Exploring the Use of Through-Argumentation and Counter-Argumentation in Arabic-Speaking EFL Learners' Argumentative Essays

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Abstract

This paper examines the preferred patterns of argument development in argumentative essays written by a group of advanced Arabic-speaking learners of English as a foreign language. To this end, the text structure of 104 essays written by 52 Master students is analyzed building upon the model elaborated by Hatim (1990, 1991, 1997). The results show that the student writers, influenced by their native culture's writing conventions, follow predominantly the pattern of through-argumentation to construct their argument. On the other hand, some of their observed argumentative discourse deviant forms are not explicable in the light of transfer factors. The implication of the study is that multiple factors come into play when the discourse conventions of English argumentative writing are distorted in EFL learners' texts. We recommend that for the teaching of written argument to be efficient, lecturers adopt instruction in which exposure to the argumentative essay genre is highlighted while activating student writers' potentials of revision and self-editing.

Key words: Arabic-speaking EFL learners, argument development, argumentative essay, cross-cultural differences, writing difficulties

1. Introduction

Argumentation centrally entails the act of giving reasons to substantiate one's claims and to affect the others' opinions or actions. People embark on argumentation to resolve differences of opinions, (Van Eemeren, Grootendorst and Snoeck Henkemans, 2002), a core constituent of human intellectual existence. Occurring pervasively in a wide range of contexts both in speech and in writing, argumentation is by far a highly complex type of discourse. When projected in academic writing, it is supposed to exhibit additional complications due to the intrinsic minutiae of the writing skill itself (Raimes, 1983). It gets even more sophisticated when writing in a foreign or a second language. In view of this, the skill of arguing compellingly in a written essay is held to be a cardinal criterion in the assessment of academic success for learners of English as a foreign language (EFL), for it reflects students' potentials of critical thinking, rational synthesis of evidence and construction of arguable claims (Björk, 2003; Graff, 2003; Smagorinsky, Johannessen, Kahn, & McCann, 2011; Stirling, 2009; Mayberry, 2009; Oshima & Hogue, 2007). On these grounds, learners of EFL need to perceive the requisite of becoming skilled at developing written academic argument in various genres to be able to convince readers of the acceptability of their intellectual claims.

It is reported in the literature that argumentative essay writing constitutes a challenge for many linguistically adroit international EFL learners (Al-Abed AI-Haq & Ahmed, 1994; Bouchard, 1996; Hinkle, 2002; Kim, 1995; Lux, 1991; Zhu, 2001). When attempting to persuade in English writing, learners find it arduous to attain the anticipated outcomes. The difficulty is not due to linguistic competence deficiencies but rather to the discourse non-conformities existing between what they take as argumentation and what their English readerships expect it to be. Such disparities in argumentative discourse engender language failure that oftentimes leads to misinterpretation of the intended goals of the whole text. Learners compose texts which seem alien according to Western academic discourse conventions, complying with what Ostler (1987) designates as "foreign sounding essays".

In the present study, which is part of a doctoral research project, we aim at exploring the preferences of a group of Arabic-speaking EFL learners as to the use of through-argumentation or counter-argumentation patterns in developing their argument. The rationale is to check if the former, being a rhetorical feature of Arabic, underlies certain discourse-level difficulties that these learners confront when attempting to write convincingly in English essays. We believe that effective instruction of writing in EFL contexts ought to start from a lucid understanding of the factors engendering non-conventional discourse forms. To fathom the context of the study, a brief review of the relevant literature is provided.

2. Culture, Writing and Argumentation

The bounds between culture, writing and argumentation have long held the interest of researchers in various disciplines. In general, understanding cultural affiliations of language users has important implications for understanding their communicative tendencies (Di Stefano, Imon, Lee, & Di Stefano, 2005; Jaganathan & Kaur, 2003; Novinger, 2001). In writing, seen as a mode of communication, the expectations and beliefs that writers and readers possess about composition stem from their native culture (McCool, 2009). Indeed, cultures differ in "what is seen as logical, engaging, relevant, or well-organized in writing, what counts as proof, conciseness, and evidence" (Hyland, 2003, p. 45). These cultural preconceptions may obstruct effective writer/reader communication. The case of argumentation as a form of communication is no exception: One cannot achieve the ultimate goal of persuasion in argumentation if the

