Greek myth—will disappear, and the world will devolve
 27 back into a primordial state completely devoid of speech or communication: a
 28 dark silence.

31 **Speech Is God: The Goddess Vak in the Hymns of the Rigveda**

32
 33 Since Robert Robert Oliver's seminal *Communication and Culture in*
 34 *Ancient India and China*, comparative rhetoricians have been interested in
 35 Indian rhetoric. Particularly useful recent studies include Anne Melfi's article
 36 "Foundations in Vedic Rhetorical Culture," which points out that "to examine
 37 the Vedic perspective using a postmodernist/modernist lens tends to result in
 38 false comparisons and fanciful conclusions" because postmodernism "rejects
 39 the possibility of universal truth" and fails to grasp the transcendent—both of
 40 which are essential concepts in Vedic rhetorical culture (134).⁴ Melfi thus

⁴For more sources on Indian rhetoric, see also the following chapters in Keith Lloyd (*The Routledge Handbook*): Sweta Baniya, "Rhetorical Comparison of Hindu God Krishna and Plato: Towards Exploring Hindu Rhetoric and Greek Rhetoric" (pp. 164–72); Miles C. Coleman, "Comparative Rhetorics of Technology and the Energies of Ancient Indian Robots" (pp. 365–73); Lloyd, "Using Bridging Rhetoric for Deliberative Dissent: Some Insights from India" (374–81); and Trey Conner and Richard Doyle, "Singing 'Nan Yar?': The Ecstatic Transmissions of Avudai Akkal and the Awakening of Ramana Maharshi" (404–13).

suggests that a contrastive study of Vedic and Western rhetorical theory would be illuminating, especially because similarities can so often be misleading (139). We agree that finding only similarities between these traditions would have limited value and may promote confirmation bias. However, via triangulation, we demonstrate that situating Vedic rhetorical culture in a constellation with Greek and Mayan communication allows us to better address Vedic rhetoric on its own terms, acknowledging its resemblance to other rhetorics *as well as* its distinctiveness. We also find that in doing so we can account for its transcendent nature and its focus on universal truth in a way that prioritizes neither similarity nor difference with a single other tradition.

Dating from between 1500 and 1200 BCE, the Rig Veda is a collection of Sanskrit hymns by various authors, constituting the oldest Hindu scripture (Witzel). Several of the hymns reference the goddess Vak, one of the most powerful divinities in the Hindu pantheon. Vak is the personification—or, rather, the deification—of speech. Her name translates directly as “speech.” Through Vak, one is able to understand and express truth and wisdom. She is the queen of the gods because she bestows the power of creation and naming (Griffith, Mandala 8.89). She is also the harbinger and giver of friendships since speech cultivates connection. Vak represents both sacred and ordinary speech. The three main hymns in which Vak is referenced are 1.164, 10.71, and 10.125, and we will limit our analysis to these three texts.

Origin of Speech

Where is the centre of the world, I ask thee. I ask thee of the Stallion’s seed prolific, I ask of highest heaven where Speech abideth. This altar is the earth’s extremest limit; this sacrifice of ours is the world’s centre. The Stallion’s seed prolific is the Soma; this Brahman highest heaven where Speech abideth. (Griffith, Mandala 1.164)

Hymn 1.164 is attributed to the sage or *rsi* Dirghatamas and is considered one of the most difficult and obscure of the Vedic hymns. Its highly figurative and allusive themes puzzle readers; even experienced scholars offer disclaimers before attempting interpretation of this hymn (Brown, “Agni” 199). We echo these limitations: our analysis will not account for the hymn’s complete meaning or solve any of its longstanding puzzles. We do, however, feel comfortable isolating some of the hymn’s more direct statements regarding Vak, or speech, and making tentative observations about Vak’s powers and her role in the universe in order to trouble assumptions about communication.

Fittingly, the hymn begins with a mystery: *Where is the world’s center?* To answer, the speaker turns to “highest heaven where Speech abideth.” The entranced author asks a question about the world’s ultimate orientation and seeks an answer by turning to none other than Speech. Additionally, Speech is linked with Brahman, a concept that connotes the very nature of being and consciousness; it is the divine source from which all things arise. J. Gonda called it the “power immanent in the sound, words, verses and formulas of the Vedas” (271–72). This point takes shape earlier in the hymn, when the speaker

writes of six parents who reside “on the pitch of heaven, [where] they speak together in speech all-knowing but not all impelling.” The placement of their deliberations in a heavenly field, and the reference to their fruitful role as mothers and fathers, reinforces the notion that Speech is heavenly and creative. As W. Norman Brown observes, speech is the source of all unorganized material in the universe as well as the source of the ritual tools designed to organize it (“Agni” 199). These twin powers can be seen in the juxtaposition of the final two clauses above: the chaotic, procreative stallion (an agent of seed prolific) followed by the Brahman (an agent of ritual order).

