

## ***New Directions in Contrastive Rhetoric: Some Implications for Teachers of Writing in Multilingual Contexts***

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Textbooks used in the teaching of writing in English often expose EFL students to paragraphs and essays, which exclusively adhere to English rhetoric. Imposing this sort of rhetorical form as absolutes, teachers of writing require the students to explicitly state the thesis statement in the beginning, followed by the topic development and conclusion. This imposition is motivated by Kaplan's (1966) assertion that students from different cultures need to be made aware of rhetorical conventions of the language they learn in order for them to be able to inculcate the new rhetoric different from their own rhetorical hometowns. Nevertheless, despite its laudable pedagogical intentions to raise student's cultural and rhetorical awareness in English, traditional contrastive rhetoric has been criticized because of many reasons. Regrettably, despite severe attacks directed to traditional rhetoric, teachers of writing in EFL contexts still cling to it and employ it as a framework for teaching writing, and thus are not well informed about new directions that contrastive rhetoric has taken hitherto. This article reviews previous research of contrastive rhetoric, and discusses new directions contrastive rhetoric has taken. It also discusses pedagogical implications of these new directions for literacy pedagogy.

## INTRODUCTION

Most textbooks used in the teaching of writing in English (especially for EFL and ESL learners) expose student writers to paragraphs and essays, which exclusively adhere to English rhetoric (see e.g., Oshima & Hogue, 1991; Regina L. et al., 2001; Reid, 1994; Rooks, 1988). Imposing this sort of rhetorical forms as absolutes, the writers of the books prescribe teachers of writing to require the students to follow English expository prose, which is typically characterized by deductive reasoning: topic sentence and thesis statement at the beginning, and then, topic development supported by examples, illustrations, explanations, and clarification.

Admittedly, the imposition of English rhetoric on student writers which is still prevalent in the current practice of literacy pedagogy reflects the fact that Kaplan's (1966) first model of contrastive rhetoric, which was based on classic Aristotelian rhetoric and logic, remains relevant. Indeed, Kaplan's study on contrastive rhetoric has had a considerable impact on the teaching of composition in both EFL and ESL contexts, giving rise to the persistent adherence to the English rhetorical conventions. The persistent adherence to traditional rhetoric in teaching composition hitherto, I believe, reflects the fact that traditional contrastive rhetoric still plays a prescriptive role in writing classroom, and that teachers of writing have not yet felt the benefits from the findings of modern contrastive rhetoric studies.

The relevance of Aristotelian rhetoric might also be due to attempts from leading rhetoricians such as Janice Lauer and Edward Corbett, who have pioneered the revival of classical rhetoric theories as a basis for the teaching of composition (Connor, 1996, p. 65). It is important to note here that although basing his theory on Aristotle's sense, which emphasizes persuasive appeals such as *ethos* (the personal appeal of the sender), *pathos* (appeals to the emotions or values of the receiver), and *logos* (appeals to reason), Kaplan (2000) himself was concerned primarily with *logos*, the reason being that the students were expected to be able to write exposition rather than persuasion.

Kaplan (1996, 1997) claims that writing is a cultural phenomenon, and that

the logic expressed through the organization of written text is culture-specific. As Kaplan asserts:

...each language and culture has a paragraph order unique to itself, and that part of the learning of a particular language is the mastering of its logical system. (1966, p. 409)

Therefore, since rhetorical convention is not universal, but instead varies from culture to culture, there is a need to make the students aware of the rhetorical conventions of the language they learn in order for them to be able to inculcate the new rhetoric different from their own rhetorical hometowns. If non-native English students are learning how to write in English, they inevitably need to be cognizant of English rhetorical convention. The awareness of the new rhetoric was believed to avoid transfer of the linguistic patterns and rhetorical conventions of the students' native language.

However, despite its laudable pedagogical intentions to raise student's cultural and rhetorical awareness in English, traditional contrastive rhetoric has become the target of criticisms and still continues to spark controversies. This paper (a) briefly looks at criticisms directed against Kaplan's contrastive rhetoric, (b) surveys previous studies on contrastive rhetoric in L1 settings, (c) discusses new directions contrastive rhetoric has taken, and (d) discusses the implications of these new directions for writing pedagogy.

