

***The Rhetorical Organisation of English
Argumentative Essays by Malay ESL Students:
The Placement of Thesis Statement***

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In the field of contrastive rhetoric, many studies have been done on rhetorical organisation of native English speakers with patterns of other languages. Although there are numerous published contrastive rhetoric studies comparing native English speakers to speakers of other languages, research on the rhetorical pattern of native Malay-speaking students, or Malay ESL students, writing in English has received limited attention from investigators. Thus, it is the aim of this paper to investigate the discourse organisation employed by native Malay ESL students in their English argumentative essays. The essays were analysed based on the location of the thesis statement. Results indicate that the most frequently employed pattern was inductive followed by the deductive. A number of participants were also interviewed to gain insight on the motivations for the rhetorical decisions. Some pedagogical implications which arise from the findings are also discussed.

Key words: rhetorical organisation, Malay ESL students, inductive, deductive

INTRODUCTION

Studies in contrastive rhetorical pattern in writing between different cultures have been replete. Findings from these studies seem to suggest that speakers of different cultures have different styles of writing (Hinds, 1990; Kaplan, 1966; Kubota, 1992; Kuntjara, 2005; Mauranen, 1993; Strevens, 1987). Native English speakers, for instance, were found to write using the linear pattern, making the subject of argument more direct and clear whereas writers of the Oriental and Asian languages were found using the non-linear pattern, in effect approaching the subject of argument in indirect manner and nuances. Although numerous contrastive rhetoric studies comparing university-level native English speakers to speakers of other languages (Korean, Thai, Indonesia and Chinese) have been published (Hinds, 1983; Indrasuta, 1988; Kubota, 1998; Kuntjara, 2005; Silva & Matsuda, 2001; Yang & Cahill, 2008), research on the rhetorical pattern of Malay ESL students writing English expository texts has received limited attention from investigators.

Rhetorical Patterns in Writing

Contrastive rhetoric is partly derived from Sapir-Whorf ideas of the associations among language, culture, and thought. It is a hypothesis that people who speak different languages will organise the same reality in different ways; in other words, it proposes the logic expressed through the organisation of written text is culture-specific (Kaplan, 1966, 1988). In his own words, Kaplan states that “Logic... is evolved out of a culture; it is not universal. Rhetoric... is not universal either, but varies from culture to culture and even from time to time within a given culture” (1966, p. 2). He further contends that each culture’s rhetorical pattern reflects the people’s logical thinking in which he describes the pattern of the English as ‘predominantly linear’ unlike the Oriental or Asian ‘broken’ pattern as reflected in their rhetorical organisation that is written in ‘circles or gyres [that] turn around the subject... from a variety tangential views, but the

subject is never looked at directly' (1966, p. 10). He then proposes a diagram of five cultural rhetorical patterns in which the English rhetoric is depicted as a straight line while the Oriental or Asian rhetoric is spiral as represented by the graphic form shown in Figure 1 below.

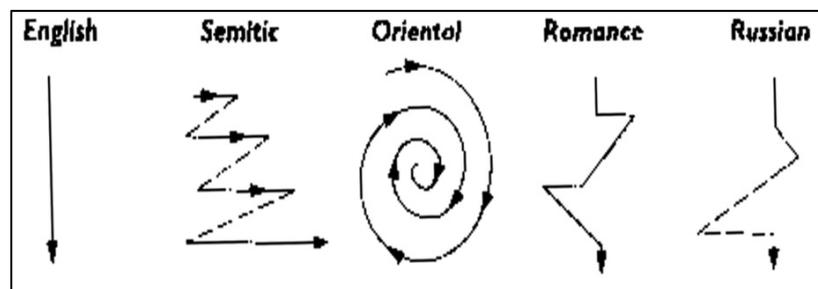


FIGURE 1
Rhetorical Patterns of Different Languages
 (Source: Kaplan, 1966)

For some time the visual memory was dominating the thinking, learning and writing of teachers and students. However, his view of the discursive reality was later criticised as self-indulgent, ethnocentric, ill-defined and vague, lacking empirical support and portraying a stereotyped reality (Enkvist, 1997).

