

Second Language Writing from an Intercultural Rhetoric Perspective

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Abstract

Composing in a language other than one's first language is a complex process which involves, in addition to familiarity and interest in the writing topic, many sub-skills the student-writer needs to master to communicate accurately, fluently, and appropriately in the written medium of the target language. These sub-skills include knowledge of the target language system (e.g. syntax, morphology, and lexicon), writing mechanics, and the types of rhetorical patterns used to organize the textual content. The latter is one of the major problems that second language learners encounter in their acquisition of writing due to unfamiliarity with these patterns and the impact of first language organisational patterns they tend to transfer to the target language. The purpose of this paper is twofold. First, it will highlight how the main assumptions of the contrastive rhetoric hypothesis, as advanced by Kaplan (1966) and his supporters emerged to account for the poor rhetorical performance of advanced learners of English as a second language. The main contention at the heart of this hypothesis (recently referred to as intercultural rhetoric by Ulla Connor but in this paper both are used interchangeably) is that the rhetorical patterns governing the development of expository or persuasive writing are not only culture bound but tend to persist in students' writing even at advanced proficiency levels. Second, it will discuss the types of criticism levelled at the hypothesis and the new directions it has known thanks to the contributions of many authors, including Kaplan himself, and how these led to the developments of contrastive rhetoric as a fruitful field of study on second language writing and composition

Key words: contrastive rhetoric hypothesis, first language interference, persuasive writing, rhetorical patterns, second language writing and composition

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Introduction

Writing the present article emanates from the authors' long experience as a teacher of English as a foreign language having had to teach, among other things, writing classes to students of different academic levels both in public and private institutions. This teaching experience has been an opportunity to observe how Moroccan learners of English as a foreign language handle the writing tasks they are assigned in and out of class, the quality of their written products, their lack of motivation towards writing in English, not because of lack of interest for the skill per se but mainly because of their apprehension of being judged negatively for the quality of their writing (language mistakes, stylistic inappropriateness, etc

The teaching/learning process of writing in English in a foreign language context, like Morocco, is a problematic issue for both teachers and learners. While teachers are dissatisfied about the poor quality of their students' written products (at times even at advanced levels of language proficiency), the students complain about their inability to produce good quality writing. These problems seem to be less attributable to deficiencies related to language aspects than to the sense of 'foreignness' that characterizes this type of writing. Experienced EFL teachers (both native and non-native) are often able to sense this 'foreignness' phenomenon in their students' writings even when the latter are free of mistakes and linguistically accurate. EFL students, on their turn, often complain about the frustrating feedback they regularly receive from their writing instructors describing their writing assignments as 'awkward', 'clumsy' or simply 'non-coherent'.

Based on the above, it is assumed throughout this paper (which is part of a broader PhD research thesis comparing the writing rhetorical patterns in English and Arabic) that one of the major writing sub-skills that may account for this sense of 'foreignness' is EFL learners' unfamiliarity with English writing rhetorical patterns, and interference of first language patterns from their respective to their English writing, as held by the contrastive rhetoric proponents.

This leads to the second motivation of writing this paper. This article is interested in shedding light on how the contrastive rhetoric hypothesis, as a first 'theoretical' attempt initiated by Kaplan (1966) was developed to accounts for the problems in writing by foreign (do you mean non-native) students who are enrolled in American universities. As will be made clear throughout the rest of this paper, the contrastive rhetoric hypothesis seems to have hugely evolved into a full-fledged field of second-language research area for two reasons. While the first has to do with the criticism its early assumptions have undergone, the second is related to the new directions it has taken thanks to the contributions of different scholars and contrastive rhetoricians (Osler, 1987; Connor & Lauer, 1988; Liebman, 1988; Kubota, 2004).

Origins and early Assumptions of the Contrastive Rhetoric Hypothesis

Historically speaking, the birth of contrastive rhetoric as a field of study is often traced back to Kaplan's (1966) article in which describes his unprecedented notion of rhetorical inconsistency in the writing of ESL students from various cultural backgrounds. Kaplan drew attention through "provocative observations" as stated by (Connor 2008, p. 2) to what he thought were consistent variations/deviations underlying the rhetorical patterns in English writings by foreign students as compared to those by English native speakers. He also questioned the tendency of some EFL and ESL teachers to assume "a fallacy of repute and some duration"

(Kaplan, 1966, p13). This means, teachers assume that being a proficient writer in one's native language would necessarily amount to being able to compose with equal degree of proficiency in a foreign or a second language.