underpinning expectations are different between writers and readers. Indeed, argumentation is thought to be accomplished differently in various cultures (Aldrich, 2003; Hatch, 1992; Kamimura & Oi, 1998; Siegel, 1999; Uysal, 2012; Warnick & Manusov, 2000). Such discrepancies have far-reaching implications for EFL writing instruction. International students are faced with the challenge of abiding by a whole set of cultural conventions as regards English argumentative writing to meet the Western audiences' expectations and to obviate misinterpretation of their texts. Hinkel (1994) comments that cultural dissimilarities and notions related to writing can develop into obstacles in the acquisition of second language communication patterns, mainly when these notions pertain to purposes missing in the learner's culture such as precision in discourse, rationality of argument, and the need for reason-based substantiation of claims. Thus, the study of the inherent cultural disparities between languages in the practice of argumentation helps us understand the nature of certain problems that often arise in EFL composition classes. The cultural aspect of ESL and EFL writing problems constitutes the core component of contrastive rhetoric research. For the purposes of this study, an examination of contrastive rhetoric findings on Arabic argumentation is of relevance.

3. Argumentation in Arabic

Interest in the study of differences between Arabic and English rhetoric and the way they may interfere in writing English prose by ESL or EFL students are motivated by the growing concern with non-Western rhetorical traditions (Hinkle, 2002). Various contrastive rhetoric studies have identified rhetorical features that typify Arabic. More specifically, the study of the rhetorical features of argumentation in Arabic has been the subject of a relatively large body of contrastive rhetoric research. A number of traits are found to distinguish Arabic argumentative discourse in comparison with English.

It is found that Arabic argumentation is characterized by repetition. Al-Jubouri (1984), in this connection, states that Arabic argumentative discourse possesses a fixed system for replication identified at the morphological level, the word level and the chunk level. For him, at the chunk level, repetition is revealed through two chief processes: parallelism and paraphrase, the duplication of form and of substance respectively. Paraphrase plays a special role in persuasion. It is thought that when an argument is restated a number of times, this would create the desired effect on the recipient. "The ingredients of an argument are assembled in such a way that a situation, an action or an event is persistently re-examined, possibly from different directions, with the effect of intensifying the reality of the claims and thus achieving a forceful assertion" (Al-Jubouri, 1984, p. 111). In an empirical study on the comprehension of argumentative discourse, Kamel (2000) concurs that a purposeful repetitive style is found in Arabic at the semantic and the syntactic levels. Instead of presenting a counter-argument, the writer attempts to fix the argument into the reader's awareness by means of replicating it. Several researchers have attempted to clarify the effect of repetition on argumentation. Johnstone (1991) uses the term *rhetorical presence* to refer to the effect of argument repetition on the success in convincing another party of one's view. According to her, instead of attempting to convince by means of the Aristotelian syllogistic argument, which is an "alien" concept to Arabs, Arabic speakers resort to reiterate arguments. In her words: "An arguer presents truths by making them present in discourse: by repeating them, paraphrasing them, doubling them, calling attention to them" (p. 117). Most importantly, she suggests that presentation persuasion is most often employed in cultural settings "in which religion is central, settings in which truth is brought to light rather than created out of human rationality" (as cited in Feghali, 1997, p. 361). Ismail

(2010) intricately criticizes this explanation. Like Johnstone, Hatim (1997) holds that Arabic speakers argue via presentation, but he affirms Olster's (1987) and Sa'adeddin's (1989) claim that such an argumentative style is the result of using an aural mode of text development.

Another distinctive feature of argumentation in Arabic is identified at the superstructure level. Hatim (1990, 1991 and 1997) sets an important distinction to describe the patterns of argument development. In this respect, he coins the term *through-argumentation*, as opposed to *counter-argumentation*. Hatim (1990) clarifies:

> Through argumentation advocates or condemns a given stance and makes no direct concession to belief entertained by an adversary. . .Counter-argumentation involves two protagonists confronting each other, an absent protagonist, who has his or her thesis cited to be evaluated and a present protagonist, performing the function of controlling the debate and steering the reader in a particular direction. (p. 136)

The formats that Hatim (1991) proposes for the representation of these two types of argumentative organization are shown in Figure 1. Both types may have an optional part called the tone-setter. The function of this unit in argumentative texts in general is to manage the situation in a manner that is propitious to the text producer's purposes. It is a marker of evaluative texture and often involves comparisons or judgments (Hatim & Mason, 1990).