### **Criticisms of Kaplan's Contrastive Rhetoric**

The study of contrastive rhetoric was initiated by Robert Kaplan, an American applied linguist, in 1966. In his article, "Cultural Thought Patterns in Intercultural Education," originally published in *Language Learning* (1966), Kaplan identified five types of paragraph development, each with different rhetorical conventions. According to Kaplan, essays written in English are dominantly linear in its development. In contrast, the paragraph development in Semitic languages is characterized by a complex series of parallel construction. Essays written in Oriental languages (e.g., Chinese and

Korean) are marked by an approach of indirection. In Roman languages, essays are written in digressive manner, which would seem too excessive to a writer of English.

Although Kaplan (1966) had already warned that these differences in organizational writing patterns should not have meant as a criticism of other existing paragraph developments, and has reiterated in his recent article (Kaplan, 2002) that linearity and Aristotelian logic are not cognitively superior to non-linearity and any other framing concepts, his work continuously ignited controversies among linguists. It has been criticized on the grounds that it is too ethnocentric and privileging the writing of native English speakers (Matalane, 1985); it ignores the educational and students' developmental factors (Mohan & Lo, 1985); it rules out the possibility of universality in thought pattern (Kirkpatrick, 1994); it was based on intuition rather than on scientific work (Leki, 1993); it concerns more with the writing product than writing process (see Leki, 1993); it neglects a range of appropriate styles within the same culture (Liddicoat, 1997); it considers L1 interference as a hindrance in L2 writing (Raimes, 1993). Responding to such criticisms, Kaplan has modified his earlier position, calling his 1966 article his "doodles" article and suggesting that rhetorical differences do not necessarily reflect different patterns of thinking (Connor, 1996, p. 16).

In his recent publication (e.g., Kaplan, 1997, 2000), Kaplan admitted the flaws in his contrastive model, making a slight modification in his assertion, but consistently maintaining the central premise of his theory. As he writes:

There were serious flaws in the initial articulation of the notion of contrastive rhetoric. Those flaws have been frequently and elaborately pointed out by any number of scholars (e.g., Enkvist, 1997). The 1966 article contrasted professional writing by native speakers with student writing by second language learners; it did not control for topic, for genre, or for length. It was ethnocentric because it looked at the writing of speakers of languages other than English from the perspective of English; it did not look at the perception of English or other languages by speakers of languages other than English (although it recommended such research). It was, in fact, based on an admittedly relatively poor research design, but

thirty years later, the question is not ‘Were the “doodles” accurate as specified?’ Of course, they were not; they perhaps tended to suggest stereotypes. Texts reflecting any of the doodles can and do occur in every language, but it is possible that particular languages have particular organizational preferences. (Kaplan, 2000, p. 83)

As a remainder, it is important to reiterate here that despite severe criticisms of Kaplan’s contrastive rhetoric, its influential power in the field of writing pedagogy still flourishes and continues to play a role (see Raimes, 1998). The continuing practice of traditional contrastive rhetoric is clearly reflected in many of the most well-known and popular contemporary ESL and *EFL* composition textbooks (Silva, 1990). In fact, Kaplan’s pioneering study on contrastive rhetoric was the first in a new field of ESL focusing on the rhetoric of writing and extending analysis beyond the sentence level (Connor, 1996), and his model was useful in accounting for cultural differences in essays written by college students for academic purposes (Connor, in press). It has had an immense impact on the teaching of writing for both EFL and ESL students, and had, in fact, stimulated considerable research on how writing differs across cultures. The section that follows will review some important studies on contrastive rhetoric that have relevance to the teaching of writing in EFL contexts.

### **Previous Studies on Contrastive Rhetoric in L1 Settings**

This section reviews some studies related to contrastive rhetoric. It is, however, not intended to be exhaustive and to include every study ever conducted. It just focuses on studies that have direct implications in the teaching of writing in EFL contexts.

Although studies on contrastive rhetoric continue to focus on L2 student writing, researchers seem to take different approaches in their attempt to investigate student writing. Leki (1993) points out that the main approaches the researchers take either examine L1 texts from different cultures written for native speakers, and the rhetorical contexts in which these texts are

inscribed or establish textual criteria and search for those qualities in samples of successful and unsuccessful texts by students writing in their L1 (pp. 353-354). She further states that observing L1 discourse and comparing it with English has become the dominant line of inquiry in contrastive rhetoric studies. This is reflected in a number of studies that often produce varied results.