Not only does Speech abide at the highest point of heaven and help to create divine reality, but the world’s center emerges from ritual Speech. The speaker’s act of a ritual at an altar that becomes the center of the world illustrates the monism of Speech, an established theme of hymn 1.164 (Brown, “Agni” 200). This form of Speech resists the dualistic thinking that would separate divine reality from lived reality. The center of the world is exactly both, wherever and everywhere Speech is occurring, here at this altar and at the highest heaven. There is no distinction between the two since Speech links and collapses this distinction. There is a similar pattern in verse 37, where the speaker asks, “What thing I truly am I know not clearly: mysterious, fettered in my mind I wander. When the first-born of holy Law approached me, then of this speech I first obtain a portion.” Here again, Speech is the source of truth at last. As Melfi observes, in the Vedic tradition, rhetoric pushes beyond the world of human confrontation into a “reality which lies beyond the mundane,” a “reality behind the mythology,” and it can do so only by reference to the figurative and analogical (139–40; see also Lloyd, “Learning” 285). Mundane language cannot access this higher truth.

Character of Speech

1. WHEN-men, Brhaspati, given names to objects, sent out Vak’s first and earliest utterances, All that was excellent and spotless, treasured within them, was disclosed through their affection.
2. Where, like men cleansing corn-flour in a cribble, the wise in spirit have created language, Friends see and recognize the marks of friendship: their speech retains the blessed sign imprinted.
3. With sacrifice the trace of Vak they followed, and found her harbouring within the Rsis. (Griffith, Mandala 10.71)

Other hymns by other authors in Vedic scripture also explore the nature and role of Speech. As can be seen here in 10.71, we find perhaps the clearest statement on the subject. Speech is marked by virtues, like wisdom, excellence, friendship, and blessedness. The metaphor of the corn-flour captures this well. Speech has a cleansing or sanctifying effect. Once bestowed, it turns regular people into vessels of virtue. In form, this hymn is different from 1.164. Here, the sage, or *rsi*, uses third-person narration and description to explain the nature and role of Speech. The speaker explicitly names the goddess Vak as the

source of the “earliest utterances” that disclosed the excellence and preciousness of all things. Through Vak’s power, early humans perceived the world’s divinity. Speech is also explicitly a deity, even *the* deity, that gives meaning to the world. Vak is the absolute, the “One Real” (Brown, “Agni” 200). Her traces are found in the Speech of the “wise in spirit” and those who recognize friendship in others by the signs of Speech. By following these traces and blessed signs of Speech, one will—via the *rsis*, the enlightened sages who have realized the nature of truth and knowledge—follow, find, and encounter Vak, Speech itself in goddess form.

The hymn continues to reinforce the link between speech, wisdom, and friendship: “No part in Vak hath he who hath abandoned his own dear friend who knows the truth of friendship. Even if he hears her still in vain he listens: naught knows he of the path of righteous action.” Here, we find several overlaps between the Vedic characterization of speech and the Greek and Mayan characterizations. In each case, speech originates from the gods as an attribute of the gods; it is then bestowed upon humans in such a way that they become more wise, social, and capable of some larger purpose. However, in contrast to the character of speech we encountered in the Mayan and Greek traditions, the character of Vak is something more. The Greek *logos* derives from the heavens as a tool for the humans; speech in the *Popol Vuh* derives from the heavens as a tool for the gods; but in the Hindu myth, Speech, or Vak, is literally and explicitly a deity, and a chief among deities. Vak is much more than an instrument; she is an absolute and an end. She encompasses all instruments and signs. She is numinous in both senses—a *gift* and a *god*. She is queen of the cosmos.

Purpose of Speech

4. Through me alone all eat the food that feeds them,—each man who sees, brewhes [*sic*], hears the word outspoken. They know it not, but yet they dwell beside me. Hear, one and all, the truth as I declare it.
5. I, verily, myself announce and utter the word that Gods and men alike shall welcome. I make the man I love exceeding mighty, make him a sage, a Ṛṣi, and a Brahman.
6. I bend the bow for Rudra that his arrow may strike and slay the hater of devotion. I rouse and order battle for the people, and I have penetrated Earth and Heaven.
7. On the world’s summit I bring forth the Father: my home is in the waters, in the ocean. Thence I extend o’er all existing creatures, and touch even yonder heaven with my forehead.
8. I breathe a strong breath like the wind and tempest, the while I hold together all existence. Beyond this wide earth and beyond the heavens I have become so mighty in my grandeur. (Griffith, Mandala 10.125)

