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SECTION A: PROPOSAL SUMMARY

Project Title:	Redundantly persuasive! Uncovering the limitations of repetition through argument teaching to Arabic undergraduates in English-speaking universities		
Principal Investigator (PI):	Name:	Dr. Chrysi Rapanta	College/Dept: Business
	Title:	Assistant Professor	Highest Degree: PhD
	Tel:	044021542	Year Awarded: 2014 - 2015
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List all Co-Investigators below, including those from other institutions:			
Name	Email	Highest Degree	University/ College
Dr. Cornelia Ile	Cornelia.ile@zu.ac.ae	PhD	Zayed University, College of Business
Dr. Dany Badran	Dany.badran@lau.edu.lb	PhD	Lebanese American University (LAU)
Dr. Victor Khachan	vkhachan@lau.edu.lb	PhD	Lebanese American University (LAU)

1. Abstract - Please provide a concise summary of the proposed research in plain language (max. 150 words).

According to a well-known Arabic proverb, "repetition will teach a donkey." In fact, scholars in contrastive linguistics have long accounted for an observed use of repetition in Arabic texts as a persuasive strategy. The current research will adopt a socio-constructionist perspective and will investigate the effect of factors other than language on undergraduate students' argument skills in two culturally different regions with same linguistic roots: United Arab Emirates and Lebanon. More precisely, we will focus on the effect of instruction (in the form of argument mapping and debate), main language used (Arabic, English or other), and disposition towards argument and critical thinking. Students' argument skills will be assessed using the informal reasoning criteria of construction of valid reasons, counter-arguments and rebuttals. Identification of circular reasoning fallacies, such as begging the question and repeating the claim (ad nauseam fallacy) will be the main focus of the analysis and recommendations.

2. Time Period – are you requesting a one-year or two-year grant?

one-year grant two-year grant

3. Students – Does the project contribute to student research training?

Yes, describe briefly
 No

4. Budget - What is the total budget requested for this proposal over the entire research period?

74,200 AED

5. Facilities and Equipment - Are you requesting space for a research assistant(s) and/or special equipment? If so, please describe briefly:

We will hire 10 student research assistants (see point 3) to help with both data collection and analysis.

6. Ethical Clearance - Does this proposed research involve human or animal subjects?

Yes – you will be required to apply for ethical clearance through the Research Ethics Committee if your proposal is successful
 No

SECTION B: DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH PROJECT

Please provide a detailed project description using the six (6) section headings below.
Please write in plain language, limiting the use of jargon and acronyms.

1. Statement of the research problem(s)

(maximum 400 words)

One of the major learning outcomes (MALOs) of Zayed University is the development and advancement of critical thinking skills, akin to prepare Emirati youth for the challenges of globalization and rapid change that they are already faced with. In the 2011 report of the International Bureau of Education, one of the 4 goals of education in the UAE region is to train students that are “armed with critical thinking, analytical reasoning and strong communication skills” (International Bureau of Education, 2011: 2). However, what we face as University teachers regarding the level of our students’ critical thinking skills is still far away from what the ZU’s MALO represents. A recent pilot study held by the proposal’s principal investigator showed that ZU undergraduates’ argumentative writing is poor when it regards further justification of claims with provided evidence, counter-arguing and rebutting one’s counter-arguments efficiently. More precisely, students tended to repeat what they already said rather than finding new ways of supporting their ideas.

Argumentation was defined by representatives of the pragma-dialectical school of argumentation as a

“a verbal, social, and rational activity aimed at convincing a reasonable critic of the acceptability of a standpoint by putting forward a constellation of one or more propositions to justify this standpoint” (van Eemeren, Grootendorst, & Snoeck Henkemans, 2002, xii). Skillful argumentation is very much related to critical thinking, especially regarding its following manifestations: a) the skill to distinguish between argument and explanation by producing reasons that justify rather than repeat the claim itself (Osborne & Patterson, 2011); b) the skill to consider alternatives, thus understanding what it is by identifying what it is not (Kuhn 1992); and c) the skill to construct or use evidence to further support one’s opinion in form of a rebuttal (Osborne, Erduran, & Simon, 2004).