Mohan and Lo (1985), for instance, in an attempt to refute Kaplan's claim, conducted a study of academic writing by Chinese students. The findings revealed that the source of the organizational problems in academic writing does result primarily from the influence of Chinese rhetorical patterns, which according to Kaplan (1966), are characterized by non-linearity or indirectness. Mohan and Lo suggested that students' developmental factors and previous educational experience be taken into account since these factors might have the potential to contribute to students organizational problems.

Another study of Arabic prose written by Saudi Arabian students was conducted by Ostler (1987), one of Kaplan's students. Comparing the structure of twenty-one expository prose with ten English paragraphs selected at random from books, Ostler found that the essays written by Saudi Arabians had a significantly higher number of coordinated sentences than the English passage. Moreover, two languages differed in the use of discourse blocs and discourse unit, with essays by Arabic students containing more discourse units (supporting ideas) than English passages. Thus, the findings of this study support Kaplan's claim that Arabic writing is characterized by a series of parallel constructions.

A study of Korean texts has been carried out by Eggington (1987), who partly supports Kaplan's notion of indirectness in Korean writing. The cause of non-linear development in Korean texts, according to Eggington, is the so-called four-part pattern *ki-sung-chon-kyul*, which is typical of Korean prose. That is, Korean prose consists of an introduction (*ki*), development (*sung*), change state or a turning to somewhat unrelated topic (*chon*), and a conclusion (*kyul*). If one wishes to write academic prose, he needs to leave out the *chon* part, thus creating "beginning, development, and end" pattern.

Eggington also takes into account the impact of Korean students' English proficiency on the students' academic writing. The students who were proficient in English tended to exhibit linear structure in their Korean writing, and the students who are not proficient in English and who have not studied it at English-speaking universities tended to exhibit non linear rhetorical patterns. Interestingly, the Korean *ki-sung-chon-kyul* style corresponds to the Japanese *ki-shoo-ten-ketsu* and the Chinese *qi-cheng-jun-he* styles. This is not surprising, however, as geographically, China, Korea, and Japan are very close (Nobuyuki, 1995).

Other studies in Chinese context were done by Matalene (1985) and Scollon (1991), cited in Connor (1996). In contrast to Mohan and Lo (1985), who dispute Kaplan's notion of indirectness in Chinese writing, both Matalene and Scollon support Kaplan's hypothesis of indirectness in Chinese writing. Scollon relates the notion of indirectness in Chinese writing to the Confucian self, which is different from the Western image of selfness. Furthermore, Matalene mentions the reliance on appeals to history, Chinese tradition, religious texts and proverbs as the factors that contribute to indirectness in Chinese student writings. Though these factors can help make the writing attractive in students' native language, they will be considered as distractions by Western readers.

Apart from contrastive rhetorical studies done in Korean and Chinese contexts, studies in Japanese setting are also numerous. John Hinds, whose influential works on Japanese-English contrast were widely quoted, was one of the prolific researchers who conducted studies of Japanese texts. Analyzing the texts from the *Asahi Shimbun's* daily column *Tensei Jingo* "Vox Populi, Vox Dei" and continuing the study of the *ki-shoo-ten-ketsu* pattern, Hinds (1987) proposed a new typology of language based on speaker and/or writer responsibility as opposed to listener and/or reader responsibility. That is, with respect to paragraph unity, Japanese writing tends to be reader-based because it is the reader who has the responsibility to understand what it is that the writer has intended to say. In contrast, English writing tends to be writer-based since whether or not communication is effective is part of the

writer's responsibility.

Hinds (1990) also conducted research which compared the English texts with the texts written in Japanese, Chinese, Thai, and Korean. What the writings in these languages have in common, as he asserted, are that they follow an organizational pattern, which he calls "quasi inductive." Hinds maintains that "English-speaking readers typically expect that an essay will be organized according to a deductive style. If they find that it is not, they naturally assume that the essay is arranged in the deductive style" (1990, p. 99). He also found that the sample paragraphs in each of the languages he examined shared a common style in that the thesis statement was often stated at the end of the passage. Hinds (1990) called this style "delayed introduction of purpose," a style which produces an undesirable effect of making the essay appear incoherent to the English speaking readers (p. 98).