Hymn 10.125 is composed by a female *rsi*, a sage who, not coincidentally, is also called Vak and who channels the voice of the divine goddess in her

authorship of this hymn. In other words, Vak, the Supreme, is speaking. Speech, speaking. She celebrates the extent and majesty of her powers. These verses are a proclamation. The uncertainty and dialogic questions of 1.164 have vanished; so, too, has the balmy third-person narrative of 10.71. Vak is unleashed and sings of herself in direct, active, agentive clauses, one right after the other. Other forces in the world may seem powerful—the man she loves; Rudra, the divine archer; the energy of battle; the Father of the world; the waters of the ocean; all existing creatures; the wind and tempest; even earth and heaven itself—but Vak is the most powerful of all, their very essence. The force of her rhetoric is so superlative, it is almost as if she may exceed her powers. With each clause and verse, the reach of her influence becomes more enveloping, like a wave that builds and crashes over the farthest corners of earth and heaven. The reader feels at once powerless, because all power flows from Vak and no other source, but also *more* powerful, because through Vak the user of speech might also wield a kind of omnipotence.

The purpose of Vak, then, is to animate the whole of existence, to give it inexorable force and, simultaneously, to give order and aim to that force. The elements of nature may exist on their own, but they would lack all agency without speech. Rudra's bow may exist, but Vak bends the arrow with fatal consequences. Animosity might exist, but Vak is the force that will “rouse and order battle.” All things may in fact *exist*, but Vak will “hold together all existence.”

Discussion

We have strategically chosen the three texts analyzed above to demonstrate the value of triangulation and to pursue the ideals of comparative rhetoric as articulated in the 2013 RSA Manifesto—namely, to explore “communicative practices frequently originating in non-canonical contexts . . . that have often been marginalized, forgotten, dismissed as anything but rhetoric, and/or erased altogether” (Mao et al. 273). We analyzed the Greek “Hymn to Logos,” the Mayan *Popol Vuh*, and the Vedic hymns of Vak to “enrich, engage, and intervene in dominant rhetorical traditions and practices” while also discovering and/or recovering “under-represented and under-recognized cultures and their discursive practices” (Mao et al. 273). Together, these three data points represent a wide range of discourse, varying substantially in form, content, ideology, and language, originating from three vastly different geographical locations, chronological time periods, and types of rhetorical traditions. Together, they trouble the traditional east/west binary and complicate the canons of our discipline. In the discussion that follows, we outline seven specific takeaways that we hope will highlight these contributions and point toward further scholarship.

First, the glottogonic myth as a genre merits further attention from comparative scholars. Not only are glottogonic myths rich with figuration, allusion, poetry, and argumentation, but they also play a key role in the

1 founding and maintenance of cultures. Given that there are many rhetorical
 2 traditions – and many religious, philosophical, and literary traditions – rooted
 3 in many different histories and places, then what glottogonic myths offer is
 4 closer access to the roots and soils in which these traditions are embedded.
 5 Myths are powerful rhetorical artifacts, but glottogonic myths are particularly
 6 relevant for rhetorical studies (Jasinski 383–84). Glottogonic myths point the
 7 rhetorician to a culture’s ideology of communication; they dramatize that
 8 culture’s moral consciousness in explicit ways; and the rhetorical practices that
 9 emerge from that consciousness can offer added coherence and a sense of
 10 independence from historically dominant traditions (Slotkin 5–6). Myths
 11 sanctify norms for a given community’s social and political life. It stands to
 12 reason, then, that a culture’s glottogonic myths will play a role in the way that
 13 culture conceives of, values, and practices communication, whether this
 14 influence is recognized or not (Kertzer 12–13). Most importantly, as discourse
 15 about discourse and as a genre that specifically seeks to account for the
 16 uniqueness and origin of human speech, glottogonic myths are, in fact, the
 17 earliest rhetorical scholarship—the earliest literature theorizing and
 18 philosophizing about the origins, character, and purpose of speech and
 19 communication. They deserve attention from contemporary scholars, and there
 20 are many more such glottogonic myths extant than the three we analyzed here.⁵

21 Second, triangulation as a theory and method merits further attention. As a
 22 framework for engaging in comparative analysis, triangulation creates the
 23 conditions to move beyond singleness and binary and into a multiplicity that
 24 disrupts borders. Triangulation is constellational and nonlinear. Like a surveyor
 25 trying to pinpoint an elusive location on a map using a minimum of three
 26 different compass bearings, the comparative rhetorician who wishes to study a
 27 particular theory, concept, or phenomenon of rhetoric would do well to collect
 28 a minimum of three different artifacts for analysis. Similarly, rhetoricians who
 29 wish to better read a particular rhetorical artifact might do well to consider it
 30 from three perspectives, depending on the project’s goals. Triangulation gives
 31 the scholar a three-dimensional perspective, which allows the object or objects
 32 of study to exist in greater space and depth, to assume substance and volume
 33 where one- or two-dimensional analyses will tend by nature to be more
 34 confined or flat. 1D and 2D perspectives have their applications, but they are
 35 over-relied upon in comparative studies that would open readers to a
 36 constellational perspective.