Through-Argumentation	**Counter-Argumentation**
↓**Thesis to be argued through**	↓**Thesis cited to be opposed**
↓**Substantiation**	↓**Opposition**
↓**Conclusion**	↓**Substantiation**
	↓**Conclusion**

Figure 1. *The structure of argumentative texts*.
Adapted from "The Pragmatics of Argumentation in Arabic: The Rise and Fall of a Text Type,"
by B. Hatim, 1991, *Text*, 11(2).

Hatim (1997) distinguishes between two variants of counter-argumentation. The first is the *balanced argument* where the text producer has the choice of indicating the contrastive shift between what may be viewed as a claim and a counter-claim either explicitly or implicitly. The second is the *lopsided,* or *the explicit concessive argument*, in which the counter-claim is anticipated by an overt concessive (e.g. *although, while, despite*, etc).

Hatim (1997) argues that the choice of argumentative pattern is deliberate. As far as Arabic and English are concerned, Hatim (1990) claims that Modern Standard Arabic prefers through-argumentation, which seems to be a kind of "loose logical connectivity" between one proposition and another, whereas in English the more explicit method of counter-argumentation is favoured. However, he argues that this preference is the outcome of the incompetent use of Arabic and of a number of extraneous factors, not of the Arabic language by itself. In more explicit terms, he mentions factors like solidarity, politeness and face-saving as chief influences on the Arabic style of argumentation. Abbadi (2006), working on the same model, examines argumentation in English and Arabic editorials, an acknowledged genre which aims principally at influencing public opinion. The results show that it is not only the textual structures of argumentation that differ but also the linguistic strategies. Kamel's (2000) study also affirms the absence of counterargument (rebuttal) in Arabic argumentative writing.

An additional area that was subject to scholarly interest in contrastive rhetoric is the use of metadiscourse in Arabic Argumentation. El-Seidi (2000) conducted a contrastive study on

Arabic and English. She underscores the use of validity markers, including the subcategories of hedges, emphatics and attitude markers. The findings of this study, while emphasizing the universality of the use of such devices, demonstrate that there is a noticeable variation in the frequency and the preferred forms. This work ends up with useful insights about the applications of the study in the field of second language writing.

Finally, research has shown that Arabic and English differ in argument evaluation. Hottel-Burkhart (2000) alludes to some features of Arabic argumentation in terms of the Aristotelian canons of rhetoric. One relevant illustration on Arabic ways of argumentation is provided. It is related to the canon of *invention*, which concerns the knowledge on which the discussion of a subject can be based. She holds that what counts as an argument is determined by rhetorical traditions across cultures and can even vary within the same tradition over time. Hottel-Burkhart cites an instance as regards the mutual assessment of two parties of each others' arguments in terms of distinct cultural values of what constitutes an argument. She alludes to Johnstone's (1986) analysis of renowned interview of the Ayatollah Khomeini by the Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci. The journalist offered factual justifications for her argument, following a Western logic, while Khomeini relied on a totally dissimilar style involving the use of Quranic verses and Hadith, a very forceful argument from Khomeini's viewpoint. In essence, this sort of miscommunication stems from cultural dissimilarities in the background building blocks of arguments themselves. Abu Rass (2011) holds that as far as Arabic is concerned, it is possible to admit that persuasion advocates tools which are strongly connected to religion, especially the use of allegories from Koran, the "word of God", the use of analogies and reference to the authority of Islam. In her words, "Supporting arguments in Arabic is done by quotations of verses from the Qur'an, the holy book, and sayings of Prophet Muhammad (Ahadeeth) as well as citing of prominent leaders or Islamic scholars" (p. 207). Tuleja (2009), contrasting Arab and US American argumentation, stresses the firm connection between inspired language and religion in the Arab context. This is partly due to the place Arabic occupies in the performance of daily religious rituals for Muslims. Hinkel (2004), in this respect, comments that the construction and organization of discourse in various languages are deeply implanted in the culture, the history of rhetoric, and the socio-cultural frameworks which establish what is and what is not prized in text.

