Contrastive Rhetoric in English-Chinese Context: From Schemata and Cultural Schemata to Rhetorical Features

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Abstract: This paper reviews studies concerning rhetorical differences in Chinese and English and investigates the communication between Chinese and English rhetorical conventions. Differences are found in the two conventions in terms of thinking patterns, ideology, strategies, and audience. Implications for multicultural education are provided.

Rhetoric is defined as the choice of linguistic and structural aspects of discourse – chosen to produce an effect on an audience (Purves, 1988). According to Purves, rhetoric is a matter of choice to produce certain effects as opposed to those that are determined by lexical and grammatical structures. Contrastive rhetoric, a subset of text linguistics, examines the dynamics of writing between different language systems and cultures. It studies rhetorical patterns in different cultures and languages, and investigates how two languages interact in the writer's production when the writer knows two or more languages.

Purves (1988) explained the rationale for contrastive rhetoric, mentioning two comparative studies of writing, Scribner and Cole (1981) and Heath (1983). In those two studies, the relation of culture to discourse and particularly to written discourse is examined. Both studies come to one point: cultural groups to which an individual belongs have different ways of using and perceiving written texts. The cultural differences in written discourse are manifested in two aspects: what is written and how it was written.

The Cornerstone of Contrastive Rhetoric

The theory of contrastive rhetoric was originated from the theory of linguistic relativity, called the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of linguistic relativity or the Whorfian hypothesis, which suggests that different languages affect perception and thought in different ways (Connor, 1996). The Whorfian hypothesis has been criticized frequently by linguists and psychologists (Clark & Clark, 1977; Fishman, 1977; Pinker, 1994). But Hunt and Agnoli (1991), after careful review of theories and experiments in linguistics and psychology, state that every language is translatable, but there is often a loss involved – an utterance that is completely natural in one language may be completely unmanageable in another. This supports the Whorfian hypothesis that language influences thought. In 1966, Kaplan confirmed the Whorfian view that language influenced thought and declared that logic and rhetoric were culture specific (Kaplan, 2001).

Method

The literature review process is composed of two phases. Phase I is to search for dissertations about second language writing in English and Chinese contexts. Trochim (2001) suggests that it is helpful to find a similar study containing a literature review. By checking this literature review, we can have a quick start on our own literature review (Trochim, 2001). I delved into dissertations to get rich descriptions of research methodology and detailed information about those rhetorical conventions including the right academic sources. Usually the sources were books or research reports. Some valuable journal articles were also found. After searching Dissertation Abstracts with keywords *contrastive rhetoric*, *Chinese*, *English*, *second*

language writing and *cross-cultural writing*, I got more than 100 dissertations, of which six matched my research interest.

From these six dissertations, books, reports and journal articles were found about the theory of contrastive rhetoric and contrastive rhetoric in Chinese and English contexts. All the materials were read through and details related to my research interest were noted down and coded. During this process, a literature review framework was built up and refined gradually. In the end, three issues came out to form the literature review framework: (a) Are there different thinking patterns in different cultures? How do they influence cross-cultural writing, especially in English and Chinese contexts? (b) Do cultural schemata have an impact on students' cross-cultural writing? What is it like in English and Chinese context? (c) How do scholars in this field contrast Chinese rhetoric and English rhetoric? What are the findings?

After the framework was established, Phase II was conducted. Googlescholar.com was searched for related academic sources in a more extensive way in order to fill in any hole that may have existed in the Phase I literature search. The same key words as those in Phase I were used. Findings emerging from the literature review are categorized below as follows: (a) schemata, (b) cultural schemata, and (c) contrastive rhetoric of Chinese vs. English.

Schemata

The inquiry into contrastive rhetoric was first started by exploring different thinking patterns in ESL (English as a second language) students' writing. In 1966, Kaplan analyzed the English expository writings of some 600 ESL students. In that study, by comparing ESL students' English writings with English rhetoric textbooks, Kaplan identified five distinct rhetorical patterns: English, Semitic, Oriental, Romance, and Russian (Kaplan, 2001; see Figure 1).
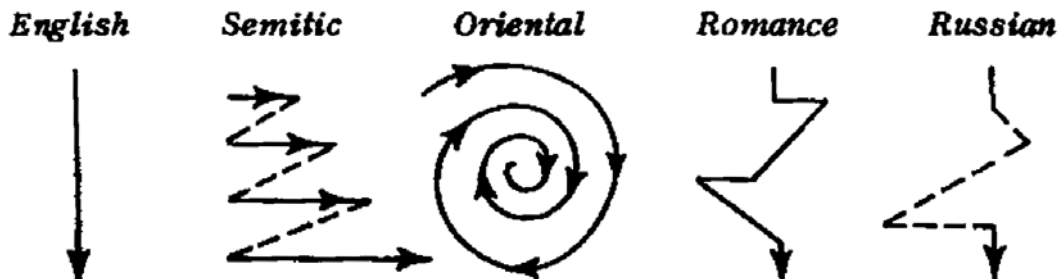