In Indonesian context, there have been few contrastive rhetorical studies ever conducted. Arsyad's (2000) study, for instance, is one that can provide insights into how Indonesian learners write argumentative texts. In his study, Arsyad examined and compared the rhetorical structure of argumentative texts written by three groups of university students: Indonesian native speakers writing Indonesian texts, Indonesian native speakers writing English texts, and English native speakers writing English texts. The students' texts were examined using both the macro text structure or dialogic analysis and the micro text structure or monologic analysis. The findings indicated that the text organizational structures of argumentative texts in English and in Indonesian were different in respect of the frequency of occurrence of sections-introduction, evaluation and conclusion- and of the sub-sections of refutation, sub-claim, and induction within the problem section. The conclusion from the study is that the differences in rhetorical structures of argumentative texts in Indonesian and English are caused by cultural differences and differences in academic writing conventions. This being the case, Arsyad suggests that Indonesian learners need to learn the preferred rhetorical argumentative structures in English, if they write for English readers.

Other studies (using reflective inquiry method) were conducted by Sugiharto (2001, 2004) and Marcellino (2004). Sugiharto (2001, 2004) found the tendency of indirectness in Indonesian students' writing. He mentioned some variables that could result in paragraph disorganization, including the unfamiliarity with the writing topics assigned the inadequate knowledge of expressing and elaborating complex ideas, and the unfamiliarity with written language conventions.

In a similar vein, Marcellino (2004), examining essays written by sixty Indonesian students who were prepared to study in the U.S.A., also found indirectness in students' texts, further explaining that non-linearity that characterizes Indonesian writers' texts is due to the students' strategy of translating ideas, sentences and/or expression from his native language to English. This strategy, as he points out, makes the students elaborate the thesis statement of a given topic from a variety of indirectly related views.

Although a large number of scholars working with L1 texts employed an approach similar to that used by Kaplan (i.e. comparing writing patterns and styles of L1 with English texts), the findings echo varied results: either confirming or refuting Kaplan's claim.

Whatever the results are, studies devoted to contrastive rhetoric discussed above have indeed enriched and broadened Kaplan's first study on contrastive rhetoric. A number of variables (i.e., developmental factors, educational background, language instruction, language proficiency, and learning strategy), which Kaplan ignored in his first study, have certainly generated lights on the contrastive rhetoric inquiry.

### **New Directions in Contrastive Rhetoric**

Insights drawn from the previous contrastive studies have paved the way for the advancement of contrastive rhetoric, showing at the same time that "the traditional contrastive rhetoric framework is no longer able to account for all the data, and the expanded framework is needed (Connor, 1996, p. 18). As a consequence, purely linguistic frameworks which focused on the

structural analysis of the written product have been supplemented by frameworks which encompass cognitive and sociolinguistic variable. These expanding foci result in new directions in contrastive rhetoric study, which according to Connor (1996) covers such domains as (1) contrastive text linguistics, (2) the study of writing as cultural activity, (3) classroom-based contrastive study, (4) genre analysis, and (5) teaching of ideology. Each of these points will be elaborated below.

Contrastive text linguistics were seen as a relatively new development in contrastive rhetoric, helping revitalize it in the 1980s by providing it with new, valid, and reliable tools for the analysis of texts (Connor, 1996). Drawing insights from major schools of thoughts in text linguistics such as Prague school of linguistics, systemic linguistics, discourse analysis, contrastive rhetoricians have begun to examine discourse level features of texts such as coherence (Eggington, 1987; Evensen, 1990; Hinds, 1987; Wikborg, 1990) as well as topical structure (Connor & Farmer, 1990). These studies of textual analysis clearly extend the scope of earlier studies of contrastive rhetoric, which dealt primarily with expository paragraph-level organization.