Kaplan launched what would later be a new field of research known as contrastive rhetoric. He defines the latter as "a way of studying languages -albeit with attention to the product rather than the process- based on the belief that the analysis of texts can lead to a better understanding of how language works." (Kaplan 1988, p 289) He goes on to warn that "contrastive rhetoric is not a methodology for teaching; though some of its findings can be (and indeed have been) applied to the teaching process since its inception". It is a field of study whose central concern is to raise teachers' and students' awareness to the fact that there are conventions of discourse structures and rhetorical organization without which knowledge of grammar and syntactic rules at the sentential levels would be useless when composing in English as a foreign language.

Kaplan (1966) comes to the above conclusion after a long experience of teaching composition to students coming from discrepant linguistic and cultural backgrounds. He initiated this field of research when he observes that some of his foreign students, even at advanced proficiency levels, "are employing a rhetoric and sequence of thought which violated the expectations of [English] native readers" (p.13). He also states that "foreign students who have mastered syntactic structures have still demonstrated inability to compose adequate themes, term papers, theses and dissertations." Instructors have written on students' papers comments such as "the material is all here but it seems somehow out of focus" or "lacks organization" or "lacks cohesion" (Kaplan 1967, p 12).

More precisely, upon analysis of more than six hundred essays written by students from different language and cultural backgrounds, Kaplan advances that five macro-structures are clearly identifiable in the five language families investigated (see figure1). He argues that of all the five observed macro- rhetorical patterns, English appears to be the only linear language and therefore the "use of rhetorical patterns unfamiliar to the intended audience [in this case the native English] ...may not only strike readers as lack of rhetorical elegance, but as lack of coherent writing or even thinking" (Mauranen 1991, p 2).

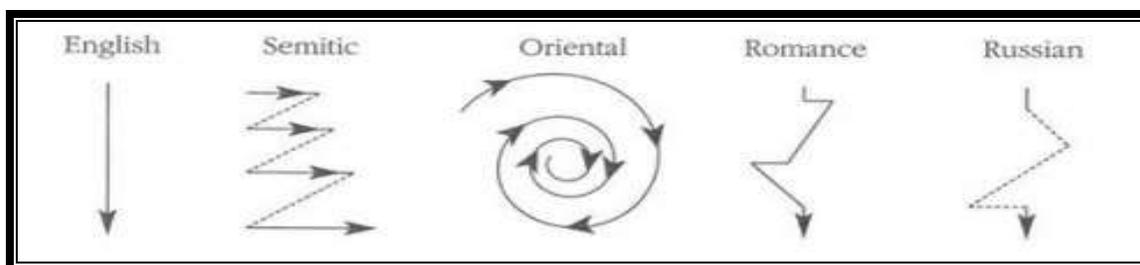


Figure 1 Diagram on cross-cultural differences in paragraph organization (adapted from Kaplan 1966).

Figure 1 describes one of Kaplan's underlying characteristics of English writing; namely the notion of linearity that is reflected in the straight line. Linearity is based on the assumption that the flow of composing in English seems to occur in a straight, undeviating mode from the topic sentence to the concluding sentence. That is, a good paragraph needs to be developed

deploying only relevant supporting arguments and details related significantly to the central idea. Contrastively, composing in other languages seems to crucially differ in many ways in that the flow of ideas occurs in dissimilar modes. In ‘Semitic’ languages, for example, the ideas are conveyed in a zigzag line because writers resort to a frequent use of parallelisms. In the ‘Oriental’ pattern, ideas are organized in a circular fashion to reflect the indirectness cycle underlying how writers develop their ideas before getting to the main point. Finally, organisational patterns used in ‘Romance’ languages and ‘Russian’ reflect a system that allows writers more freedom to digress from the main point and incorporate less relevant material to the central topic being developed (Connor 1996, p 15).

Kaplan (1966) tries to visually depict that “paragraph developments other than those normally regarded as desirable in English do exist,” (p. 14) and by implication, any attempt to teach students how to compose in English would necessarily involve, besides acquainting them with syntactic and grammatical rules of usage, familiarizing them with the writing conventions and rhetorical logic or patterns specific to the English language as well.