Figure 1. Five rhetorical patterns.

Thus, he suggested that rhetoric varies from culture to culture, and that the rhetoric in the first language can be transferred to students' second language writing (Kaplan, 2001). Kaplan's study was a continuing pursuit of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which postulates that differences in the syntax and semantics of a language may influence the thought patterns of native speakers and writers of different languages (Whorf, 1956).

Western Verbal Logic vs. Chinese Nonverbal, Pictorial Logic

Further exploration opened up a new horizon in the issue of culturally different logic in western alphabetic languages and Chinese logographic language (Shen, 1989). This so-called new horizon was actually existent before the inception of contrastive rhetoric. It can be traced back to the beginning of the 20th century when imagism was found in poems by Ezra Pound, Amy Lowell and others. Pound first learned Japanese and then delved into Chinese characters and Chinese poems, from which his poetic imagism was inspired (Ayers, 2004).

Chinese poems highlight the use of the technique of *yi jing* 意境, of creating a picture in the mind, which accounts for the Chinese nonverbal, pictorial logic. Shen (1989) explains that it is a thinking process conducted largely in pictures and then transcribed into words. The picture described by the poet is taken over and developed by the reader. The imagination of the author and the imagination of the reader are thus overlapping (Shen, 1989).

In English writing, logic is conceptualized by the arrangement of propositional content and managing the systems of cohesion and coherence. To some extent, this conceptualization is culturally defined (Kaplan, 1988). In the United States, two traditions are reflected in the teaching of writing: one is syllogistic and the other is hierarchical (Wilkerson, 1986). Great value is placed on clarity and precision in the framework of a rigorously logical system (Kaplan, 1988).

Cultural Schemata

A widely accepted definition of culture explains it as a set of rules and patterns shared by a given community (Goodenough, 1964). Cultural schemata refer to the ideological modes well-established in a cultural convention. People's thinking in that culture is to some extent prescribed by the ideological background knowledge. China's five-thousand-year history accumulated a number of such ideological modes that impact upon Chinese people's thinking and, accordingly, rhetoric (Lin, 1999).

Historical Significance of Writing in Chinese Society

In order to keep order among the highly diversified peoples on that vast land, ancient China's emperors needed some rules. Confucius met this need by providing rules for all walks of life in his Four Books and Five Classics. Those rules formulated a framework within which Chinese people dealt with their everyday life. There was no exception for writing. Since writing was so significant for personal development, specific and strict rules of Chinese writing were established. 八股文 *Ba gu wen* or "eight-legged essay" was a typical example to illustrate the rules of writing in Chinese history. Nowadays, students are not asked to write according to those rules anymore, but some simplified versions are still in use by some teachers of Chinese to teach Chinese composition. Some teachers of English also try to apply these rules to teach English composition since similarities between Chinese expository essays for college entrance exams and GRE (Graduate Record Examination) writing were found (Hu-chou, 2000).

Collectivism and Harmony

Confucianism was the school of philosophy that influenced or even dominated Chinese cultural conventions. It advocated collectivism and harmony among people, who were organized in a hierarchical relationship and took reciprocal obligations. Mutual respect was highly valued, and so was the willingness to participate in the making of communal harmony (Ames, 1991). Confucianism suggested that education should emphasize teaching by strict moral models (Young, 1994), which helped to consolidate the social hierarchy and communal harmony.