Another new direction that contrastive rhetoric has taken concerns the process of learning to write in different culture. Though the notion of culture was used in Kaplan's (1966) contrastive rhetoric, no account was given to the reasons for culture-specific writing styles. In addition, the notion of culture in this sense was often associated with the English culture, thus often creating ethnocentrism and resulting in negative stereotyping of others' languages and culture. However, recent contrastive studies have tried to investigate the effects of culture on learning literacy, and more importantly, to provide accounts on why written texts are organized differently in different cultures. According to Connor (1996), modern contrastive rhetorical studies on culture and literacy have become interdisciplinary, involving not only applied linguistics (focusing on the effects of L1 literacy on L2), but also anthropology and psychology (focusing on the social functions of writing), and education (focusing on the role of instruction on writing in a given

language and culture). The findings obtained from these different disciplines reveal a complex relationship between literacy and culture, cognition, and social behavior.

It was (and has always been) the case that traditional contrastive rhetoric concerns more on the writing product than on the writing process, and therefore, “it has not found much favor with those who adopt a process orientation to teaching writing” (Leki, 1993, p. 350). Modern contrastive rhetoric researchers have come to realize that students’ perceptions and beliefs about literacy and learning in classroom are of importance since these factors are believed to influence the student’s thinking process. In addition, having been informed by sociolinguistics studies, contrastive rhetoric broadens its scope by investigating the act of writing in the classroom where students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds interact not only with the text he writes, but also with the teacher and other peers who function as the readers. Contrastive studies dealing with classroom writing can be considered as one of the important findings in modern contrastive rhetoric study. This is especially true when sociolinguistics studies confirm the presence of cultural mismatches which result from classroom conversation, collaborative groups, and teacher-student conferences (Connor, 1996).

Earlier studies on contrastive rhetoric dealt primarily with academic writing, especially with expository prose. Lending support from the social constructivist approach, which views writing product as a social act that takes place in specific context and specific audience, contrastive rhetorical studies at present have begun to explore and analyze texts from various genres such research articles, grant proposal (academic writing), business writing, editorials, résumés, and job application (professional writing). (see Connor 1996 for the discussion of genre-specific studies of these types of writing) In addition, contrastive rhetorical studies have recently focused on such a genre as narration, persuasion and argumentation (see studies by Arsyad, 2000 on student argumentative writing; Connor, 1987).

Finally, the major foci of the earlier contrastive rhetoric studies have been to compare non-native English student writings with those of English texts,

thus invoking the danger of perpetuating the Anglo-American bias. The results of these earlier studies are implicated in the current teaching of writing, in that the students are taught to write a text that meets the English-speaker expectations instead of writing in their own native lingual and cultural identities. Such an implication in the teaching of writing has certainly posed an ideological problem, and has become the target of recent critics of contrastive rhetoric (Connor, in press). However, with the new directions it takes, contrastive rhetoric is considering the importance of valuing and appreciating students lingual and cultural identities by “emphasizing individual and cultural-societal contributions of writers and explaining that non-nativeness in writing derives from social and cultural traditions imprinted upon each individual whose writing practices contribute variety of norm.” (Connor, 1996, p. 26).

### **Pedagogical Implications**

The new directions that contrastive rhetoric has taken have serious implications in the teaching of writing, particularly in a multilingual and multiethnic context where the students come from diverse cultural and lingual backgrounds. Unlike traditional contrastive rhetoric, modern contrastive rhetoric is interdisciplinary and has become a hybrid field of study, drawing on several related fields such as text linguistics, anthropology, psychology, composition pedagogy, and applied linguistics. The findings of contrastive rhetoric drawn from these related fields have certainly extended the scope of the traditional contrastive rhetoric. From a pedagogical perspective, the findings of modern contrastive rhetoric can offer several benefits to classroom teachers. In English writing class, for instance, where the students come from different cultural and lingual backgrounds, students’ inability to write a paragraph that meets the expectation of English readers do not necessarily reflect the students’ personal or cognitive inadequacies but are instead part of students’ endeavors in adjusting themselves to learn the conventions of another discourse community whose rhetorical tradition

differs from their own. This inability might also be due to students' unfamiliarity with the convention the new rhetoric requires of them. In other words, they have not yet got a feel for what kinds of rhetoric their English readers expect them to write. The study conducted by Sugiharto (2005) revealed that if the students have developed and accumulated schematic knowledge of what the English rhetoric looks like, they would be able to write an English prose in a linear order. Findings from this study also imply students' developmental readiness in acquiring new rhetoric, a position that Mohan and Lo (1980) take.