In response to the criticism, Kaplan (2000) acknowledges his hastiness saying that he no longer holds the notion that rhetorical pattern reflects a particular way of thinking, but they are rather the result of different writing conventions learned. For example, Kaplan (1988, p. 3) found evidence of Chinese indirect rhetoric in the *ba-gu-wen* or eight-legged classical format essay employed in Chinese imperial examinations which he states 'has clearly endured into modern times', which is echoed by other scholars like Coe and Hu (1989) and Cai (1993). In consequence, Kaplan (1988) explains the

Chinese students had difficulties keeping their English writing coherent because of the difference between the direct linear pattern of English discourse and the spiraling pattern of typical Chinese discourse. Based on this empirical fact, he holds to the view that “there are differences between languages in rhetorical preference” (2000, p. 84).

There are many studies that probe into the differences of rhetorical organisations in various cultures (Hatim, 1997; Hinds, 1990, Indrasuta, 1988; Kuntjara, 2005; Liu, 2007; Mauranen, 1993). The problems related to both ‘delayed introduction of purpose’ and unclear thesis statement were observed in Japanese ESL students’ argumentative and persuasive essay organisations (Hinds, 1990; Hirose, 2003; Kobayashi, 1984; Kubota, 1992, 1998). When this notion of ‘delayed introduction of purpose’ is employed in Japanese writings, it often creates stance ambiguity within a piece of writing, and such writer stance ambiguity is often perceived as a weakness or limitation in English writing resulting in lower scores on Japanese ESL students’ English essays. Even more elusive to Western readers, Japanese writers may also use the ‘omission’ pattern where “they do not present the thesis statement, hesitating to take either the pro or the con position” (Kamimura & Oi, 1998, p. 311). The Western rhetorical strategies in contrast, are radically different from the Asians where pride is taken in clarity, directness and eloquence.

Consistent with findings in Japanese language, Kuntjara (2005, p. 26) asserts that the Orientals are not the only writers that prefer the ‘circular’ way of writing, but the Indonesians seem to be ‘more inductive [and] ambiguous’ in their texts due to cultural influence. According to Kuntjara (2005), Indonesian ESL students preferred to use inductive way of expressing ideas as they believe stating things directly and explicitly may sound too blunt or aggressive. Corroborated by Geertz (1960, p. 246), Bahasa Indonesia is a highly contextual language that considers many contextual factors surrounding the speakers such as their relationship, how the person says it and the setting. They believe by saying things implicitly, one may avoid hurting other people with their directness and explicit language (Geertz, 1960, p. 247). In effect, they refrain from stating disagreement over a certain matter directly and explicitly for the fear of

getting accused of being ‘blunt’ (Kuntjara, 2005).

In the same vein, Subagio (1999, p. 42 cited in Lim, 2003, p. 78) describes that the culture of argumentation does not belong to the Malay world and does not even take root in their original culture:

Berdebat tidak berakar pada kebudayaan asli kita. Sampai kini bicara kita mengikuti jalur satu arah: dari atas ke bawah dalam bentuk petuah atau petatah-petitih. Orang tua dan mereka yang dianggap tua, apakah saudarataua, kepala kampung, menteri di dalam kabinet, ketua partai, atau pemimpin perusahaan meneruskan tradisi memberi petuah itu, yang di dalam hubungan modern disebut briefing, pengarahan, atau penataran. Orang kecil di bawah diharapkan tinggal mendengarkan, mengangguk-angguk, dan melaksanakan perintah. Kebiasaan memberi dan menerima petuah itu cocok bagi suasana feodal, yang kita wariskan dari nenek-moyang.

(Argumentation is not rooted in our own original culture. Until now our discourse follows only one direction: from top to the bottom in the form of maxims. The elders and those we perceive as elders, whether older relatives, village head, Cabinet minister, head of a political party or industry leader continue with this tradition by giving maxims and guidelines, which in the modern context are called briefing, command, or induction. Small people at the bottom are expected to listen, obey and enforce the command. The normal practice of giving and receiving maxims and orders are appropriate in the context of feudalism, which we inherited from our ancestors).

