

Contrastive Rhetoric and the Japanese Writer of EFL

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In the last two decades, contrastive rhetoric (CR) has expanded tremendously in scope. It has gone beyond text analysis to include investigations of political and historical contexts for writing as well as cross-cultural differences in the composing process. The fundamental attitude of CR toward L2 text production as interfered with by L1 rhetoric, however, remains unchanged. Taking this deterministic approach, the author discusses the pedagogical implications of CR research for L2 writing teachers. More specifically, suggestions are made with reference to English and Japanese rhetorics as to how L2 teachers can take advantage of learners' L1 rhetoric in the orienting process to L2 writing. The foci of discussion are on the similarities and differences between English and Japanese texts in terms of organizational style, use of logic and relative relationship between writer and reader, and instructional methods of Japanese and English writing in Japan. The discourse patterns under discussion include expository, argumentative, and technical writing.

対照修辞学と日本人の英語作文

過去二十年間、対照修辞学 (contrastive rhetoric) の研究範囲はかなり広がってきた。文章の分析に留まらず作文過程における異文化の違いや、政治的、歴史的背景などについての研究まで及ぶ。しかし、外国語を用いて文章を書くときにはいつも母国語の修辞学の干渉を受けるという基本主張は変わっていない。この観点から、著者は対照修辞学の研究が外国語の作文の教師にとってどのような意味を持つのかを検討する。具体的には、英語と日本語の修辞学を中心にして、学習者の母国語の修辞学を外国語の作文指導に活用する方法について提言する。また、本稿では英語と日本語の文章構成、論理の利用、著者と読者との関係および日本における日本語と英語の作文指導法について論考する。文章のジャンルとしては説明文、論議文および専門技術的な文章を扱う。

1. Introduction

Having its roots in the tradition of the Prague School Linguistics, contrastive rhetoric (CR) was first introduced by Kaplan as a research approach to text analysis in the early sixties (Kaplan, 1966). After examining over 600 English compositions, Kaplan claims that non-native writers "employ a rhetoric and a sequence of thought that violate the expectations of the native reader" (p. 4). He argues that the rhetorical organization in his writing samples shows negative transfer from the non-native writers' L1 rhetoric and culture (1972).

In spite of the support expressed by some researchers and educators (e.g., Bander, 1978; Santana-Seda, 1974), Kaplan has been severely criticized for his research design and the specific thought or organizational patterns attributed to various culture groups (see Leki, 1991). In his modified version of CR (1987), Kaplan contends that although all kinds of rhetorical modes are possible in any written language, each language has certain preferences. He also points out (Kaplan, 1988) that since a text is a complex structure involving syntactic, semantic, and discoursal features (including cohesion and coherence, schematic structure, audience, and the sociolinguistic functions of a given text), CR does not and cannot ignore the composing process. A new direction for CR research is thus suggested. Researchers now look beyond contrasts in formalistic features and include investigations of the political and historical contexts of writing, as well as the socio-psychological, interactive properties of texts. This global view leads to the recognition of the fact that purpose, task, topic, and audience are all culturally informed (Carrell, 1984; Hinds, 1987; Jones & Tetroe, 1987). Writing is no longer seen as just creating and imitating written texts; it is a "social phenomenon that requires more than a minimal control of syntactic and lexical items in the target language" (Kaplan, 1988, p. 297).

Over the years, CR has expanded tremendously the scope of its research, resulting in new definitions of CR. Hudelson (1989) views CR as based on the assumption that not only are literacy skills learned and culturally shaped, but they are also transmitted by educational systems. Martin (1991) treats text as an interactive, dynamic, communicative process rather than a simple physical structure. He sees the ultimate goal of CR as providing information about what learners bring with them from their own cultures, and how it interacts with what they come across in the process of composing. This broadening of CR research brings us to a new understanding of the role of L1 rhetoric in L2 writing. The following sections survey the findings of previous CR research pertaining to English and Japanese rhetorics in particular, and consider what pedagogical implications those findings have for L2 writing teachers.

2. English and Japanese Rhetorics

2.1 Rhetorical Organization

To date, researchers have not come to an agreement as to how to define English and Japanese rhetorics. It has been shown, however, that the widely accepted, topic-oriented, linear pattern is not the only one apparent in a normal English text, nor is it unique to the English language (Braddock, 1974). For example, some rhetoricians (Young et al., 1970) argue that "cooperative"

forms of argumentation dominate English writing. They claim that English writers, instead of giving reasons to sway their opponents, try to move gradually toward a more central position that can be shared by both the writer and the reader. Alternatively, based on samples written by native speakers of English, Cheng (1982) describes English writing as a series of concentric circles emanating from a base theme. Her conception is that the most important idea is the closest to the center, whereas the outermost circle encloses the rest of the article. This uncommon view of English writing is worth noting as it leads one to consider that the interpretation of rhetorical patterns may be influenced by a reader's biases.