Repetition has been long recognized as a linguistic phenomenon related to fallacious persuasive discourse, and more precisely to the fallacy of argumentum ad nauseam (Gilabert, Garcia-Mila, & Felton, 2012). Moreover, it has been associated with the Arabic language as a technique of stating intensively what one supports (Johnstone, 1983, 1987; Hatim, 1990). However, repeating as a way of persuading is not a recognized persuasive strategy, especially when it is used instead of strengthening one’s views through new evidence and constructive rebuttal (Johnstone, 1996). This fallacious use of repetition is evident in University students’ texts as a type of “my-side bias” (Nussbaum & Kardash, 2002), and also in debate as an evidence of difficulty in coming up with new subjects (Metsämäki, 2009). Thus, it is important to identify ways to support students’ argumentation strategies as expressed both in written and oral argumentation. Also it is important to identify whether the pattern of repetition is culture-related, language-related, or even influenced by other personal factors such as previous knowledge or general disposition towards arguing.

2. Literature review – a concise and current review of scholarly research or important information relating to your research topic

(maximum 600 words)

As Johnstone (1987) has put it, in the Arabic language “an idea is made believable by being stated, restated and paraphrased.” This observed tendency, which is rooted in poetry and oral rather than

written Arabic communication, might become quite problematic for “good” reasoning standards, especially in what regards valid argumentative discourse. According to a number of scholars (e.g., Walton, 1991; Rips, 2002; Hansen, 2002) the reasons given to support a claim should be well distinguished and without repeating those ideas contained in the claim itself; otherwise the fallacy of begging the question is committed. Similarly, the answer to an opponent’s counterargument, also called rebuttal, should be different than the claim itself yet still give additional proof in support of the claim. As far as the first requirement is concerned, it is observed that Arabs use repetitive statements to reinforce their content rather than search for proof to support their claims (Johnstone, 1983, 1987, 1996; Bassiouney, 2009). Thus, similar reasons given in co-ordination after the main contention are very much expected in a piece of persuasive Arabic discourse. As for the second, counter-arguments and rebuttals seem to follow a more affective ethical rule according to which direct opposition is not very welcome (Hatim, 1990). Indirectness in combination with the emotional aspect of “keeping ideas in the here and now of the discourse“ (Johnstone, 1987) make counter-arguments and rebuttals weak and not self-defined.

Significant research has been done thus far in the field of contrastive rhetoric with particular focus on comparing Arabic language structures to other languages, especially English. Findings of this field are contradictory. Early research shows that the use of the Arabic language is the main reason for the use of repetition as a fallacious strategy of persuasion. This claim agrees with the famous Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, later supported by Kaplan (1966) and others (e.g., Atari, 1983; Clark & Bamberg, 2003), which argues in favor of a native language predominance on the control of what rhetorical structures are used and how. At the other side of this strict view, researchers following a more constructionist approach have shown that other sociocultural factors, rather than the use of language, influence one’s choice of rhetorical patterns. Some of these factors are: rhetorical context (Lekki, 1991; Connor, 1996), past instruction experience (Purves & Purves, 1986; Jarratt, Losh, & Puente; Phung, 2006), and discourse community, in terms of language selection according to context and goals (Connor, 1998; Lekki, 1991; Dudly-Evans, 1997).

From an educational research point of view, findings about young adults’ argumentation skills are added to further support this second approach. According to Kuhn (1991), skilled argumentation performance does not emerge naturally, but it is related to a range of socio-cultural experiences. Researchers have shown, for example, that explicit instruction of argument skills has a positive outcome on the argumentative performance of adolescents and young adults (e.g., Zohar & Nemet, 2002; Kelly & Takao, 2002). The use of representations such as graphs or argument diagramming maps has an additional value as a means of explicit argument instruction (Munneke, Andriessen, Kanselaar, & Kirschner, 2007). Finally, explicit task instructions related to the goals of argumentation have also been proven to be of great importance on the persuasive value of arguments emerged (Nussbaum & Kardash, 2005; Felton, Garcia-Mila, & Gilabert, 2009).

However, to our knowledge, no research evidence exists targeting the relation between language selection and quality of arguments, especially when the selected language is or is not the native, mainly

in terms of socio-cultural linguistic characteristics. Transferred to the Arabic context, there is a lack of understanding of whether there is a difference in the quality of arguments produced depending on which language is used during the argumentative task: Arabic, English or other languages. This of course is to be judged together with other factors, such as the everyday use of this language, the previous instruction experiences, and the general disposition towards argument, also called argumentativeness (Hampe & Dallinger, 1995).