More features are identified by Kamel (2000) differentiating Arabic and English argumentation. She has shown that at the level of surface formats and logical markers, Arabic style is more explicit and cohesive than English style. Concerning topics, in Arabic topic sentences may not be explicit, and the typical English topic shifts, especially when presenting rebuttals in argumentation, are unusual and confusing for Arabic speakers. As for coherence and ellipsis, there is a manifest tendency to assert in Arabic. For example, it is possible to say what something is and then what it is not, violating the principle of presupposition used in English. At the relevance level, Arabic speakers do not have the same underlying background knowledge for the construction and interpretation of texts as English speakers, including knowledge of superstructures. Furthermore, fronting, as a way of structuring information, is used in Arabic as opposed to clefting, passive voice, and subordination in English. As regards the logic employed in Arabic Argumentation, Kamel (2000) demonstrates that Arabic uses coordination of ideas. Further, she argues that the concept of paragraph as a unit of thought and logic and the independence of text structure does not exist in Arabic. Finally, the ideational structure is characterized by the absence of nuclear hierarchical structure of ideas in paragraphs and texts.

Having reviewed the literature on cross-linguistic differences in writing and argumentation and on the rhetorical features of Arabic argumentation liable to be transferred to

the English essays of EFL learners, the present study was conducted to address the following research questions:
1. Do the argumentative essays written by advanced Arabic-speaking EFL learners show preference for through-argumentation in argument development?
2. Do the argumentative essays written by advanced Arabic-speaking EFL learners demonstrate non-conventional discourse features other than through-argumentation in argument development?

4. Methodology

4.1 Participants

The participants in this study were 52 students registered at the Department of English for the academic year 2012-2013 at Kasdi Merbah University, Ouargla, Algeria. All of them, 41 female and 11 male, are Algerian first-year or second-year Master students, whose first language is Algerian dialectal Arabic and who had been learning English for more than ten years. The participants' age mean value is 24.34 years. All participants have first learned Standard Arabic (which was used as a means of instruction) from primary to secondary school, then French as a first foreign language starting from the third or fourth year of their education and finally English as a second foreign language starting from middle school.

4.2 Data Collection

To collect data, the researcher draws on a non-parametric, researcher-designed writing test intended to elicit argumentative essays from the student participants. The essays constitute the text corpus for this study. The test comprises a free writing task, which involves the production of two short argumentative essays on debatable topics (see Appendix A). The students were overtly instructed to project their argumentative texts in the form of an essay, whose length ranges between 200 and 400 words, the common length of short essays allotted to students, especially in examinations. A short introductory questionnaire aimed at eliciting background information on the subjects precedes the writing task. Before administering the test, the participants were notified one week in advance. The researcher met the classes separately and explained the writing task to the participants. The students received individual copies of the test. A two-week deadline was set to retrieve the copies. Only a number of the students responded to the test and returned the copies.

4.3 Data Analysis Procedure

The essays are analyzed according to a three-stage procedure. In the preliminary stage, the collected essays were given codes to make their recognition possible. Each code appears in the form (A-B), in which A is a principal number referring to the participant (from 1 to 52) and B is a secondary number designating either the first essay or the second one for each participant (1 or 2). For example, the code (34-1) stands for the first essay of the 34th participant. Subsequently, the texts were subjected to identification and quantification of all the rhetorical patterns as regards argument development. The examination considers whether the participants opt for "counter-argumentation" or "through argumentation", that is, whether the writers support or denounce a given stance by making/ or not making a direct concession to the belief entertained by a potential adversary respectively. Spelling and lexico-grammatical inconsistencies are not taken into account. In operational terms, to identify the argumentative patterns that the participants opted for, the model developed by Hatim (1997) was followed. Table 1 summarises

the indicators of each pattern. In the last stage, the most prevalent patterns were signaled in proportion to the total measurements to determine the degree of cultural transfer in argumentative essays.

Table 1
Indicators of Argumentative Patterns

Through-argumentation	Counter-argumentation	
	Balance format	**Explicit Concessive format**
1 (tone-setter)	1 (tone-setter)	1 (tone-setter)
2 ↓Thesis to be argued through	2 Thesis cited to be opposed	2 Thesis cited to be opposed
3 ↓Substantiation	3 ↓Opposition 4 ↓Substantiation (Explicit or implicit contrastive shift between claim and counter-claim/ explicit markers *but, however...)*	3 ↓Opposition 4 ↓Substantiation (Explicit concessive connection/ Explicit markers *although, while, despite...)*
4 ↓Conclusion		
	5 ↓Conclusion	5 ↓Conclusion

4.4 Results and Discussion

The analysis of argument patterns in the corpus yielded significant findings. Table 2 displays the ratios for each kind of arrangement. The results show that out of the total of 104 essays, 50% follow the through-argumentation pattern, 47.11%, the counter-argumentation pattern , while 2.88% do not track any clear form of argumentation.