Hinds (1983a) argues that Japanese, like English, has a variety of typical rhetorical patterns. Generally, Japanese writing is marked by the circular approach common to most Asian language texts (Kaplan, 1966). It is characterized as an indirect approach "turning and turning in a widening gyre" (p.10). It remains, however, a controversial issue as to whether or not Japanese rhetoric is indeed circular and indirect.

Much less problematic are two major literary traditions in Japanese that are considerably different from the organizational style found in most English texts. One, *jo-ha-kyuu*, developed from Noh drama, consists of a fairly linear sequence of "introduction-development-climax or conclusion." According to Hinds (1983b), this tradition is similar to the English rhetorical style. The other, *ki-shoo-ten-ketsu*, is a better known framework that has its origin in classical Chinese poetry and is still used by sophisticated Korean and Chinese writers (Achiba & Kuromiya, 1983; Hinds, 1990). This style begins with a long indirect introduction of the topic, which is further developed in the second part, followed by an abrupt transition or a vaguely related point, before all the previous parts are brought together in a conclusion.

While both *jo-ha-kyuu* and *ki-shoo-ten-ketsu* represent Japanese traditional rhetorical organizational styles, their application is no longer prevalent in modern Japanese prose. Although the latter is still introduced to Japanese students in elementary and junior high schools, it is rarely practiced. An informal survey by the author reveals that most college-level students do not know the *jo-ha-kyuu* pattern. Yet it is possible that either or both of these textual schemata subconsciously form the basis of Japanese speakers' judgment of good writing.

Besides the above traditions, another style has been found to describe modern Japanese writing. It is characterized by the author's decision to select "a baseline theme" (Hinds, 1980, p.133). Unlike the English concentric

approach described by Cheng (1982), the Japanese writers using this style return overtly to the underlying theme before progressing to a different perspective. This dominant style in popular essays apparently contributes greatly to the young generation's schemata of modern Japanese writing.

2. 2 Use of Logic

Kaplan (1966) suggests that different rhetorical styles represent different sequences of thought. In expository writing, Japanese and English writers seem to differ greatly in their use of logic. Hinds (1990) sees English expository paragraphs as a hierarchical development around a topic. Other sentences in the same paragraph evolve from the topic sentence and an indefinite number of subtopics or perspectives develop in prescribed ways. Kaplan (1988), like Hinds (1990), claims that such organization reflects scientific logic transformed into a deductive model which expository writers aim for and are consistently taught at school.

Although the deductive style is shown to be also possible in Japanese writing (Kobayashi, 1984), Hinds (1980) identifies a different expository prose style in Japanese popular essays. He finds that in popular essays most paragraphs tend to be organized by a return to a baseline theme, with loosely connected perspectives. He thus argues that Japanese writing is more commonly based on an inductive style and labels it, along with Thai, Korean, and Chinese, as having "delayed introduction of purpose" (Hinds, 1990, p. 98). Similar claims have been made by Kobayashi (1984), who found in her research that when writing in their L1, Japanese tended to use a specific-to-general pattern and to relate text information to their own experience. By contrast, Americans tended to follow a general-to-specific rule and to restate text information. Kobayashi comments that when Japanese writers argue, they prefer to personalize the topic, be vague about the major issues, and tend to focus on trivial points. Harder (1984) regards this as a problem showing Japanese writers' inability to argue as a result of their cultural assumptions about what is rhetorically agreeable. The truth, however, may be that for a Japanese reader what is hinted at is more important and acceptable than what is too bluntly presented.

Another illustration of the Japanese sense of logic is given by Ballard and Clanchy (1991), who suggest that Japanese learners, out of their great concern for achieving harmony, often try to justify the bases of differing interpretations in their source materials and make no attempt to test or evaluate them. Inevitably, their work is judged by English readers as illogical and lacking critical thought.

2. 3 Roles of Writer and Reader

In his comparative study of English and Japanese expository and argumentative writing, Hinds (1987) points out the cross-cultural differences in the roles of writer and reader. He classifies Japanese as a “reader-responsible” language and English a “writer-responsible.” He found that Japanese writers do not need to give clarification or full explanations of their views. Instead, they drop hints and leave behind nuances (Suzuki, 1975). This type of prose earns high praise from Japanese readers because it offers them opportunities to savor the “mystification” (p. 31) of language. On the other hand, the reader-oriented approach of English writing makes writers responsible for presenting their views clearly.