Similar to the Indonesians, the Malays also consider ‘arguments as impoliteness’ especially when talking to the elders as they are more in favour of with age comes wisdom (Lim, 2003, p. 78). As highlighted by Goddard (2000), the Malays place importance on hierarchy in relationship; they greatly value the display of *hormat* respect

and *timbang rasa* consideration. However, to regard the Malays never argue would be absurd. In view of that, Lim (2003, p. 76) contends that:

[t]he Malays who are known to excel in orating might not argue according to the Western model of argumentation, but they do argue in their own rhetorical way, by using their peribahasa (proverbs)... within their own cultural settings.

This shows that proverbs are used to indirectly state the gist of their arguments to 'show their *budi* gratefulness not to *menjatuhkan air muka* to spoil one's dignity or make one feel ashamed (Lim, 2003, p. 76). In a study undertaken by Ahmad (1997), the Malay scholars seem to be influenced by their cultural values which forbids them from being upfront and critical as it is considered an act of *menjatuhkan air muka* or spoiling other researchers' dignity; resulting in the absence of the crucial move- *Indicating the gap* in their research article introductions. In consequence, there is slimmer chance for Malay scholars' research articles being published internationally.

These findings indicate that different cultural values and assumptions may influence how people think, and how they express themselves both orally and in written texts. Importantly, Nakamura (1964, p. 3) states that while every individual is affected by the globalisation, he is still strongly influenced by the ways of living and thinking in his own nation and culture. Thus, there is a warranted concern that when native Malay student writers are asked to write argumentative essays in English, they would still be influenced by their culture and be inclined to write in 'circular way' as opposed to the Western 'linear way'. Unfortunately, such style of writing is often perceived as rhetorical weakness by English speaking readers and may hinder comprehension if the students were to write for the international audience.

Conceptualisation of Thesis Statement

According to rhetoricians, a thesis statement in a piece of writing should provide a stance, the belief or the point of view of the writer; or it states the aim of the essay or conveys the main idea of the text. A good thesis statement often expresses a writer's opinion or attitude on a particular topic. Sullivan (1984, p. 23) contends that a well-chosen thesis statement should be a complete, clear and specific sentence (cited in Yang & Cahill, 2008). For this study, the thesis statement is specifically defined as the statement that clearly summarises the writer's viewpoint on whether the writer agrees or disagrees that Malaysian government has done enough in tackling the issue of censorship of television shows and movies.

The English language evolves out of a particular Anglo-European cultural pattern (Hinds, 1990), so basing on Kaplan's (1966) hypothesis, the expected thought sequence of a native English speaker is linear in its development. In a native English argumentative writing the paragraph begins with a clear thesis statement, followed by paragraphs containing relevant and adequately-supported arguments that support the statement. The central idea or thesis statement is related to all other ideas in the whole essay and that makes it unified and a good piece of writing. As emphasised by Bain (1866, p. 108), a deductive pattern is preferred by native English speakers where the placement of thesis statement "to indicate the scope of the [text]" usually comes at the beginning of the paragraphs (cited in Braddock, 1974). Meaning, the Western speaker tends to open a discourse by introducing the main point before he or she puts forward the reasons or arguments in support of the main topic. As an illustration, the form of the pattern is:

X (main point)
Because of Y (reason, background)

Meanwhile, Scollon and Scollon (1991, p. 1-2) offer a very distinct example

concerning the difference between Asian and Western rhetoric. According to the Scollons, an Asian speaker usually uses an order of presentation in which the main idea is postponed until sufficient background has been put forward which is similar to Hind's 'delayed introduction of purpose'. This form of rhetorical organisation was also evident in Indonesian speakers' writings who like to delay the message at the end of their narrative prose to give more impact to their stories (Kuntjara, 2005). Since the Malay and Indonesian languages could be traced from the same origin, there might be similarities in the way they organise their thoughts and realise them in the written form. To illustrate, the form of Asian writing pattern is:

Because of Y (background or reason)
So X (main point)

As explained earlier, contrastively, Asians use inductive approach while Westerners use deductive approach. As a result, an expository text written using the inductive approach appears incoherent and would be considered poorly written to the English-speaking readers (Connor, 1996).