Table 2
Argumentation Patterns

Pattern	Number of essays	Percentage
a. **Counter-argumentation**	49	47.11 %
b. **Through-argumentation**	52	50 %
c. **Other**	3	2.88 %
Total	104	100 %

On the other hand, the analysis of the essays developed by counter-argumentation, which is recommended in English writing, generated ample evidence of complications encountered by

the student writers to construct counter-argumentative essays. The observed inconsistencies undermine the text's layout. Table 3 summarises the main deviations from the Western model's conventions for writing a counter-argumentative essay.

Table 3
Problems in Writing Counter-argumentative Essay

	Problem	N° of essays	%
a.	Confusing argumentation and other text types	05	10.2 %
b.	Non-systematic placement of arguments and counter-arguments in the essay	27	55.1 %
c.	Advancing of counter-arguments without refutation: Complete separation between counter-arguments and arguments	16	32.65 %
d.	Presentation of gambit in the form of a rhetorical question	12	24.48 %
e.	Paragraph division (random distribution of details or lack of division in the body section)	13	26.53 %
f.	Superordinate informing move in the introduction	10	20.4 %
g.	Other	07	14.28 %

Such non-conventional patterns detected in the participants' counter-argumentative essays are explicated and illustrated below:

a. Confusing argumentation and other text types: Out of 49 counter-argumentative essays, 10.2 % display confusion of argumentation and other text types, such as narration and exposition. In some texts, lengthy narratives appear in the development section to establish the ground for advancing arguments. This form of story-telling is not included as evidence, a practice that is acknowledged in Western usage. Rather, it distorts the whole essay and causes the reader to lose track of the argumentative line. This practice appears in the first body paragraph of essay (3-1):

> Algerian women worked together with men in the war against the French colonization. They took the burden of being both head of family and soldier to defend home. They were recruited just as men, planted bombs, and carried confidential papers to desired spots. They were tortured and humiliated to spare information on the secrets of the revolting squads. Their role was more important after the Algerian independence. Women were given the chance to work and take positions of responsibility. They worked side by side with men in fields which were men-restricted. Their efforts were appreciated during and after the French colonisation. But later they were treated differently. [**Narrative moves**] . . .

In other essays, although the writer attempts to advance arguments and counter-arguments to demonstrate two opposing views, the way pros and cons are presented makes the discussion a form of exposition in which causes are clarified, as shown in essay (50-1):

> *Women nowadays became an important members in the society and they have a higher positions in it. There are many causes that led them to take this positions.*
> Some women have encouraged to get such position like election. They encouraged by their families which give them supports and even purpose which may give to them. Also, the society has a big influence on the position of the women in the society because they look for power and authority which they always search for them simply, they defend their presentation in many fields to convey their existence in the society or in the family itself.

b. Non-systematic placement of arguments and counter-arguments: This appears in 55.1 % of the counter-argumentative essays. Not conforming to the convention of placing the arguments and their anticipated objections in the development paragraphs and to the systematic distribution of evidence and counter-evidence, this part of the corpus involves several types of distortions.

- Counter-arguments and refutation are positioned in the introduction before the presentation of the writer's stance in the thesis. The introduction of essay (4-2) illustrates this case:

> In universities all over the world, the curriculum devised to students of English as a foreign language contains three basic modules; they are: literature, linguistics and civilisation. Many students, including me in my three first years, wonder of the usefulness of such modules. Students see that the above mentioned modules are unhelpful and useless for them since their target is to be able to produce and process the English language. They, however, find themselves using a language which is strange to both native speakers and other learners of English. In fact, this happens because these learners do not appreciate the background knowledge transmitted to them through those three modules about the way the English language is really used by its native speakers. (4-2)

- Detailed arguments are advanced in the introduction right after the standpoint. Then, more arguments appear in the development. This is detected in essay (10-1) below:

> Nowadays, women are not just housekeeper but more than that, they have an important role and status in our society because they became to participate in various fields such as: elections. This last, it is a challenge that faced all women because of many reasons: women are able to achieve worse and better in their job even in politic, they can do many activities for example: making decision, interview, organizing and rule people . . . etc. Besides this, women as human being, rely on their emotion to attract and influence people to be productive. That's why, women have a great impact in our society.