37 Third, triangulating glottogonic myths reveals that speech is diverse in
 38 mythic *origin*, *character*, and *purpose*. Each of the three myths we examined
 39 above acknowledges a different origin for speech as a human attribute. Speech

⁵See, for example, the early chapters of Genesis from the Judeo-Christian tradition; Gylfaginning IX in Snori Sturlson’s thirteenth-century Icelandic book, *The Prose Edda*; the Codex Chimalpopoca; and many other glottogonic myths listed in Wayne Allison. Glossogenetic myths, or myths about the diversity of languages often vis-à-vis cosmic flood narratives, are also available for future study, including the Iroquois story of the god Taryenyawagon, the mythology of Yuki, and the stories of Hermes, as well as oral myths from the Andaman islanders and from Bantu people of East Africa and stories of a primeval minstrel who mixes language and song in Teutonic mythology, among many others from American indigenous, Australian, Polynesian, and Asian cultures.

1 does not have a monomyth. To demonstrate this fact, we find differences in the
 2 anxieties behind the advent of speech. In the Greek myth, humans are most
 3 vulnerable to and fearful of chaos. Speech is a tool from the gods that will help
 4 them stave off dissolution and thrive as communities. In the K'iche myth, the
 5 gods themselves are vulnerable to and afraid of chaos. Human speech is not a
 6 concession they have made but rather a condition for their own existence. In
 7 the Vedic myth, there seems to be no anxiety behind the omnipotence of Vak.
 8 She seems to respond to no exigence. As the queen of the gods, she is eternal.
 9 And whereas in the Greek and Mayan myths chaos is intolerable, Vak is both
 10 the source and constraint of chaos. She contains all. Brown made this point in
 11 his analysis of Vak's creative role in the world: "She is self-existent, the
 12 Absolute, dependent on nothing outside of herself" ("The Creative Role" 20).
 13 Had we limited our analysis to the first two traditions, we might have been
 14 tempted to essentialize speech's role as an antidote to chaos.

15 Fourth, we find similar spaciousness in our reading of speech's mythic
 16 *character*. By "character," we refer to the inherent quality of speech. We may
 17 know its mythic origin, but what is its shape, its complexion, its temperament?
 18 The Greek myth, for instance, regards speech as an instrument for some
 19 purpose, a political and social tool. James Jasinski describes instrumental
 20 myths as tools that help "to resolve situational exigencies and to produce
 21 judgements about public issues" (192). These terms capture the Greek
 22 rhetorical tradition well. On the other hand, in the Mayan myth, speech is tied
 23 more to ritual. As a means to re-create and sustain the gods, it comports more
 24 with what Jasinski calls a "constitutive" myth. That is, it has the power to
 25 "produce and constitute" the world (192). In the Vedic myth, speech may be
 26 both instrumental and constitutive, but we would also suggest it is something
 27 else entirely: it is *immanent*. It pervades and sustains the entire universe. These
 28 terms we have suggested as descriptors of the character of speech—
 29 instrumental, constitutive, immanent—should not be regarded as the only terms
 30 by which to understand the character of speech found in these three myths. Our
 31 purpose is not to essentialize. Even though we read each myth as favoring,
 32 respectively, the terms above, each of these myths is likely to have some claim
 33 to all the terms. Our purpose is simply to show that these myths are not the
 34 same, and even where there are similarities, they are weighted in unique ways.
 35 In other words, they lend themselves to difference, incongruity, and flux, and
 36 they demonstrate that the broader phenomenon of rhetoric cannot be grasped
 37 without accounting for such variety, overlap, and difference.