Japanese and English writers also differ in their assumption of shared knowledge with the reader (Hinds, 1987). Japanese texts tend to assume a very high degree of knowledge shared between the writer and the reader, whereas English readers expect most of the propositional structure to be provided by the writer. The latter idea suggests that the writer has to assume very heavy responsibility. According to Hinds, the reasons for these differences are related to the different literary traditions and expectations of the two different cultures. Historically, English writers’ great concern for clarity can be traced back to the emphasis on literacy in classical Greece and post-reformation England. The Japanese, on the other hand, are oriented to shared social purposes and value indirectness and nuances. Language is, for them, a medium for social cohesion rather than self-expression. Their attitude toward reader responsibility can be seen both as a continuation of the influence of Classical Chinese, and as a reflection of their communicative responsibility to be empathetic and intuitive (Carson, 1992; Hinds, 1987).

In their examination of business writing styles from different cultures, Jenkins and Hinds (1987) found that English business letters, like expository and argumentative writing, reflect a reader-oriented approach. They see two most distinctive features of English business letters: personalizing the content to the reader and taking a “you-attitude” to appeal to the reader’s pride. Japanese business writing, on the other hand, focuses on the relationship, or space, between writer and reader. The writer is careful in selecting the format and language that will most effectively establish or maintain the appropriate relationship with the reader. This emphasis on the socially acceptable distance between the writer and the reader differs greatly from the English business writer’s attempt to create familiarity with their readers.

In her study of technical and business writing, Dennett (1990) found that not only do the Japanese and Americans have very different attitudes toward the audience, their attitudes toward writing also differ. Her American subjects used writing in their work as a discovery process for themselves as well as a tool for reporting work, whereas her Japanese subjects generally regarded writing as "the wrap-up stage of thinking, a separable work task to be addressed separately" (p. 7). Dennett's findings suggest that the Japanese treat writing more as a product than as a process. This difference in what writing means to the Japanese and Americans is full of implications for teaching. Dennett also found that while all the Americans showed great concern with their readers, there was general indifference toward the audience among the Japanese.

To conclude this section on rhetorical differences, I would like to stress that apart from the tendency to dichotomize different rhetorics, some CR researchers easily fall into a monolithic idealism in criticizing other rhetorics. Negative views of Japanese writers' use of logic, for example, reflect biases of researchers with an English rhetorical perspective. This leads one to question the validity of the use of English rhetorical standards (British or American) to evaluate the English writings of non-native writers for non-native readers. Unfortunately, the issue of what rhetorical framework to use for writing in English as an international medium has not attracted much attention from CR researchers.

3. Writing Instruction in Japan

Students in Japan, on the whole, receive very little or no direct instruction in writing in their native language. It is generally assumed that, once past elementary school, one will have acquired the basic writing skills and thus no longer need any formal training in writing. There is also a general belief among Japanese teachers that writing is learned by reading. Hence the emphasis of Japanese language instruction is on reading model texts rather than training writing skills. Practice in writing under a teacher's guidance seldom occurs beyond junior high school. The instructional styles and beliefs of most Japanese composition teachers are described in a study by Liebman-Kleine (1986), which shows that Japanese writing teachers put emphasis on clarity, organization, and beauty of the language. Since writing is regarded as a private act, teaching tends to take the form of lectures, and there is little sharing of writing or ideas among students. Memorization is still considered an effective learning method, and much literary reading is required. As a result, most Japanese students' L1 rhetorical skills remain underdeveloped.

In junior and senior high school, students learn English and have composition classes, but there is little training in writing beyond the sentence level. Not surprisingly, classroom instruction in English composition resembles the Japanese model. According to my own observations, the teaching routines most often found in an English composition class are translating, asking for translation, explaining grammar and word usage, and reading aloud. In almost all cases, lectures are given in L1, and emphasis is placed on grammar and spelling. Very often, students have to memorize incoherent sentences as if they formed a complete passage and recite them in front of the teacher in or out of class. In a typical high school level English writing class, tasks are restricted to sentence-combining, paraphrasing, and translating, and the largest unit of discourse is the paragraph.

4. Implications for Pedagogy

Putting aside the issue of the rhetorical standards for international English, CR research in English and Japanese rhetorics raises our awareness of the fact that problems are bound to arise when there are cross-cultural differences in attitudes about what constitutes good writing. This awareness leads to several implications for the teaching of EFL writing to learners with a Japanese mindset, which, in some cases, also apply to learners with other L1 backgrounds.