- Counter-arguments and refutation appear in the conclusion after the affirmation of opinion. The conclusion of essay (4-1) illustrates this non-conventional practice:

> At last, I do not want, as a Muslim, to leave the impression that I am against the woman. On the contrary, it is Islam that gave us, we women, the most appropriate place that we deserve. Islam does not consider the woman as an inferior creature compared with man, but it does differentiate what is more adequate for each, and hence that it is not helpful for women to take part in elections.

- Arguments are advanced for the first time in the conclusion. This is found in the concluding paragraph of essay (45-1):

As our prophet Muhamed (PBUH) said "a people rulled by a woman are cursed"
As long as we are Muslims and putting all other claims aside, this is enough for us to get convinced that women have some roles to play in the society, but taking high positions in it is not one of them.

- Some counter-argumentative essays pursue mostly the through-argumentation pattern, with a brief or partial reference to adversary's views. In essay (49-1), the only instance of counter-argument appears in one contrastive expression, as shown in this extract:

. . . We know that the real place of woman is in her house, but we can not neglect her importante place in the development of our socity, cultural or educational. Therefore she should be encouraged to take some positions like participation in the elections.

c. Advancing of counter-arguments without refutation: In 32.65 % of the texts, counter-arguments are acknowledged or accommodated but without refutation. It is shown in standard writing coursebooks that refutation, or rebuttal, involves both anticipation of potential objections and arguing against them by building into the writer's arguments the reasons that invalidate the objection: the writer casts doubt on the opponent's reasons or questions the accuracy, relevancy, and sufficiency of the opponent's evidence (McWhorther, 2012). Such an approach permits writers to look at their arguments from the perspective of skeptics (Ramage, Bean, & Johnson, 2010). In this section of the corpus, the writers do acknowledge the other side's position but with no attempt to logically connect their claims to those of the adversaries. Therefore, the text is structured as a pointless exposition of two drastically separated sides.

d. Presentation of gambit in the form of a rhetorical question: In 24.48 % of counter-argumentative essays, the gambit section of the introduction is only a replicate of the essay's question. Hyland (1990) explains that a gambit is marked by its eye-catching effect. In the argumentative essay genre, the utility of this move is to grab the reader's attention. It is usually formulated as a conflict-ridden statement or a dramatic illustration. In this section of the corpus, the writers do not formulate a striking lead-in for their essays; this obstructs the presentation of their stance and tone. The introductory paragraph of essay (7-1) demonstrates such a plain style:

Nowaday women take a important state in our society. We can find her in many work fields in Hospital, schools, a company, airport, and factories and other many places, so should women be encouraged to take such positions.

e. Thought division: Problems in paragraph division are recorded in 26.53 % of the totality of counter-argumentative essays. The middle of an essay conventionally comprises paragraphs that sustain the proposition expressed in thesis statement. By citing examples, explaining causes, offering reasons, or using other strategies in these paragraphs, the writer provides sufficient specific substantiation to convince the reader that the opinion is a judicious one. Important in the body section is that each paragraph presents and develops one main point in the discussion. Paragraph unity in English stipulates that paragraph topics do not overlap. Thus, generally a new body paragraph signals another main point in the discussion. It is observed, however, that the essays under focus exhibit no correlation between the thought units (the supporting ideas) and the paragraph divisions of the essay. The observed distortions involve (1) random distribution of details and hence failure to establish the boundaries of each argument or (2) lack of division in the body section.

f. Super-ordinate informing moves in the introduction: These moves are found in some counter-argumentative essays. Informing moves constitute an essential part of an argumentative essay's introduction. Hyland (1990) explains that a writer optionally makes use of background material to contextualise the topic. Definitions, classifications, descriptions, critiques or "straw man" arguments usually constitute this section. Standard writing textbooks urge writers of argumentative essays to provide their audiences with "a history of the situation" and to direct their attention to the importance of the points introduced at this level. It is recommended, however, that introductory sections of an English essay be short and to the point. In the corpus, 20.4 % of counter-argumentative essays start with a universal statement only globally related to the topic of the paper, similar to the findings of Ostler (1987). The following introductory paragraph of essay (48-2) illustrates this rhetorical tendency.