38 Fifth, by virtue of the variations in speech's mythic origin and character,
 39 the myths also point to different *purposes*. For the Greeks, speech comes *from*
 40 the gods *for* the humans. For the K'iche Mayans, speech comes *from* the gods
 41 *for* the gods, though the K'iche benefit as a nation as well. And for the Vedic
 42 Hindus, speech *is* God herself. To elaborate, for the Greeks, speech, which is to
 43 say the logos, becomes a means to political and social cooperation.
 44 Cooperation in the ancient Greek mind is an always volatile and threadbare
 45 project by which human beings both converge and diverge. Language may
 46 exalt the species to a civilized state, but civilization is merely a contained

1 chaos. The purpose of speech in this world is therefore *to persuade*. Among the
 2 K'iche, however, language marks an undeviating line to divine order. Its
 3 purpose is not to manage an invincible chaos but to end chaos altogether in the
 4 convergence of the original creator gods with the living K'iche people. The
 5 purpose of speech in this context is *to create*. In the mind of the Vedic *rsis*,
 6 speech is as pervasive as gravity, a kind of pantheist force. We are reminded
 7 somewhat of Isocrates's view: "no reasonable thing is done anywhere in the
 8 world without logos." The key distinction, though, is Isocrates's qualifier
 9 "reasonable." *Logos* is the container of all *reasonable* actions. *Vak* is the
 10 container of all existence, even the unreasonable, the transcendent, and the
 11 absolute. She is Truth. The sages exist to access and make known this truth.
 12 The purpose of speech in this context is *to reveal*.

13 Sixth, and finally, our triangulation of glottogonic myths has important
 14 pedagogical implications. The Greco-Roman tradition, which we rhetoric
 15 scholars so often take for granted, promotes the notion that speech is an
 16 inherently ennobling force. Its *raison d'être* is to manage social relationships,
 17 strengthen communities, and ultimately civilize humanity. In Eurocentric
 18 pedagogy, this ennobling function takes certain instrumental forms: to inform,
 19 express, entertain, and, most prominently, to persuade others and to meet social
 20 expectations. Indeed, these are the taken-for-granted forms of communication
 21 that are taught to school children in standard curricula ("Communication").

22 We would not argue that we should not teach communication for the
 23 purposes of social unity, democratic engagement, and more responsible
 24 argumentation. We should. Nor are we saying that better communication is not
 25 a viable solution to civic problems. Perhaps it is. We are arguing that that
 26 paradigm is not the only available paradigm and that evidence of other
 27 functions of communication is not evidence of misuse or lack of use. Other
 28 mythic histories of human communication show us that speech is not
 29 necessarily designed for civic dialogue. We learn from the Mayan and Vedic
 30 myths that human communication is designed for seers and sages as much as it
 31 is for politicians and pedagogues—perhaps even more so. And yet, this fact
 32 does not mean that Vedic and Mayan communication are not concerned with
 33 reasoning and logic or that Greek rhetorics are not concerned with ritual and
 34 mysticism. Clearly, they are. What we hope our triangulation reveals is that
 35 these sorts of boxes and categories do not apply in reliable ways.

36 Where we set out to discover and share generalizable findings about
 37 communication, we instead discovered and have tried to demonstrate neither
 38 sameness nor opposition, but profusion, divergence, difference. Triangulation
 39 afforded us the ability to do so. As Keith Lloyd reminds us, there are varieties
 40 of ways that arguments are made, as well as variety in "who we make them for,
 41 and to what ends" ("Rethinking" 381). As we continue to theorize the role of
 42 communication in the world, and as we teach this power to our students, we
 43 would do well not to ignore the multiplicity of communication and not to
 44 perpetuate our own myth about its origins, character, and/or purpose; not to
 45 view the outliers of public discourse as violators of the sacrament of
 46 democratic speech but potentially as practitioners of a different tradition or a

different combination of traditions; not to assume we know the best or only ways of which communication has been conceived; and not to be quite so surprised or appalled when we observe the products of a universe of communication that has always been wild, primitive, chaotic, diverse, and mysterious.