The above clearly reflects that contrastive rhetoric, as a field of study, has been an eye opening experience for both composition teachers and student-writers who “[grew] compelled to look beyond the syntactic levels of language and consider “discoursal macro-patterns in the light of underlying cultural traditions” (Enkvist 1997, p 19). It also reveals how this new this new ESL writing interest marked a historical shift away in language teaching and learning from a mere focus on language structure and the spoken mode, under the auspices of the Audio Lingual Method and the structuralist approaches to language teaching and learning prevalent in the 1960’s, to a consideration of writing as an essential skill in the language learning process by raising learners’ attention to the fact that the organisational patterns used in any language are cultural bound.

Kaplan’s hypothesis has generated many scholars’ interest in this new line of enquiry. Thus, while some of them (e.g., Ostler, 1987a ; Walker, 2007) hastened to provide further support to this key hypothesis and contribute new research support to it, others (e.g., Kubota 2004; Saville-Troike & Johnson, 1994; Spack 1997) were quick to reject it as a biased, value-laden and ethnocentric theoretical hypothesis. The latter group especially rejected Kaplan’s hypothesis for being severely lacking in scientific rigor and still in need of more empirical research evidence (which is the purpose of the current research paper) before it can be accepted as a valid theory of ESL writing and composition that may account for the rhetorical variations in ESL students writers’ in the target language.

Theoretical Foundations of Contrastive Rhetoric

According to Grabe & Kaplan (1996), intercultural rhetoric has its origins in the notions of language at the discoursal and inter-sentential levels. Its goal is “to describe ways in which written texts operate in larger cultural contexts” by seeking a better “understanding of ways in which written language operates and the way in which written language diverges from spoken languages (p79). Contrastive rhetoric is especially said to be deeply rooted in the two main beliefs that “each language or culture has rhetorical conventions that are unique to it and that the rhetorical conventions of the students’ L1 interfere with their ESL writing” (Kubota & Lehner 2004, p 8). This amounts to saying that the ultimate goal of contrastive rhetoric is a better

understanding of the composing process of foreign language learners by “trying to understand what strategies and presuppositions they [ESL students] bring with them, what strategies and presuppositions may co-occur in the target language and what strategies and presuppositions may create tensions with the target language” (Kaplan 1988, p 295).

The key premises of early the contrastive rhetoric are inspired by a number of theories and notions from different disciplines, namely anthropology (linguistic relativity hypothesis), psychology (negative transfer hypothesis) and sociology (Lin 2007), among others. Connor (2008), on the other hand, observed that the idea of contrastive rhetoric for Kaplan has been inspired by four key areas: the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, Contrastive Analysis and Schema Theory besides a pressing need to fill in a pedagogical gap created under the auspices of the audio-lingual method with regards to teaching writing and composition in ESL and EFL contexts (p. 301). The following section attempts to provide a brief account of what and how each notion contributed to the development of the contrastive rhetoric into a full-fledged area of research in L2 writing and composition.

Contrastive Rhetoric and the Theory of Linguistic Relativity:

The theory of linguistic relativity, also known as the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, has been described as the cornerstone of the contrastive rhetoric theory. According to Connor 1996, the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of linguistic relativity and contrastive rhetoric are related mainly because the former is based on the idea that “different languages affect perception and thought processes in different ways” (p.10). The anthropologist Sapir (1929) wrote “its [one’s language] forms predetermine for us certain modes of observation and interpretation (p. 10). Later on, his students Whorf (1956) elaborated on the above ideas of Sapir claiming that “the forms of a person’s thought are controlled by inexorable laws of patterns of which he is unconscious. These patterns are unperceived intricate systematization of his own language”. Meaning that one’s L1 affects not only one’s “personality [and the way s/he] communicates... [But also the way he or she] analyses nature notices or neglects types of relationship and phenomena, channels his reasoning, and builds the house of his consciousness. (p. 189)

Similarly, Gumperz & Levinson (1996) report that the Whorfian hypothesis is deeply rooted in the assumption that “language, thought and culture are deeply interlocked and that each language might be claimed to have associated with it a distinctive world view” (p. 2). This implies that the way people see the world is contingent on the type of language they have been exposed to and subsequently acquired. One’s L1 shapes what they see and how they see it, both of which eventually affect how they would express it in the written medium be it in their first or second language. Talking about ESL and EFL writing, it is assumed that one’s native language influences to a great extent one’s thought processes, which as a result leads to a hindrance of fluent second language acquisition (Connor 1996).