> Studying foreign languages became of interest to many people nowadays, notably English language. In fact, mastering English, or any language, demands great efforts. Some university students prefer to have classes in linguistics, literature, and civilisation. Yet, others want to learn English for their special objective. So, what are the subjects that should be included in the English curriculum to meet students needs?

g. Other inconsistencies: Other minor non-conventional forms are recorded in 14.28 % of the counter-argumentative essays. The student writers commit miscellaneous deviations from the Western standard model. These include (1) writing two introductions, (2) a very long, circuitous introduction, (3) failure to establish writer stance, (4) unfocused or biased gambit, (5) offering resolutions in the body of the essay and (6)the absence of a conclusion. The following extracts illustrate some of such deviant patterns:

> **(Case 1)**   Unlike the last few decades, women nowadays hold high and crucial position in society. That is, many women rule their communities and present them in different occasions. So, where is our society in this scale of « development » and what its population think about this? **[introduction 1]**
>
> Recently, in our society, many women participate in the election and wish to hold a crucial position. In fact, observing society's point of view, there are some people with giving women such position and there are other against such innovation. From my personal view, women should not be supported to wrk in such positions. Simply because there are hidden foreign goals behind encouraging women to demand such sensitive position. Surely, many women and will astonish from my view as a women. But it seem to me that I have build my understanding from a reasonable reasons. **[introduction 2]** (essay 31-1)

> **(Case 2)**   From the very beginnings of life on earth, men and women lived together as the two building blocks on which human existance depended. Their relationship was bound on the superiority of men over women. And this was the fact until the rise of civilization and religion which gave women more respect and power. Women were protected by the law and were given the right to speak for themselves and fight against anything that belittles their position in society. Today, they have the right to attend courts, to witness verdicts, and to participate in elections. But however independent and responsible women are today, they are always seen from the same angle. The context of the Algerian society is a clear

example of this situation. Women are called to participate in elections, to take important ruling positions in society but is it coming from fairness of men ? The present paper discusses in brief why women should not be encouraged to take such positions in the Algerian society. (essay 3-1)

(Case 3) Women nowadays became an important members in the society and they have a higher positions in it. There are many causes that led them to take this positions. **[introduction]**. . .To sum up, sociaty should respect our religion and fellow it especially in the difficult choises in our life. **[conclusion]** (essay 50-1)

(Case 4) Women's issues have been of seminal importance to many people today. These issues concern everyday life, say, working, participating in elections, and so on. The latter has rised a great challenge in the muslim worlds. From the Islamic viewpoint can women contribute in such critical positions? Does Islam give respect and dignity for women? For which purpose women were created? (essay 48-1)

4.5 Interpretations

The results could be interpreted as follows. Through-argumentation pattern, which is postulated to be predominant in Arabic speaking EFL learners' persuasive essays, appears in the largest proportion of essays (50 %). That is, the effect of Arabic rhetorical patterns is significant. Along with this tendency, the analysis of essays shows that, the use of counter-argumentation pattern is not altogether overlooked, as it appears in 47.11 % of the essays, which is not a minor rate. On these grounds, it is construed that anticipation and acknowledgement of the adversaries' positions in argumentation appears to be considered by student writers in argumentative essay development. This implies that the effect of the student writers' L1 (Arabic) is only moderate. The rhetorical tendencies are found not to be moulded solely by native culture's patterns; in fact, the student writers attempt to use an English-like approach to advance and support their claims. However, the participants do demonstrate multiple weaknesses in producing this pattern. On the other hand, the proportion of 2.88%, where the essays have no clear pattern, denotes that the student participants do not differentiate the major text types and their related organisational discourse features. These essays lack argumentative tone and structure: Firstly, the writers' positions as regards the controversial issue are not introduced either explicitly or implicitly. Secondly, the development explains a state of affairs by means of successive informing moves instead of attempting to convince an audience of the acceptability of some standpoint. Accordingly, the texts are expository in purpose and content. Overall, considering all proportions, it can be concluded that multiple factors are at work in the construction of argumentative essays by advanced EFL learners. The recorded rhetorical tendencies are for the most part non-native-like. The observed defects call into question the existing instruction as regards this genre and necessitate that adequate tutoring be supplied to reduce the effect of L1 culture and maximize the understanding and manoeuvring of English discourse conventions as regards writing counter-argumentative essays.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

In researching the writing skill, it is argued that textual data constitute a practical source that reveals the recurrent features characterizing texts or the problems that writers encounter in

manipulating certain areas of discourse. Whether they are analyzed descriptively, analytically or critically, textual data represent a practical tool to fathoming linguistic properties of texts (Hyland, 2003). From a course designer's perspective, analysis of textual features can reflect the existing gap between English L1 writers' texts and that of specific groups of ESL or EFL learners of writing and can suggest points of emphasis in teaching content or even methodological choices (Hinkle, 2002). Taking the case of the Arabic-speaking advanced EFL learners involved in this study, the analysis of the recurrent rhetorical patterns in their argumentative essays has led the present researcher to extract some implications for teaching the specified academic writing genre to Arabic-speaking students.