In addition, students' attempts in writing an English prose that deviates from the expectation of English readers should not necessarily be attributed to L1 interference. Teachers of writing should be advised to reject the L1 interference as the sole factor causing the students' difficulties writing in another language. In fact, comparative studies on translation versus direct composition conducted by Kobayashi and Rinnert (1992) demonstrated the usefulness of the students' native language (students' L1) as a writing strategy before writing in English. In this respect, students' L1 is shown to be an important resource rather than a hindrance in decision making in writing (Raimes, 1993). Other factors such as educational backgrounds, previous language training, language proficiency, language instruction, genre characteristics and learning strategy should be taken into account as potential variables that might either foster or impede the students' success in communicating to audience that has expectation from the texts they construct.

Probably, another important implication for teachers of writing, thanks to the advances in modern contrastive rhetoric, has been the diminution of the product (textual)-process dichotomy, which is often perceived as the polar opposite in literacy pedagogy. Traditional contrastive rhetoric was blamed for concerning itself with the written product and ignoring the writing process the students undergo, therefore giving the impression of mutual exclusiveness of one approach at the expense of the other. Nevertheless, in modern contrastive rhetoric a product-process opposite becomes no longer valid. It should be clear that modern contrastive rhetorical studies consider the

importance of not only the products of expert writers to be compared, analyzed and duplicated (textual orientation), but also the process of how novice writers exploit their own cognitive resources in text construction and reconstruction (process orientation). In this respect, students' personal growth (which might be influenced by their native cultural and lingual backgrounds) in learning another rhetorical structure not belonging to their own is valued and appreciated.

As for the genre-specific studies, the findings of the modern contrastive studies can be applied not only in academic writing (research articles and grant proposal), but also professional writing business writing, editorials, and *résumés*). With regard to the latter, contrastive rhetoric studies are most suitable to the teaching of English for specific Purposes (ESP). For example, teachers can discuss what cross-cultural studies have revealed regarding the structure of business letters in, say, Japanese, and how this might differ in English, Chinese, and Indonesian business writing. In fact, genre-specific studies showed that the writings from these different cultures are considerably different (see, for example, Connor, 1996). It is thus clear that insights from these cross-cultural studies on contrastive rhetoric can deepen both teachers and students' understanding of the fact that preferences in writing styles are culturally informed. In so doing, they can analyze qualities of texts that are admired and considered to represent successful communication.

In order to be able to communicate successfully in the target language (i.e. English), students should have an awareness of what rhetorical convention of English looks like and what the readers expect of them in writing. Lacks of awareness of such cross-cultural differences in text characteristics and reader expectations are believed to be the main cause preventing non-native student writers to write successfully in the international community (Connor, 1996). In fact, research in reading reveals that readers can understand better if they are familiar with both the content and the form or rhetorical patterns of the texts they read (Carrell, 1984).

It should be apparent that teachers have the responsibility to encourage their students to develop this awareness so that they can construct a text

which hopefully corresponds to that of English speaking readers. This can be done by making use of the findings of modern contrastive rhetoric studies as “a consciousness-raising device” (Raimes, 1993, p. 247); that is, they are used as the means through which the end can be achieved.

In sum, Kaplan’s seminal work on contrastive rhetoric in 1966 was, in fact, based on three important intellectual traditions: contrastive analysis, the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, and Christensen’s generative rhetoric (Matsuda, 2001). Since then, we have witnessed how contrastive rhetoric has progressed rapidly and how the influence of other fields of studies such as text linguistics, anthropology, psychology, and applied linguistics have enriched and expanded the scope of traditional Kaplan’s contrastive rhetoric. This influence also shows us that contrastive rhetoric is becoming more protean and more sensitive to “the social context and local situatedness and particularity of writing activity” (Connor, 1996), thus lessening the prescriptive role contrastive rhetoric has been playing in the writing classroom. More importantly, the influence of other related fields of studies has surely strengthened the framework of contrastive rhetoric as a field of inquiry. Only with a strong and sound framework can contrastive rhetoric play a more legitimate role in writing classrooms.

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