THE STUDY

The main objectives of this study are to investigate the discourse organisation (inductive or deductive) employed by Malay ESL students in their English argumentative writings and the factor(s) for their rhetorical decisions

METHODOLOGY

Participants and Setting

97 Malay ESL students studying in a local public university were initially selected as participants of this study. However, only 53 students agreed to participate and gave their consent for their writings to be examined. They were second year diploma students majoring in humanity and social sciences.

Argumentative essays

To build the corpus for this study, the researchers assigned an argumentative essay task, 'The Malaysian government has done enough in tackling the issue of censorship of television shows and movies. Argue your position' to be completed by the participants. A total of 53 argumentative essays were then collected and analysed for this study. The analysis of the expository texts was conducted in terms of the (a) location of main idea, and (b) the statement must address all the information presented in the essay. A textual analysis of the data was then triangulated with the participants' interview on the rhetorical decision.

Audio taped stimulated recall interview

Stimulated recall interview method (retrospective protocol) was also used to collect data. Gass and Mackey (2000, p. 19) suggest that stimulated recall can be used "to uncover the cognitive processes in L2 research" as "a participant may be enabled to relive an original situation with vividness and accuracy if presented with a large number of cues or stimuli which occurred during the original situation". Most importantly, stimulated recall interviews reveal not only what happened, but also why it happened (Green & Higgins, 1994; Shavelson, Webb & Sasaki, 1986). Therefore, they provide 'a

richer understanding of the relationship among texts, situational factors, and writer's constructive processes' and help identify patterns in writing (Green & Higgins, 1994, p. 117–118). Bloom (1954) found that if the stimulated recalls were prompted up to 48 hour after the event, recall was 95% accurate. Therefore, in the present study, stimulated recall interviews were administered within two days after the writing activity to find out the reasons for participants' rhetorical choice.

Data Collection and Procedures

All 53 students were assigned to write an argumentative essay on the same topic. The students were given one week to complete and submit the essays to the researchers. All essays were written at home rather than in class so that the students could have more time to organise their essays.

After categorising the placement of thesis statements in the essays, four students from each rhetorical pattern were individually interviewed. In total, eight students (P1-8) were interviewed to find out the reasons for them to employ deductive or inductive approach. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed after which the transcription were later examined in relation to the reasons for the choice of rhetorical styles.

Data Coding

In order to examine the discourse organisation, the present study applies the types of analysis by Tirkkonen-Condit and Lieflander-Koistinen (1989) on the location of a thesis statement for distinguishing the deductive and inductive rhetorical patterns. It is decided that there were 4 main locations of the thesis statement: (1) thesis-at-the-beginning (TB), (2) thesis-in-the-middle (TM), (3) thesis-at-end (TE) and (4) thesis-implicit (TI). In terms of placement, a thesis statement that appeared in the beginning of the essays after a short topic explanation was identified is taken as TB. The thesis statement that appeared at the end of the essays is regarded as TE. If the thesis statement

occurred in the middle section of the essay neither at the beginning nor the end, it is considered as TM. Finally, if there was no explicit statement summarising the writer's stance and thus had to be implied, or there was no thesis found, the thesis is deemed as TI.

The researchers defined the deductive pattern as having a TB clearly stated in the introduction. In this pattern, the thesis statement usually preceded the supporting reasons. In contrast, the inductive pattern had a TM, TE or TI. In the case of TM and TE, the supporting reasons often preceded the writer's thesis statement. As for TI, the supporting reasons revolve around the discussed issue implicating the writer's stance without a statement clearly stating the writer's position. Hence, an essay with TB reflects a deductive development of ideas, and an essay with TE, TM, or TI reflects an inductive development of ideas.