The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is classified in two versions. A ‘weak version’ also referred to as “Linguistic Relativity” is based on the idea that the specific concepts related to a speakers’ first language do influence their thought processes and world perception (Jourdan & Tuite, 2006). The basic assumption underlying this version is that cognitive processes are influenced by one’s first language; hence the reason why speakers of different languages are bound to

think/reason differently and use discrepant thought processes when developing their arguments (Kaplan 1966).

Contrastively, the strong version of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, also known as “Linguistic Determinism”, posits that language controls perception, thought processes and cognitive structures of its speakers. This implies that the way one’s language is organized will determine the way they would tend to perceive the world around them. Therefore, learning a new language implies that a person’s way of thinking will undergo some changes under the influence of the new language (Yule, 1996). This is why Kaplan (1966) reasons sarcastically that “if Aristotle had been Mexican, his logic would have been different, and perhaps, by the same token, the whole of our philosophy (referring to western philosophy) and our science would have been different” (p. 12).

Grabe & Kaplan (1987) admit that “contrastive rhetoric frankly derives some but not all of its orientations from the weak version of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis” (p. 197), the main contention of which has been that language influences- and not determines-one’s perception, conception and thought of reality. Hence, the way we think and the way we conceive of the outside world is to a large degree a by-product of our cultural thought patterns and the first language we happened to have acquired.

Contrastive Analysis and/or the Negative Language Transfer Hypothesis

The negative language transfer hypothesis is yet another crucially significant and prevailing notion upon which the idea of contrastive rhetoric is based. Kaplan (1988) postulates that “contrastive rhetoric has been concerned with such questions as ...what learners bring with them from their own cultures and how what they bring interacts with what they encounter when they undertake to compose in English.” (p. 294). This obviously evokes the idea of negative transfer. Kaplan phrases this notion as early as (1966) observing that “Instructors have written on foreign students’ papers such comments as ‘the material is all here but it seems out of focus’ or ‘lacks organization’ or ‘lacks coherence’. He explicitly shares those comments describing them as “essentially accurate [because] ...the foreign students employ [their L1] rhetoric and a sequence of thought which violates the expectations of the native speakers” when composing in English as a foreign or a second language (p. 12).

Put more precisely, the contrastive analysis theory, originally developed by Fries (1945) and Lado (1957), postulates that the syntactic errors in a second or foreign language context often results from a negative transfer from the students’ first language. Fries (1945) claims that the linguistic structures of the first language do oftentimes affect the process of learning how to write in a second language. Interestingly enough, not unlike the Sapir Whorf hypothesis, the theory of contrastive analysis has a strong version and a weak version. The strong version is deeply rooted in the belief to possibly predict all the difficulties L2 learners might face through knowledge of the differences between their native language and the target language (Connor 1996). The weak version by Wardhaugh (1970), however, was less deterministic in that it assumes that contrastive analysis can merely be deployed for its explanatory power to account for the potential difficulties second language learners might face while still coming to terms with the intricacies of writing and composition in the new linguistic system of the target language.

Based on both notions above by Fries (1945) and Lado (1957), Kaplan (1966) drew attention to the fact that the very same undesirable transfer or language interference that is assumed to take place at the syntactical/grammatical levels also occurs at the level of rhetorical and organizational patterns. Kaplan thus advocates that, in their attempts to compose in a foreign or second language, student-writers tend to mistakenly assume that macro structures as well as preferred rhetorical patterns from their L1 are directly transferrable to the new context of the second language they are trying to learn. Through this reasoning, the notion of ‘negative transfer’ was extended to incorporate the macro-structural or rhetorical levels of students’ composition. For Kaplan, each culture/language tends to develop its own specific and generally agreed upon rhetorical logic that governs how writers organize their expository prose when composing in their native language. He states that “each language and each culture has a paragraph order unique to itself” (Kaplan 1966, p 14) and that the pattern of the English language is predominantly linear, deductive and direct.