References

- Allison, Wayne L. 1971. "In the Beginning Was the Word: The Genesis of Language." BYU–Hawaii Speeches: David O. McKay Lectures, February 8. <https://speeches.byuh.edu/david-o-mckay-lecture/in-the-beginning-was-the-word-the-genesis-of-language>.
- Alshehri, Fawziah Ali. 2020. "Examining the Re-Translation Hypothesis: The Case of Three Short Stories in the Saudi Literary System." *Athens Journal of Philology* 7 (1): 51-72.
- Bantz, Charles R. 1979. "The Critic and the Computer: A Multiple Technique Analysis of the ABC Evening News." *Communications Monographs* 46 (1): 27–39. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03637757909375988>.
- Bashir, Muhammad, Muhammad Tanveer Afzal, and Muhammad Azeem. 2008. "Reliability and Validity of Qualitative and Operational Research Paradigm." *Pakistan Journal of Statistics and Operation Research* 4 (1): 35–45. <https://doi.org/10.18187/pjsor.v4i1.59>.
- Berwick, Robert C., and Noam Chomsky. 2016. *Why Only Us: Language and Evolution*. MIT Press.
- Brown, W. Norman. 1968. "Agni, Sun, Sacrifice, and Vāc: A Sacerdotal Ode by Dirghatamas (Rig Veda 1.164)." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 88 (2): 199–218.
- . 1971. "The Creative Role of the Goddess Vāc in the Rgveda." *Mahfil* 7 (3): 19–27.
- Bryman, Alan. 2004. "Triangulation." In *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Social Science Research Methods*, edited by Michael S. Lewis-Beck, Alan Bryman, and Tim Futing Liao, 1142–43. SAGE Publications.
- Campbell, Rebecca, Rachael Goodman-Williams, Hannah Feeney, and Giannina Fehler-Cabral. 2020. "Assessing Triangulation across Methodologies, Methods, and Stakeholder Groups: The Joys, Woes, and Politics of Interpreting Convergent and Divergent Data." *American Journal of Evaluation* 41 (1): 125–44. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1098214018804195>.
- Casanova, Pascale. 1999. *The World Republic of Letters*. Harvard University Press.
- Ceccarelli, Leah. 1997. "The Ends of Rhetoric: Aesthetic, Political, Epistemic." In *Making and Unmaking the Prospects for Rhetoric*, edited by Teresa Enos, 65–74. Lawrence Earlbaum Associates.
- Cheney, George. 1983. "On the Various and Changing Meanings of Organizational Membership: A Field Study of Organizational Identification." *Communications Monographs* 50 (4): 342–62. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03637758309390174>.
- Christenson, Allen J. 2021. "For It Is with Words that We Are Sustained: The Popol Vuh and the Creation of the First People." In *The Myths of the Popol Vuh in Cosmology, Art, and Ritual*, edited by Holley Moyes, Allen J. Christenson, and Frauke Sachse, 21–47. University Press of Colorado.

- 1 ———, trans. 2003. *Popol Vuh: Sacred Book of the Quiché Maya People*. University
2 of Oklahoma Press. [https://www.mesoweb.com/publications/](https://www.mesoweb.com/publications/Christenson/Popol)Christenson/Popol
3 Vuh.pdf.
- 4 "Communication." n.d. Britannica Kids. Accessed November 1, 2025. <https://kids.bri>
5 tannica.com/students/article/communication/273754.
- 6 Damrosch, David. 2003. *What Is World Literature?* Princeton University Press.
- 7 Darwin, Charles. 1871. *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*. 2 vols.
8 Murray.
- 9 Denzin, Norman K. 1978. *Sociological Methods*. McGraw-Hill.
- 10 Engelson, Amber. 2021. "'I Have No Mother Tongue': (Re)conceptualizing Rhetorical
11 Voice in Indonesia." In *The Routledge Handbook of Comparative World*
12 *Rhetorics: Studies in the History, Application, and Teaching of Rhetoric beyond*
13 *Traditional Greco-Roman Contexts*, edited by Keith Lloyd, 195–205. Routledge.
- 14 Falk, Dean. 2004. "Prelinguistic Evolution in Early Hominins: Whence Motherese?"
15 *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 27 (4): 491–541. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s01405>
16 25x04000111.
- 17 Finnegan, Cara A. 2010. "Studying Visual Modes of Public Address: Lewis Hine's
18 Progressive Era Child Labor Rhetoric." In *The Handbook of Rhetoric and Public*
19 *Address*, edited by M. Hogan and S. J. Parry-Giles, 250–70. Blackwell Publishing.
- 20 Fusch, Patricia, Gene E. Fusch, and Lawrence R. Ness. 2018. "Denizen's Paradigm
21 Shift: Revisiting Triangulation in Qualitative Research." *Journal of Sustainable*
22 *Social Change* 10 (1): 19–32. <https://doi.org/10.5590/JOSC.2018.10.1.02>.
- 23 Garrett, Mary. 2013. "Tied to a Tree: Culture and Self-Reflexivity." *Rhetoric Society*
24 *Quarterly* 43 (3): 243–55. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02773945.2013.792693>.
- 25 Goetz, Delia, and Sylvanus G. Morley, eds. 1950. *Popol Vuh: The Sacred Book of the*
26 *Ancient Quiche Mayan*. University of Oklahoma Press.
- 27 Gonda, J. 1962. "Some Notes on the Study of Ancient-Indian Religious Terminology."
28 *History of Religions* 1 (2): 243–73.
- 29 Griffith, Ralph T. H., trans. 2016. *Rig Veda*. Leeway Infotech.
- 30 Hashmi, Alamgir. 1988. *The Commonwealth: Comparative Literature and the World*.
31 Gulmohar.
- 32 Hastings, Sara L. 2010. "Triangulation." In *Encyclopedia of Research Design*, edited
33 by Neil J. Salkind, 1537–39. SAGE Publications. <https://doi.org/10.4135/978141>
34 2961288.n469.
- 35 Hauser, Marc D., Charles Yang, Robert C. Berwick, Ian Tattersall, Michael J. Ryan,
36 Jeffrey Watmull, Noam Chomsky, and Richard Lewontin. 2014. "The Mystery of
37 Language Evolution." *Frontiers in Psychology* 5 (401): 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.>
38 3389/fpsyg.2014.00401.
- 39 Isocrates. 2001. "Antidosis." In *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical*
40 *Times to the Present*, 2nd ed., edited by P. Bizzell and B. Herzberg, 75–79.
41 Bedford/St. Martins.
- 42 Jaeger, Werner. 1965. *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture. Vol. 1, Archaic Greece:*
43 *The Mind of Athens*. Oxford University Press.
- 44 ———. 1971. *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture. Vol. 3, The Conflict of Cultural*
45 *Ideals in the Age of Plato*. Oxford University Press.
- 46 Jasinski, James. 2001. *Sourcebook on Rhetoric: Key Concepts in Contemporary*
47 *Rhetorical Studies*. Sage.
- 48 Kertzer, David I. 1988. *Ritual, Politics, and Power*. Yale University Press.
- 49 Lloyd, Keith. 2007. "Rethinking Rhetoric from an Indian Perspective: Implications in
50 the Nyaya Sutra." *Rhetoric Review* 26 (4): 365–84. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07350>
51 190701577892.