The thesis statement also needed to meet two criteria: 1) the statement must explicitly state whether the student either agree or disagree with the statement 'The Malaysian government has done enough in tackling the issue of censorship of television shows and movies. Argue your position' (essays stating both 'agree' and 'disagree' were not acceptable); and 2) the statement must address all the information in the essay.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Locations of Thesis Statement

Findings of this study reveal that the students used all four locations of thesis statement. Table 1 below shows the details of the locations.

TABLE 1
Overall Frequencies of Placement of the Thesis Statement

	Placement of Thesis Statement	Percentage (%)
Deductive	thesis-at-the-beginning (TB)	28
	thesis-in-the-middle (TM)	23
Inductive	thesis-at-end (TE)	11
	thesis-implied (TI)	38
		100

As can be seen in Table 1, the highest percentage for the location of thesis statement is TI (38%), followed by TB (28%), and TM (23%). The lowest is TE (11%). The findings suggest that when writing English argumentative essays, most Malay ESL students (72%) preferred the inductive rhetorical pattern to deductive pattern, a feature similar to Japanese and Indonesian EFL writers (Hinds, 1987; Kuntjara, 2005).

Inductive Approach

Further analysis of the corpus indicates that those who employed the TI (38%) left it to the readers to find the link between the reasons in the four or five paragraphs to the main idea, either agreeing or disagreeing with the topic. In all two or three body paragraphs, the writers argued their case by giving reasons to support whether they agreed or disagreed with the topic given. However, they did not state their thesis statements explicitly in any of the paragraph. The inductive rhetorical organisation is illustrated in Writing Sample A below:

Writing Sample A: TI Pattern

Introduction

As we can see, in Malaysian movies scene, all the movies that are done by the local directors are following the standard of censorship that has been stated. But the international movies which are waited to be aired in Malaysia will be filtered and vet before it gain the license to be shown in the public. The Film Censorship Board of Malaysia is the government agency responsible for granting licenses to the films for viewing.

Body

Malaysian government should play their role in screening the movies or television shows that will be aired on the local television.

Was there enough censorship of television? Many families agree that certain movies should not be shown to young children and certain shows should be censored to an extent, yet they do not see the significant censorship on regular television shows...fear effect on their children.

The Malaysian government also serious in putting ratings- 18-SX, 18-PL and 18-SG in the movies...despite of all these, the dialogue used in this cartoon (South Park) are mainly cursing and foul words... their cheeky and bright colour has attracted the lower age audience which the content of the cartoon are not suitable for them.

Conclusion

As we can see, the Malaysian government are taking steps how to overcome the censorship in movies and television shows. We must support their initiative and their hard work in implementing the censorship in the movies and the television shows.

Note: All errors from original writing are retained.

As illustrated in the selected excerpt, there is no clear thesis statement indicating the writer's position on the topic in any of the paragraph. When asked the reason for the absence of a clear thesis statement, P1 who employed the TI pattern said, "I think the

readers know my opinion about the topic after reading my points. I gave examples how the government censors television programmes”. P1 further said that was “[his] way of saying the government has not done enough”. This particular discourse pattern seems to echo other findings from the Orientals and Asians whose writings are reader-responsible that require readers to ferret out writer’s intended meaning (Hind, 1983; Kuntjara, 2005). Lim (2003) stated that the Malays are known as ‘gentle’ people who do not often tell others what their actual intention directly and explicitly because they consider it to be impolite. “It is said that even if they engaged in a disagreement or when they dislike certain ideas, they will choose the most polite diction or proverbial sayings in conveying their thought so that the hearer would not get hurt” (Lim, 2003, p. 2). Malay argument as a result is “non-confrontational, non-competitive, gentle, friendly, and succumbing, because its final goal is consensus and compromise” (Lim, 2003, p. 31). As noted by Goddard (1997, p. 196), the Malays’ basic strategy of dealing with disagreement is ‘Don’t say it straight, go around’, in other words to be indirect. Thus, it could be safely assumed that P1 did not want the ruling government to be offended by being implicit about his position on the topic.