Thus, inspired by the premises underlying the notions of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis as well as the notions of Contrastive Analysis/L1 interference, both of which were prevalent in the early 1960s, Kaplan highlights the fact that L1 cultural and linguistic backgrounds do affect writing processes and written products of ESL student-writers at the rhetorical and macro-structural levels. That is to say, one’s first language is bound, if not to shape, at least affect to some extent the logic and rhetorical choices they tend to make when composing in a language other than their first one. As a matter of fact, there seems to be an overlap between the previous definition of the Whorfian hypothesis and Kaplan’s definition of contrastive rhetoric when the latter writes that:

Rhetoric concerns itself basically with what goes on in the mind rather than with what comes out of the mouth...what we notice in the environment and how we notice it are both predetermined to a significant degree by how we are prepared [by virtue of the L1 acquisition and cultural experience] to notice this particular type of object” (Kaplan 1966, p 16)

Similarly, Connor (2008) phrased the same notion arguing that “if the English rhetorical style differed from the rhetorical style of the learners’ native language, then there would be a potential learning problem” (p. 301). This finally suggests that the key premise of the contrastive rhetoric hypothesis is that any “rhetorical difference” between the students’ L1 and the target language would in all likelihood translate into a “composing difficulty” for L2 students resulting in rhetorical mismatches between their final written products and the expectations of L2 native readers.

Contrastive Rhetoric Hypothesis and Schema Theory

The contrastive rhetoric hypothesis is closely related to schema theory in more ways than one. The latter originates from research in cognitive science and is defined as an “approach to information processing.” It is based on the belief that “processing a text is an interactive process between the text and prior background knowledge or memory schemata of the listener or readers [as well as writers]” (Carrell 1984a: 482). The relevance of schema theory to contrastive rhetoric is made all the more explicit in what Carrell referred to as ‘formal schemata’ to describe

background knowledge of rhetorical structures that rule the reading text and composition processes in the target language.

Research in schema theory has made it unambiguously clear that readers and writers need to accumulate background information that may provide an appropriate framework within which to read or write. Reid (1988) claims in this respect that “novice writers need familiarity and practice with the common rhetorical strategies so that they can make intelligent choices as they select a form for their ‘discovered’ ideas” (p. 150). This implies that novice writers sometimes find it difficult to write mainly because they lack relevant rhetorical schemata or what Flower and Hayes (1980) refers to as “the stored plans for creating such format”(p. 29).

The strong kinship between the notion of schema theory and contrastive rhetoric resides all the more in ESL student writers’ need all along their learning process to study rhetorical approaches and to imitate or practise models of what is considered as a good piece of writing from a rhetorical point of view. It is, therefore, part and parcel of textbook writers’ job and the composition teacher task to foster the rhetorical schemata that correspond to those used by writers of the TL both receptively (in a reading class) and productively (in a composition class). Carrell (1984b) recommends that “inexperienced and unskilled ESL writers who have not been exposed to rhetorical analysis of American academic prose need to develop their understanding of the forms of academic prose.” (p. 156)

Also, looked at from a schema theoretical point of view, it seems especially that the kind of help that ESL/EFL students need to successfully accomplish the various writing assignments in the target language is to equip them with appropriate frameworks/ formats that would facilitate their constant endeavour to fulfil what Shaughnessy (1977) refers to as “the expectations and needs of the academic or professional audience” (p. 240). According to Reid (1984), when the schemata of the writing task in the TL happen to be manageable, two goals can be achieved. First, “the students’ papers (essays, technical reports, doctoral dissertations etc.) written in the forms anticipated by the professional reader will be more easily accepted and understood”. Second and more importantly, “a student who feels more comfortable about being able to manage the form will be more able to concentrate on the content of the writing assignment” (p. 156).

Accordingly, it seems that just like cultural and domain specific schemata, formal/ rhetorical schemata, do equally play a vital role in the process of meaning construction (reading comprehension) as well as in the process of meaning production and construction (writing process). This amounts to saying that ESL student-writers equipped with the relevant schemata - be they content, cultural, domain specific and/or above all rhetorical and formal- are more prone to compose texts that are not only ideationally appropriate but rhetorically sensitive to the native audience’s expectations. This also amounts to saying that ESL writers who are poorly or partially equipped with appropriate organisational patterns in the target language will suffer from deficiencies in their composing process and, as a result, may end up deploying less effective rhetorical patterns that mismatch with those of L1 writers when evaluated from a native speakers vantage point .