As shown in the results section, traces of cultural influences of Arabic language were found at the rhetorical level in the students' argumentative essays. Areas in which the students showed preferences of native-like patterns include the use of through-argumentation as a general organizational pattern. Research in contrastive rhetoric in relation to ESL or EFL teaching recommends that to minimize the effects of L1culture on non-native students' writings, first students be sensitized to the existing cross-cultural differences in writing. This can help them in foreseeing the challenges they may have when composing in English. The findings of research on Arabic/English dissimilar argumentative discourse organizational patterns should be made available to EFL learners through research symposia and workshops. On the other hand, when designing writing syllabi, the content should make room for students' extensive exposure to English authentic texts written by native professionals to affect the schematic knowledge learners have about this argumentative genre. For instance, students would grasp the advantage of including counter-arguments and refutation in essays to formulate rational and unbiased critical discussions. This would reduce the effects of the cultural environments in which they have been socialized and would make their attempt to convince a potential disagreeing reader in academic settings more successful. In sum, where students are found to opt for discourse properties pertaining to their native culture, instruction has to highlight L2 features through extensive exposure to new patterns to supplant existing ones. However, it should be emphasized here that this practice is not meant to eradicate the learners' cultural identities in composition. Rather, the students should be sensitized to the fact that such requirements are advocated in Western academic contexts, where readerships have different orientations and expectations, and that such requirements constitute standards according to which their writing is assessed.

On the other hand, the analysis of argumentative essays revealed that some of the detected non-conventional discourse features are not attributable to cultural factors. When the learners use counter-argumentation, a salient feature of English essays, to organize their essays, they are found to produce defective texts from a Western angle. These discourse problems are in essence the result of lack of proficiency in English writing. Such empirical evidence implies that in teaching argumentative writing, students should have ample chances of being explicitly led to manipulate the target areas of English argumentative essay writing, to practise, to draft and to revise their texts with the support of feedback on evolving writing skills.

The findings of the study require an instructional approach whose focal concern is to assist EFL learners in discerning the disparities in argumentation between Arabic and English rhetorical properties. Further, learner difficulties require that writing instruction should make room for practice as a tool to address proficiency lacunae. Given this situation and drawing on the model of teaching writing developed by Badger and White (2000), a methodology dubbed the "process-genre" approach is recommended in the present study, underlining both the cognitive and social aspects of the skill. In this hybrid approach, according to Badger and White

(2000), teachers, learners and texts interact to supply input for learning. The learner is actively engaged in processing structure of model texts, considering linguistic forms, reflection on situational factors, multi-stage composition of texts and evaluation of his/her own texts or those of peers. The teacher's role gradually changes from scaffolding to facilitating learning throughout the whole process. Texts constitute a core contributor to enhance learners' knowledge. Overall, the process-genre methodology is deemed to meet the needs of EFL learners, whose writing is subject to multiple influences, including culture, proficiency and instruction variables.

About the Author

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Appendix A: The Students' Writing Test

Dear participant,
This test is part of a linguistic study conducted in connection with a doctoral research. Its objective is to investigate the writings of postgraduate students. You are kindly requested to respond to the following writing tasks.

I. The participantes profile

1. Name (optional):	....
2. Age:	………
3. Gender:	*M ( )* | *F ( )*
4. Level of education	
5. Option	*ESP ( ) Lit ( )*
6. What is your first language? *- What languages other than your first language do you speak and use before learning English?* *- What languages have you learnt at school before English?*	- - -
- At which level did you first start to learn English?	*- Primary school ( )* *- Middle school ( )* *- High school ( )* *- University ( )*
2. Number of years studying English at university	-

II. Writing Tasks
Write *two* compositions about the issues below. Use the language forms and essay organisation that you think are the most appropriate to convey your message to the readers.
Issue 1:
Women have participated in elections as candidates and managed to take important ruling positions in society. Should women be encouraged to take such positions?
Issue 2:
The study of subjects like "literature", "linguistics" and "civilisation" is useful to/ not needed by university students of English as a foreign language to help them learn this language better. State your position and defend it.

NB: The length of every composition should approximately be between 200 and 400 words.