Oliver (1971) analyzed traditional Chinese culture and concluded:

> Rhetoric in Chinese society thus came to be very much akin to sheer propriety. The utility which rhetoric was to serve was the maintenance of harmony. The way to this goal was through ceremony, etiquette, and methodology. There was a right way of doing things – a way that was established and accepted. When behavior conformed to this pattern of expectation, the individual's relations with his fellows would be predicable and dependable. Accordingly, the community would have a decent and decorous stability. (p.145)

The Contrastive Rhetoric of Chinese vs. English

Three phenomena are under discussion in contrastive rhetoric: *audience*, *genre,* and *rhetorical structure*. Focusing on audience, two questions are investigated: who has the authority to write and who may be addressed. Genre concerns what may be discussed and in what form. Selection and arrangement of evidence is the focus of the third set of questions which address the issue of rhetorical structure (Kaplan, 2005).

Audience

Audience can also be explained as the participants of the activity of writing, including the author and the reader. The relationship between those two sides was claimed to be different in different cultures. Hinds (1988, p.143) introduces the concept of reader versus writer responsibility by suggesting that in Japanese, and probably in Chinese, the reader is generally more responsible for effective communication than the writer. Hinds (1988) also believes that English writers or speakers have the responsibility to make clear and well-organized statements, so if there is any breakdown in communication, it is "because the speaker/writer has not been clear enough, not because the listener/reader has not exerted enough effort in an attempt to understand" (p.143). Hinds believes that reader-responsibility is relevant to Chinese, which means the readers have to make inferences using their own knowledge. Snively (1999), in her research, confirmed the following ideas: First, the Chinese language is ideographic, pictorial, concrete, and consisting of separate characters with few grammatical markers, so the reader is expected to pull the words together in his own mind, make his own jumps, and rely on word order to show the connections (as cited in Taborek & Adamowski, 1984, p. 91). Second, the widespread use of metaphor means Chinese people are unwilling to talk about their feelings directly, but rather use metaphors to avoid directness. Indirectness is valued highly in Chinese writing: one shouldn't state one's opinion directly, as it is considered as rude, abrupt and lacking aesthetic qualities (Snively, 1999). Third, *pithy writing* requires the reader to read between the lines. Current Chinese writers will quite naturally follow that style. The technique of *yi jing* 意境, of creating a picture in the reader's mind, also leads to reader-responsibility. As in poetic or literary works in any language, the writer suggests; the reader also does some creative work, pulling together the words to create a mental picture (Snively, 1999).

Genre

Using data from ESL students' first languages (L1) has produced convincing evidence for the existence of different rhetorical patterns across languages. Much research has been done on expository writing. Kachru (1983), examining expository texts written in Hindi, discovered that topic unity is not a requirement of a paragraph; in Hindi there is no need for an explicit topic statement, and Hindi expository writing has a greater tolerance of digressions than English. A lot of research findings concern the differences between Chinese expository writing and its English counterpart. Chinese expositions often follow some well-established templates, among which are the classic eight-legged essay, four-part essay and three-part essay. Rhetorical devices are pervasive in Chinese expositions (Fagan & Cheong, 1987).

Rhetorical Structure

Kaplan (2005) indicated that different cultures and languages may use different rhetorical structures (i.e., different ways of dealing with evidence). Western scientific and technical discourse communities attach great importance to evidence and the arrangement of evidence in lab reports, working papers, reviews, grant proposals, technical reports, conference papers, journal articles, and so forth, while in China, for a long period of history, natural science as an imported subject was considered trivial and tricky. The preference "for multitudinous specifics…

is at odds with a Chinese literary tradition that prefers a densely selective and suggestive…style" (Li, 1996, p. 120).

Implications for Multicultural Education

Culturally responsive pedagogy has been used to provide equal educational opportunities to indigenous youth for over 40 years (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008). In the 1980s and 1990s, there was an increasing number of racially and ethnically diverse students in U.S. schools, which brought the discussion of culturally responsive education into the mainstream. Pewewardy and Hammer (2003) noted that much was learned about student motivation, resistance, culture and cognition, language and cognition, and so on.

Ethnocentrism and ethnorelativism are two important concepts concerning culturally responsive pedagogy. Ethnocentrism assumes that the world view of one's own culture is central to all reality, which may result in negative stereotyping of others' languages and cultures. Ethnorelativism, on the other hand, is tolerant of differences in behavior and cultures. If a contrastive rhetoric study considers Anglo-American writing rhetoric as good and regards it as the standard, it will be criticized for being ethnocentric. Many early contrastive rhetoric studies were claimed to be so (Connor, 1996). In order to avoid stereotyping languages and cultures in our multicultural education, awareness and knowledge of the differences should be stressed, and perceptions of values in different cultures should be enhanced.

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