Generally speaking then, it appears that the students' effort to learn how to write rhetorically appropriate texts entails, among other things, exposing them to such rhetorical schemata in the first place. ESL students cannot legitimately be expected to write rhetorically appropriate essays when composing in the target language unless they are equipped with the relevant conventions underlying the writing genre/task at hand. Therefore it would be fair to expect them to write in ways that match the expectations of English native readers only after they are "cognitively and schematically ready" (Reid 1984) or well prepared and adequately trained to write in a linear way where English is concerned.

Yet it is only fair to point out that while Kaplan (1966) attributed ESL student writing problems exclusively to rhetorical interference from their native culture and language, there are others who claim that these problems could as well be attributable to instruction and literacy development which oftentimes fails to equip students with the appropriate rhetorical schemata. Zamel (1992), for example, suggests that a student's inability to write appropriately and with a certain degree of ease in the target language may be a natural result of their prior instruction and literacy practices. She theorized that some students' creativity is at times inhibited by their teachers' previous instruction when forcing them for instance to plan before they start writing. Reid, on the other hand, claimed that "developmentally," if a student fails to compose appropriately in the target language it is because "she...has not yet achieved a level of writing skill that allows her to feel comfortable about composing. She has no appropriate schemata, no framework within which to write" probably because she is still at "the first stage of the student's apprenticeship" (Reid 1988)

Because linearity, according to Kaplan 1966, is one of the major rhetorical patterns that typically characterizes the process of writing in English, the following section will be devoted to a discussion that goes into details about the premises underlying this notion.

Linearity in Language: a Rhetorical Discursive Preference in English Rhetoric

Linearity in English is one of the fundamental concepts underlying Kaplan's theory of contrastive rhetoric. He described English as "predominantly linear" as opposed to "the digressive" or non-straightforward structures which characterize what he categorizes as 'Romance', 'Semitic' and 'Oriental' language groups (1966, p. 16). Kaplan draws attention to the fact that

The thought patterns which speakers and readers of English appear to expect as an integral part of their communication is a sequence that is *predominantly linear* in its development...the paragraph in English, while it is discursive, ...is never digressive. (*Italics added* Kaplan 1966, p 14).

Although so much criticism was levelled at his description of other languages as non-linear, Kaplan reiterated the same point of view as late as 2001 insisting that "English is more linear than other languages." The expectation of any native speaker when reading in English is to feel, in Kaplan's words, that "there is nothing in this paragraph that does not belong here, nothing that does not contribute significantly to the central idea. In fact "The flow of ideas [tends to] occur in a straight line from the opening sentence to the last sentence" (p14p) in a paragraph.

Anything not related to the central idea would strike L1 readers as redundant and irrelevant; a fact which would eventually affect negatively the quality of their written discourse.

Thus, Kaplan insists that learning how to compose in another language, especially with regards to academic and advanced composition classes, involves raising both students' and teachers' awareness to the fact that "Rhetoric, the method of organizing syntactic units into larger patterns is as much a culturally coded phenomenon as the syntactic units themselves are" Kaplan (1967, p. 11)

However, the rhetorical labels he used to describe other languages were severely criticised as 'ethnocentric', 'ill-defined' and above all 'intuitive'. They were especially regarded as unacceptable because they were lacking in empirical support and portraying stereotyped reality (Enkvist, 1977). Kubota (1997) criticised the tendency to draw stereotypical overgeneralisations about rhetorical styles in different cultures based on a few "non-representative samples" that often end up in "biased values judgements that favour the patterns of the target language at the expense of the subjects' native language" (Kubota 1998b). She argues that needless dichotomies generate "fixed apolitical and essentialised representations" (p 9) that etherize the native culture, language and rhetoric of ESL students in favour of a superior native English 'Self' reflecting unbalanced power structures between the biased self and exoticized non-native 'Other'.