First, it is essential that composition teachers adopt a new attitude toward their students' errors, and address the issue of sensitivity to cross-cultural differences in the classroom. Leki (1991) thinks that the highest value of CR studies is that they simplify students' tasks by offering them glimpses into the differences between the target language and their native language. Such differences inform the students, and possibly the native teacher, that they come from different rhetorical traditions which have been shaped by different cultures. In a culturally heterogeneous group, the teacher can use students' L1 knowledge and experience as a resource for uncovering cross-cultural differences. Awareness of the differences is important because it makes students realize that to become part of the target language discourse community, they need to develop new attitudes, to meet certain criteria of the target language's traditions, and, in some cases, to put aside their native language habits.

To Japanese learners, for example, adjusting to Western logic—which perhaps contradicts some of their own cultural attitudes—can be extremely difficult at the beginning. For that reason, Harder (1984) argues that adjustments must be made in both directions. This means, on the one hand, that Japanese learners must recognize that their own patterns do not necessarily fit into the Western ideological structure; on the other hand, the teacher must

learn to appreciate Japanese patterns of communication, identify cross-cultural differences, and help students make transitions to Western patterns. Instead of telling students to abandon their Japanese traditions entirely on the first day of instruction, the teacher can start out with their patterns and work from there. One example is that when a pervasive "specific-to-general" pattern is found in the students' texts, it can be helpful to have the students practice reversing the arrangement of ideas to emulate the Western style. Likewise, in teaching translation, it can be helpful for the teacher to capitalize on the differences in overall organization between the two languages and make students aware of the necessity to reorganize the flow of information from the original (see Hinds, 1990, for an illustration of English/Japanese translation).

Second, the social-constructionist rationale behind CR focuses learners' attention on audience and context (Hinds, 1990; Kaplan, 1988; Leki, 1991). In most cases, an L2 audience or context represents a discourse community of different cultural knowledge, experiences, assumptions, and expectations. As discussed by Dennett (1990) and Jenkins and Hinds (1987), the Japanese seldom compose with an audience in mind except when writing letters. Furthermore, they assume a high degree of shared knowledge with their readers. These mismatches create barriers which make it difficult for Japanese writers to function effectively among native speakers of English. Hence, there is a need for the teacher to teach them audience analysis skills and the expectations of the English reader in the pre-writing stage. In an academic context, it is especially important for the teacher to explain explicitly to the students the widely accepted criteria used by academic audiences to evaluate their work. Such essential ingredients of good English expository writing as clarity, significance, support, unity, and conciseness are not necessarily taken for granted by Japanese learners.

Third, it is the responsibility of English composition teachers to teach students how to develop a critical mind and take a stand. English writers are expected to show a high standard of critical thinking and argue their views in a rational manner. The same expectations are, however, either non-existent or less stressed among the Japanese. Teachers cannot assume that critical thinking is already inherent in their students' minds. Since neither a critical attitude nor self-expression is as highly appreciated by the Japanese as it is by English speakers, Japanese students may need a great deal of time and practice to learn how to be critical writers. Teachers should be ready to accept challenge with great patience. They can try to create non-threatening situations where students can express and exchange opinions with one another.

Fourth, the writing teacher can incorporate the textual orientation of CR into a process approach. Leki (1991) argues that L2 readings should be used along with L1 readings as models for comparison and analysis. In so doing, students will be able to discover and consider such rhetorical differences as use of logic, writers' attitudes, and writer-reader relationships between the two languages. Scarcella (1984) also suggests that teachers guide such activities by feeding students information about the cultural and discoursal differences between L1 and L2. Giving explicit explanations and teaching close reading skills should help learners to identify and understand the differences better. The goal here is to help learners cultivate a sense of Western logic and rhetorical diversity. Once their knowledge of the target language and culture is developed, the learners' consciousness of their own rhetorical styles may increase.

In conclusion, CR has great potential to inform the teaching of second languages on both micro- and macro-levels. The new social-constructionist view of CR brings the teacher's and learners' attention to both the process and the product of rhetoric. It is my hope that CR research will continue to shed light on second language teaching by studying more closely the connection between process and product, as well as the ideological dimension of writing in different cultures.

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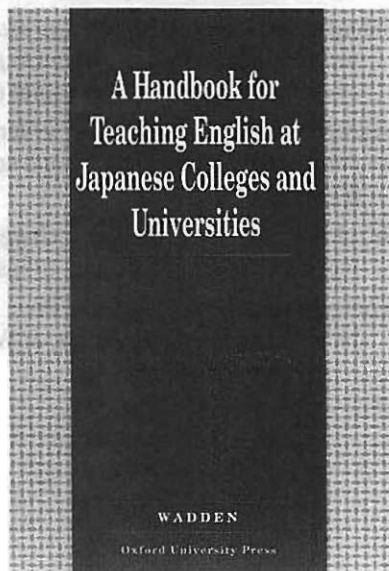
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