3. Goals of the research – anticipated outcomes including potential problem solutions, or contribution to knowledge or understanding of issues
(maximum 400 words)

The main goal of this research is to identify the main written and oral argumentation patterns of young adults belonging to the broadly defined as “Arab population”, with the further aim to support them in their scholar argument practices, which, as a consequence, enhance critical thinking skills. Being aware that not all Arab regions are the same, we focus on two very different Middle-eastern regions: United Arab Emirates and Lebanon. Although “locals” of both regions can be generally characterized as “Arabs”, we understand the existence of major differences in the sociopolitical development of these countries, which is reflected in the differences in languages, religions, and general culture. For example, Lebanese Arabs are culturally more ‘westernized’, multi-religious and even internally multi-linguistic, compared to the Emirati Arabs who, regardless of the recent rapid social changes especially in Dubai (Haque, 2007), have a stronger Arabic identity in terms of the language used with their family and friends, their Islamic values and traditions, and the adoption of a more conservative way of living. Following the social constructionist paradigm described previously, we expect that these differences will also be reflected in the ways people argue about everyday matters. Our main inquiry is to identify which of the expected argumentative differences can be attributed to the predominant use of language (Arabic, English or French), in people’s everyday lives, and which can be related to other factors such as effects of instruction, the explicit goal of argumentation, and individual argumentativeness.

Apart from focusing on two linguistically and socioculturally different Arabic populations, the Emirati and the Lebanese, a secondary goal will be to support both populations with explicit instruction on argumentation (see Method section for details). In other words, we will provide systematic training in argumentation, both written and oral, for a specific period of time, so we can later investigate students’ progress into structural argumentation.

In sum, our research will contribute to the theory as well as yielding more practical outcomes. At the theoretical level, we endeavor to shed some light on the current argumentation patterns of Arab youth and to identify the factors that influence the production of some non-effective patterns, such as repetition. At the practical level, we will try to eliminate possible argumentation faults by teaching

students what is a valid and effective argument and how they can practice it, in both written and oral tasks.

4. Research methodology – anticipated methods to be used in your research process, including main research questions, data gathering, documentation or analysis planned (maximum 400 words)

To address the above goals, we will follow a quasi-experimental design applied in two case studies, the Zayed University, Dubai and Abu Dhabi, and the Lebanese American University, Beirut. Our approach could be described as both descriptive and experimental. In the first phase, we are interested in identifying the current argumentation patterns as they emerge in simple reasoning classroom-tasks in both settings. In the second phase, we investigate whether an additional intervention with debate training will have further positive effects on students' argument skills. At the same time, the paradigm of cross-cultural research (Shiraeve & Levy, 2012) will also be considered, as regional differences inside the broadly defined Arab population are likely to emerge.

More precisely, we search to give answers to the following questions:

1. Are the recurrences of argument repetition, especially begging the question and persistent presentation, evident in current argumentation across different regions of the Arab world?
2. Does explicit instruction on argumentation have an effect on the quality of the arguments produced?
3. Does practicing argumentation as a debate have any effect on the quality of reasons, counterarguments and rebuttals University students come up with?
4. Does the use of English as the first, second or third option in comparison to Arabic or other language play a role in the quality of the arguments produced? Are more repetitions produced when Arabic is the first linguistic option of the participants?
5. How important are individual factors such as the predisposition towards arguing, also known as argumentativeness, or previous experience with supporting one's views through constructive debate?

The intervention will consist of three parts: 1) a two-hour seminar on main argument skills, namely construction of valid and effective reasons, counter-arguments, and rebuttals; 2) instruction on the use of an argument-mapping software called Rationale (Van Gelder, 2007), to further support students' understanding of good argument through its visual representation; and 3) the organizing of oral debate sessions on issues of common interest, such as environmental awareness, with volunteer participation to further check the influence of oral argumentation practice on the quality of arguments produced.