This criticism led Kaplan to subsequently reconsider his categorisation of the rhetorical patterns that characterise different language families. In his subsequent article that he entitled "Cultural Thoughts Patterns Revisited", Kaplan (1986) "admit[s] having made the case too strong. [He] regrets having done so; though in no way regret having made the case". He substituted his initial assumption that English is a predominantly linear language by a new recognition that "each language has its certain preferences so that while all forms are possible [in all languages] all forms do not occur with equal frequency or in parallel distribution" (p. 10)

Kaplan seems to no longer hold the view that the linear logic reflects a special way of thinking but as being the result of preferences for given writing conventions, which are "learnable" and, by implication, teachable across languages and cultures (2000, p. 84). He seems thus to tone down his original statements regarding his claimed rhetorical differences between language families, without totally rejecting them in that he reiterated his fundamental assumptions that a) languages present 'gaps' not just at the lexical or structural levels but at the rhetorical level as well; b) every speaker –and or writer perceives these differences when comparing his or her language with other linguistic systems; c) there is a tendency to unconsciously transfer to the second language the resources and rhetorical devices of the first language and finally d) there are languages whose rhetorical patterns are more linear than those of other languages. While avoiding any explicit reference to English or any other specific language, Kaplan also acknowledges that "every speaker perceives his/her language as linear and all others as non- linear" (Kaplan 2000, p. 84)

New Developments in the Field of Contrastive Rhetoric

Most new developments in the field of Contrastive Rhetoric were initiated by Connor (1996). She took Kaplan's defence by describing the criticism levelled at the early assumptions of the contrastive rhetoric hypothesis as illegitimate and unjustifiable, stating that "these

critics...refer to contrastive rhetoric as if it had been frozen in space.” She objected that “understood by many as Kaplan’s original work (1966), contrastive rhetoric is often characterized as a static field of research that is linked to contrastive analysis itself deeply rooted in structural linguistics and behaviourism.” Her outstanding monograph on contrastive rhetoric in 1996 marked a turning point in intercultural rhetoric research and reflected four new directions along which this field has developed: a) The acknowledgement of more and new genres with specific textual requirements; b) consideration of social and situational variables within the context of writing; c) developments of new and more rigorous research methodologies; and finally d) a suggestion to change the name CR into intercultural rhetoric (Connor 1996).

To start with, unlike Kaplan’s early contrastive studies which focused exclusively on expository essays by students from various cultural backgrounds, Connor (2008) reviewed a number of related studies conducted in the field of CR and concluded that new genres besides the students’ essays are considered. Connor 1996 observed that research articles, research reports and grant proposals and other “writing for professional purposes like business letters [are] now considered a legitimate type of second language writing worthy of research and teaching “(p. 3)

Second, together with consideration of new writing genres, CR has recently moved its emphasis to incorporate such social, situational and contextual variables that come to play only to shape to a large degree the writing product ensuing from any writing endeavour like audience, genre, purpose and message. Writing therefore is no longer regarded as a de-contextualized undertaking with no special consideration of authorship, audience, genre and purpose of the writing in general. In this regard, Bazerman and Prior (2004) highlighted three questions to guide the analysis of writing, namely “What does the text talk about? How does text influence audience? How do texts come into being?” (in Connor 2008: 4.)

In addition to consideration of context, text type, genre and audience’s expectations, Connor (2004) draws attention to the paradigm shift in terms of the methodologies deployed recently in CR research. She observed that textual linguistics analyses are currently using rigorous and sophisticated corpus linguistics in terms of design, data collections and data analysis. Current research in CR avails itself of the concept of *Tertium Comparationis i.e.* comparable corpora as requisite for drawing valid and reliable research finding in intercultural studies. The notion of *Tertium Comparationis* describes a common platform of comparison among sets of corpora elicited from writers from various backgrounds when trying to trace the origin of any rhetorical variations, if any, in their writings as claimed in Kaplan’s “doodles article.”(1966)

In the same vein, in 2002 Connor’s reaction to the various criticism levelled against CR - this is especially so where post-colonial and post-modern writers are concerned- gave birth to a new appellation for the field. She drew attention to the need for a new term which “better encompasses the essence of CR in its current state” (p. 4). Thus with the view to making the difference between the often quoted ‘static’ model and the new improvements that have been realized all along the development of CR, Connor (2008) concluded that “it may be useful to begin using the term intercultural rhetoric to describe the newly and present dynamic models of cross cultural research” (p. 306) and thus avoid the unequal status of power that the term ‘contrastive’ seems to assign to different types of rhetoric when compared to that of English.

What all the above amounts to is that CR is an increasingly dynamic and exploratory area of research. It is a constantly changing field whose comprehensive theory is still in the making. It is still trying to incorporate new genres and widen its perspective by trying to incorporate considerations of discrepant writing variables that come to play in various writing situations. It especially attempts to adopt rigorous methodologies by attending to the notion of comparability among the corpora of texts not only at the linguistic and genre levels but in terms of purpose and audience expectations as well.