- 1 ———. 2013. "Learning from India's Nyāya Rhetoric: Debating Analogically through
2 Vāda's Fruitful Dialogue." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 43 (3): 285–89. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02773945.2013.792698>.
3
4 ———, ed. 2021. *The Routledge Handbook of Comparative World Rhetorics: Studies
5 in the History, Application, and Teaching of Rhetoric beyond Traditional Greco-
6 Roman Contexts*. Routledge.
7 Mao, LuMing. 2003. "Reflective Encounters: Illustrating Comparative Rhetoric." *Style*
8 37 (4): 401–24. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/style.37.4.401>.
9 ———. 2011. "Doing Comparative Rhetoric Responsibly." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 41
10 (1): 64–69. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40997192>.
11 ———. 2013. "Beyond Bias, Binary, and Border: Mapping Out the Future of
12 Comparative Rhetoric." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 43 (3): 209–25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02773945.2013.792690>.
13
14 Mao, LuMing, Bo Wang, Arabella Lyon, Susan C. Jarratt, C. Jan Swearingen, Susan
15 Romano, Peter Simonson, Steven Mailloux, and Xing Lu. 2015. "Manifesting a
16 Future for Comparative Rhetoric." *Rhetoric Review* 34 (3): 239–74. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07350198.2015.1040105>.
17
18 McCroskey, James, Amber N. Finn, and Virginia P. Richmond. 2001. "Eysenck's BIG
19 THREE and Communication Traits: Three Correlational Studies." *Communication*
20 *Monographs* 68 (4): 360–66. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03637750128068>.
21 Melfi, Anne. 2021. "Foundations in Vedic Rhetorical Culture: Approaching Moksa
22 Analogically." In *The Routledge Handbook of Comparative World Rhetorics:
23 Studies in the History, Application, and Teaching of Rhetoric beyond Traditional
24 Greco-Roman Contexts*, edited by Keith Lloyd, 134–43. Routledge.
25 Müller, Max. 1862. "The Theoretical Stage, and the Origin of Language." In *Lectures
26 on the Science of Language*, edited by M. Müller, 287–328. Scribner.
27 Oliver, Robert. 1971. *Communication and Culture in Ancient India and China*.
28 Syracuse University Press.
29 Ott, Brian L., Eric Aoki, and Greg Dickinson. 2011. "Ways of (Not) Seeing Guns:
30 Presence and Absence at the Cody Firearms Museum." *Communication and Critical/
31 Cultural Studies* 8 (3): 215–39. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14791420.2011.594068>.
32 Plato. 1967. "Protagoras." In *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, vol. 3, translated by W. R. M.
33 Lamb, 309–62. Harvard University Press.
34 Poulakos, Takis. 1997. *Speaking for the Polis: Isocrates' Rhetorical Education*.
35 University of South Carolina Press.
36 Pugazhendhi, D. 2021. "Greek, Latin, Sanskrit and Tamil: The Meaning of the Word
37 Ἐρυθραῖν in Erythraean Sea." *Athens Journal of Philology* 9 (1): 47–76.
38 ———. 2021. "Tamil, Greek, Hebrew and Sanskrit: Sandalwood (σανταλόξυλο) and its
39 Semantics in Classical Literatures." *Athens Journal of Philology* 8 (3): 207–230.
40 ———. 2022. "Ion (Euripides) and Karna (Mahabharat, Sanga Ilakkiyam) –
41 Deconstruction of Binary Oppositions." *Athens Journal of Philology* 9 (3): 197–
42 234. <https://doi.org/10.30958/ajp.9-3-2>.
43 Reuber, Alexandra. 2019. "The (Silent) Articulation of Otherness: Maurice Blanchot's
44 *Double Parole in Death Sentence, Awaiting Oblivion, and Madness of the Day*." *Athens Journal of Philology* 6 (4): 235–254.
45
46 Ritchie, Graham, and Simon Kirby. 2005. "Selection, Domestication, and the
47 Emergence of Learned Communication Systems." In *Proceedings of the Second
48 International Symposium on the Emergence and Evolution of Linguistic
49 Communication*, 108–16. The Society for the Study of Artificial Intelligence and
50 the Simulation of Behaviour. [https://aisb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/1](https://aisb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/1_EELC_Final.pdf)
51 [_EELC_Final.pdf](https://aisb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/1_EELC_Final.pdf).