Parts 1 and 2 will be delivered to all participants, whereas part 3 will only be given partially as an experimental variable. All students' skills will be assessed in time, before and after the debate training, using the produced argument maps with the help of the Rationale tool. Moreover, all students will be interviewed regarding their attitudes towards argumentation using three different scales recently joined together as part of a cross-cultural study (Xie, Shi, Evans, & Hample, 2013).

5. Research schedule and deliverables – what are the major phases of your research anticipated, and what do you realistically plan to accomplish at what stage

In accordance to what was previously described, the research design will be composed of the following stages:

Stage 1. Assessing participants' arguments produced with the help of Rationale tool. At this stage students will not have received any explicit teaching on argumentation. All the produced maps will be assessed in terms of the quality of reasons, counterarguments and rebuttals with a special focus on the use of repetition. Estimated time: one class hour for each participant class, and one month for the assessment of all produced maps.

Stage 2. Assessing students' argumentativeness by conducting a structured interview with the help of research assistants. Estimated time: two months.

Stage 3. In class two-hour instruction on the use and meaning of argument and which are the main argument skills. Estimated time: two months to complete all instruction seminars in Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Beirut.

Stage 4. Training part of the participants to debate sessions. In total, 3 debate sessions to be held by each University. Estimated time: two months.

Stage 5. Re-assessment of all students written argumentation in a new curriculum-based task to assess transfer of knowledge. Estimated time (for both task and assessment): one month.

Stage 6: Statistical analysis and comparison of the results produced in stages 1, 4, & 5. Estimated time: two months.

Stage 7: Discussion and writing of findings. Estimated time: three months.

Stage 8: Dissemination in scientific journals. Estimated time: two months.

Figure 1 (Appendix) shows a proposed schedule with exact deliverables.

6. Budget narrative – describe and justify your main budget items. An itemized budget spreadsheet will also be attached to this proposal

The total budget for this collaborative research proposal is estimated to be 74,200 AED. This amount comprises the following items:

- a) Travelling of the two ZU-based faculties to Beirut to visit the Lebanese American University (LAU) and conduct the argumentation seminars together with the co-investigators.
- b) Travelling of the two LAU-based faculties to Dubai and Abu Dhabi to facilitate the debate sessions together with the co-investigators
- c) Travelling of the Dubai-based faculty to Abu Dhabi and vice versa.
- d) Hiring of 10 research assistants who will be all be students of the two involved institutions (ZU and LAU).
- e) Purchase of the argument mapping software Rationale for all students involved.
- f) Purchase of books and informative materials from part of the investigators.
- g) Editing and proof reading services for publishing in high quality journals in the fields of education, language, and culture.

The detailed budget spreadsheet is attached.

SECTION C: RIF BUDGET SPREADSHEET

Please attach your completed RIF Budget Spreadsheet.

Please use the naming convention 'your surname'_RIF_budget.xlsx eg Martin_RIF_budget.xlsx

SECTION D: SEDONA CV

Please attach your updated SEDONA CV.

Please use the naming convention 'your surname'_SEDONA_CV.doc eg Martin_SEDONA_CV.doc

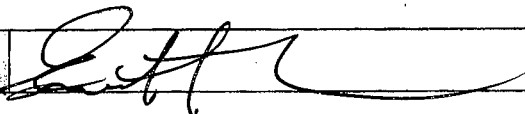
SECTION E: DEAN'S EVALUATION

You must obtain the physical signature of your Dean before submitting this application form. Applications without signatures will not be accepted.

If you do not have access to digital signatures, it is recommended to:

- print the completed form
- obtain the Dean's signature

- sign the application yourself
 - scan and email to research@zu.ac.ae Please note: When saving this application form, please use the naming convention, 'your surname'_RIF_2011_proposal.doc eg Martin_RIF_2011_proposal.doc

Dean's Name:	Emil Hiy	College/Department:	COB
I endorse that this project is appropriate for the unit to undertake as part of its educational, service or research programs; that appropriate and sufficient staff are available and willing to supervise; and that adequate space and facilities are available.			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
I approve the request for facilities and equipment. (Arrangements will be made directly with the Principal Investigator)			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> NA
Comments:			
Dean's Signature:			Date: 27/11/13

I certify that all information provided is true and correct at the time of submission.

Submit to research@zu.ac.ae

PI's Signature:	Chrysi Rapanfa	Date:	26/11/2013
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