To be fair to Kaplan though, it is not without relevance to mention that Kaplan himself addressed some of the above criticism supporting thus the new trends contrastive rhetoric has known. It did not escape Kaplan in his seminal article to point out his value-free or non-biased point of view when he said “this discussion is not intended to offer any criticism of other paragraph development, rather, it is intended only to demonstrate that paragraph development other than those normally regarded as desirable in English do exist” (1966, p. 20). He later admitted that all the cultural patterns he identified in his legendary article of 1966 do exist in all languages though with different degrees of frequency. In his own words:

In fact, it is now my opinion that all of the various rhetorical modes identified in the “doodles article” are possible in any language...the issue is that each language has certain clear preferences, so that while all forms are possible, all forms do not occur with equal frequency or in parallel distribution (1987, p. 10)

That said, it is not without relevance to point out that the present researchers are currently conducting a study in line with the new trends in contrastive rhetoric research. A research that begins with building comparable corpora collected under similar situational and contextual factors like genre, time constraint, audience expectations, subject matter, the level of writers’ expertise and /or prior instruction etc. as advocated by Connor and Moreno (2005, p. 85)

Implications of Contrastive Rhetoric to Second/Foreign Language Writing

EFL and ESL writing instructors have obviously drawn significant implications from contrastive rhetoric studies ever since Kaplan’s pioneering article was first published (Connor 2004). Atkinson (2000) states that “The contrastive rhetoric hypothesis has perhaps its greatest allure for those non-native English speaking contexts abroad forced as they are to look EFL writing in the eye to try to understand why it at least sometimes looks “different” often subtly out of sync with what one might expect from a native perspective” (p. 319). Contrastive rhetoric is especially relevant to second/foreign language teaching and learning of writing and composition at advanced levels of language proficiency, as “advanced EFL writers who have mastered grammar of the target language would produce pieces of writing that have a persistently “un-English” taste of peculiar strangeness.” (Koch 1981, p. 2) It is especially believed that (1) implications derived from valid research on rhetorical schemata of various languages will surely lead to better ESL writing instructional practices for teachers; (2) similarly, when ESL students are better instructed to meet the expectations of L1 readers in their writing classes, they would surely be in a better position to make informed rhetorical choices when composing in the TL.

Enkvist (1997, p. 204) underlies yet another advantageous contribution of contrastive rhetoric to second language writing describing it as a field that “promises meaningful practical applications at best improving intercultural communication and understanding.” This, however, is likely to be achieved only when, as Ostler (1987a) pointed out “ESL teachers first appreciate the differences in Rhetoric in different cultures and learn to teach these distinctions as an aid to improving both the reading and writing skills of their students” (p. 169). Similarly, Reid (1993) sums up the implications and applications of contrastive rhetoric to ESL instruction observing that its central focus is awareness rising. This awareness, however, must result from valid “investigation of the different ways writers, from different backgrounds, organize and present written material that reflects preferences of each particular culture” (p.170). It is also this very same awareness that would discourage L2 writers from resorting to rhetorical patterns from their L1 when writing in the target language.

Conclusion

Put in a nut shell, this paper has attempted to trace the main assumptions and news developments of the contrastive rhetoric hypothesis while highlighting the various research flaws underlying early studies conducted in the line of Kaplan’s original article of 1966. These research inadequacies/flaws of the early contrastive rhetoric hypothesis, however, have been observed in other subsequent studies seeking to investigate the validity of its key premises. The contrastive rhetoric hypothesis is, therefore, in dire need of more empirical research evidence by incorporating discrepant languages/cultural backgrounds and writing genres to contribute to the existing body of literature about L2 writing and composition. This paper is hoped to be another step in this direction in that it is part of a PhD research project that aims at investigating rhetorical differences in persuasive essays by Moroccan EFL students (Arabic L1) and English native speakers writing in English. This project is intended to test the applicability of contrastive rhetoric hypothesis to the Moroccan context where English is taught as a foreign language, hoping that its findings would contribute significantly to a better understanding of the interaction between L1 and L2 conventions in the L2 writing process, and hence to an eventual development of a more comprehensive theory of the contrastive rhetoric.

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