Interestingly, P1’s conclusion ends with *We must support their initiative and their hard work in implementing the censorship in the movies and the television shows*. Inquired on this, P1 said “The government has done their part, so society and parents also should help out to make it more effective”. Being a collective community, the Malays are also well known as a community that “gives priority to collective accomplishment” in which any attempt to settle differences or disagreement should be conducted in a spirit of *gotong-royong* (cooperation), to work together in order to achieve the most similarities out of the most differences (Lim, 2003, p. 79). Thus, in the context of P1’s writing, his collectivism values are manifested in the use of first personal plural pronoun ‘we’ and being an advocate of in-group obligations.

The next common location to place the opinion-stating sentence was the TM (23%) pattern. Based on the analysis, it was found that some of the participants placed their thesis statements either in the second or third paragraph of their writings which is

considered an inductive approach. The rhetorical organisation is illustrated in Writing Sample B below:

Writing Sample B: TM Pattern

Preamble

Television is must for everybody because it can give more information and entertainment to us. But today many television show and movies shows fill violence improper use of languages. That's why we can see many side effects from the people who watch the movies. They easily being influences by the television shows and movies that they watch. Otherwise, before the filmmakers want to show their movies to the public they must go through a few steps that given by the government like the censorship of the television shows and movies. But has the Malaysian done enough in tackling the issues of censorships?

Introduction

I think the government not enough to censorship certain films because still have some movie scenes send wrong message to the viewers such as glorify racing especially to the young people. (Thesis statement)

Body

Other than that,...

In addition,...

Conclusion

Note: All errors from original writing are retained.

P5 and P6 stated that “it [would be] appropriate to introduce the topic before stating [their] opinion”, thus they have the preamble paragraph prior to the introduction as a means of orienteering readers to the content. As evident in the sample above, P5 sketched a backdrop of her thesis to earn the readers’ trust by drawing on moralistic appealing approach to argumentation before postulating her stance which is a typical strategy by Asian writers (Indrasuta, 1988, Hinkel, 2011).

A further analysis of sample writing B reveals P5 used sentence initial *I think* as stance expression in the second paragraph. In spoken Malay, the expression ‘Saya fikir’ *I think* or ‘Saya rasa’ *I feel* is customarily used to indicate a speaker’s standpoint. Though the expression is perceived as colloquial and discouraged in written forms, the appended structure *I think* is used in P5’s writing probably out of typical practice to express conviction. This is in line with Sweeney’s (1987) observation that the Malay university students tend to manifest their oral tradition in their written assignments. It could be assumed here that there is a transfer of the lexical device in the Malay spoken native tongue to English writing. This finding parallel to Milton and Hyland’s (1999) finding of the high occurrence of epistemic verb *think* in Chinese speaking English writings to express conviction rather than doubt. However, the disparity in the use of lexical device in indicating writer’s conviction according to the Western and Eastern worlds could result in the perception that argumentative essays written by Malay ESL students would be considered lacking assertiveness, a similar concern raised by Kusuyama (2008) for the case of Japanese writers.

Lastly, TE (11%) pattern was the least preferred location for thesis statement in the inductive approach to writing among the participants. For this pattern, the writers’ main ideas do not appear until the last paragraph or conclusion. In the interview, P7 and P8 said in order to “convince [their] lecturers, [they] need to present all the information to support [their] opinion[s]”. P7 and P8’s choice to delay the thesis statement to the end of the paragraph could be culturally stemmed. Goddard (1997) observes that the Malay culture is based around the dimension of high and low; rulers, leaders and the older people occupy a high position while subjects, followers and the young are those in low position. He also states that the Malays place great emphasis on proper conduct, and the integral part of this is speaking the proper way. Adhering to this high and low hierarchical relationship, P7 and P8 display their respect by delaying the thesis statement in the conclusion so that they would not be considered blunt or forceful. ‘Delayed introduction of purpose’ is also evident in Japanese students’ expository writings (Hinds, 1990). However, contrary to Hinds’ (1990) findings, that is, in Japanese prose the

paragraphs before the main idea do not constitute evidence, the Malay students' preceding paragraphs provide reasons or evidence for the thesis statement which shows their ability to argue in a congruent manner. Such ability is also a characteristic found in the advanced native English writers' academic writings (Braddock, 1974). The rhetorical organisation is illustrated in writing sample C below:

Writing Sample C: TE Pattern

<p><i>Introduction</i></p> <p><i>Body</i></p> <p>Finas has done their role in filtering the upcoming movies mainly foreign movies. Film Censorship Act is an act that has been created to filter and vet the content of specific movies that will be aired in Malaysia.</p> <p>Recently, the guidelines on film censorship are going to be revamped soon.</p> <p><i>Conclusion</i></p> <p><u>In conclusion, the government already has do part of their job in censorship the movie and television shows that we watch every day. (Thesis statement)</u></p>
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Note: All errors from original writing are retained.

Deductive Approach

Another employed strategy of positioning thesis statement found in the corpus was TB (28%) pattern. This deductive approach to writing is similar to the characteristic expected in the native English speakers' written texts in which the writer's opinion on the topic is presented explicitly in the first paragraph and supported with reasons. This rhetorical organisation opens an argumentative discourse by introducing the main point before putting forward the reasons or arguments in support of the stance. The rhetorical organisation is illustrated in Writing Sample D below:

Writing Sample D: TB Pattern

Introduction

Censorship has been the way of government to prevent the citizen from influences by the bad things in a television shows and movies. In Malaysia it selves have its own body to control the censorship. The bodies that control the censorship are the FINAS that stand for film industrial development Malaysia. These bodies will censors scrutinized and vet, and then filter, and then snip and cut from the original copy. The effort made by the government that is censorship is not good enough to prevent the consequences to happen. **(Thesis statement)**

Body

The first reason why I am saying like that is because there are still have scene that are not filter it properly.

Secondly, television programs or movies show too much violence.

Last but not least, the floating of pirate DVD in our countries is one of the factor that contributed to this problem.

Conclusion

As a conclusion, the Malaysian government not done enough in tackling the issues of censorship... **(Reiterated stance)**

Note: All errors from original writing are retained.

Both P3 and P4 stated, “[they] learned from [their] English writing instructors that effective ESL essays must have a clear thesis statement [indicating writer’s stance for argumentative essay] in the introduction followed by good supporting points [in the form of] factual information, logical explanations or illustrations”. P3 said, “I was taught the argumentative essay format should consist of introduction, at least two body paragraphs and conclusion. And I must write the thesis statement as the last sentence in the introduction”. Thus, they “tried [their] best to do this in the writing assignment given”. According to P4, “My writing class instructor told to look for the cue word...

Argue your position which means I have to take a stand, agree or disagree". Thus, it could be concluded that the participants' prior English writing instruction plays a major role for them to employ the deductive rhetorical organisation pattern.

CONCLUSION AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

This study is limited by the size of dataset and sampling to draw conclusive generalisations about the Malay ESL students' English writings, but several points could be argued. First, based on the findings there is a predominance of the inductive style in Malay ESL students' English writings which seems to be attributed to the participants' native culture. This suggests that culture and writing are inextricably connected to each other in which native cultural background influences the writings in a second language. Second, other than culture, participants' prior English writing instruction is also seen as contributing factor to the choice of rhetorical decision. It is difficult to control the participants' previous learning experiences in English writing because it is part of the curriculum in Malaysian mainstream schools. Finally, a closer examination of the sample writings reveals Malay ESL students were inclined to use the epistemic verb *think* in their thesis statement which is perceived as lacking conviction by the native English readers which should be warned against.

The findings of this study have several pedagogical implications for ESL writing instructors in Malaysia. They could use contrastive analysis to highlight the structural variations in other cultures which would benefit the students to make an informed rhetorical choice that fit the expectations of the target audience. Such exposures will help to enhance the Malay ESL students' writing skills and make them competent rhetorical players. In addition, ESL writing instructors should introduce other sentence-initial adverbials like *unfortunately*, *certainly*, *clearly*, *indeed*, *obviously*, *perhaps*, *sadly*, *basically*, *interestingly*, *overall*, *overwhelmingly* etc. to their students' as other formal expressions suitable for expository writing to express convictions.

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