- 1 Romney, Abraham. 2021. "A Comparative Cultural Rhetorics Approach to Indigenous
2 Rhetorics in the Americas." In *The Routledge Handbook of Comparative World
3 Rhetorics: Studies in the History, Application, and Teaching of Rhetoric beyond
4 Traditional Greco-Roman Contexts*, edited by Keith Lloyd, 277–86. Routledge.
- 5 Rowland, Robert C. 1989. "On Limiting the Narrative Paradigm: Three Case Studies."
6 *Communications Monographs* 56 (1): 39–54. [https://doi.org/10.1080/03637758](https://doi.org/10.1080/03637758909390248)
7 909390248.
- 8 Sachse, Frauke. 2021. "Metaphors of Maize: Otherworld Conceptualizations and the
9 Cultural Logic of Human Existence in the Popol Vuh." In *The Myths of the Popol
10 Vuh in Cosmology, Art, and Ritual*, edited by H. Moyes, Allen J. Christenson, and
11 Frauke Sachse, 48–76. University Press of Colorado.
- 12 Slotkin, Richard. 1985. *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of
13 Industrialization, 1800–1890*. Atheneum.
- 14 Sparks, Garry. 2019. *Rewriting Maya Religion: Domingo de Vico, K'iche' Maya
15 Intellectuals, and the Theologia Indorum*. University Press of Colorado.
- 16 Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. 2003. *Death of a Discipline*. Columbia University Press.
- 17 Stroud, Scott R. 2009. "Pragmatism and the Methodology of Comparative Rhetoric."
18 *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 39 (4): 353–79. [https://doi.org/10.1080/02773940903](https://doi.org/10.1080/02773940903196614)
19 196614.
- 20 ———. 2011. "Useful Irresponsibility? A Reply to Mao on the Purpose(s) of Comparative
21 Rhetoric." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 41 (1): 69–74. [https://www.jstor.org/stable/40](https://www.jstor.org/stable/40997193)
22 997193.
- 23 Tedlock, Dennis. 1996. *Popol Vuh: The Definitive Edition of the Mayan Book of the
24 Dawn of Life and the Glories of Gods and Kings*. 2nd rev. ed. Simon and
25 Schuster.
- 26 Timmerman, David, and Edward Schiappa. 2010. *Classical Greek Rhetorical Theory
27 and the Disciplining of Discourse*. Cambridge University Press.
- 28 "Triangulation." n.d. *Oxford Collocation Dictionary*. Accessed November 1, 2025.
29 <https://googledictionary.freecollocation.com/meaning?word=triangulation>.
- 30 Vautier, Marie. "Autobiography, Bilingualism and Poetry: Writing in English and
31 French in Canada to Address Personal and Political Challenges." *Athens Journal
32 of Philology* 2 (4): 215–226. <https://doi.org/10.30958/ajp.2-4-1>.
- 33 Wang, Bo. 2013. "Comparative Rhetoric, Postcolonial Studies, and Transnational
34 Feminisms: A Geopolitical Approach." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 43 (3): 226–
35 42. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02773945.2013.792692>.
- 36 Weiss, Bernard G. 1974. "Medieval Muslim Discussions of the Origin of Language."
37 *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 124 (1): 33–41.
38 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43370636>.
- 39 Witzel, Michael. 2003. "Vedas and Upanisads." In *The Blackwell Companion to
40 Hinduism*, edited by Gavin Flood, 69–71. Blackwell Publishing.
- 41 Żywicznyński, Przemysław. 2018. Language Origins: From Mythology to Science. Vol.
42 18 of *Dis/continuities: Toruń Studies in Language, Literature and Culture*. Peter
43 Lang.
- 44