

**Promoting Cultural Pluralism:  
Support for Dynamic Contrastive Rhetoric in Japanese EFL Classes**

David Penner  
October 23, 2008  
LING 5P05  
For: Dr. McGarrell

**Promoting Pluralism:  
Support for Dynamic Contrastive Rhetoric in Japanese EFL Classes**

Ever since Robert Kaplan's (1966) "Cultural Thought Patterns in Inter-Cultural Education", where with an Archimedean spiral, he concludes, "Oriental languages prefer an indirect approach" (Connor, 2002, p. 494), contrasting rhetoric has remained controversial; however, despite recent criticism (e.g. Kachru, 1995; Zamel, 1997; Spack, 1997; Kubota, 1999), teaching a dynamic (Matsuda, 2001) form of contrastive rhetoric (CR) remains a valuable practice as Japanese EFL students can improve their use of rhetorical patterns and persuasion, gain insight into Japanese and Western values, and understand how to participate across cultures in discourse communities.

**Recent Criticism of Contrastive Rhetoric**

***CR Stereotypes, Discriminates, and Inaccurately Describes L1 Transfer***

Much research shows that cross-cultural analysis invites stereotyping. For example, understanding becomes limited when researchers conclude, "Asian culture generally values collectivism and discourages individual self-expression, creativity, and critical thinking whereas Western culture displays the opposite characteristics" (Kubota, 1999, p. 10). "Contrasting rhetoric also stereotypes Western culture" (Zamel, 1997, p.344) - people should not assume that "there are well identified norms of writing in English" (Kachru, 1995, p. 24). Since "other dimensions of identity intersect with or transcend issues of language" (Zamel, 1997, p. 345), writing in a certain way could have more to do with personality, gender or class. Just like how Verbeem (2004) concludes that any attempt to generalize cultural learning styles invites accusations of stereotyping (p. 19), connecting rhetorical patterns to particular cultures causes similar reactions.

Researchers also note that contrasting rhetoric discriminates, dichotomizes and privileges the writing of native English speakers (NES) (Connor, 2002, p. 494). When teachers stop “[viewing] students as individuals [but] as members of a cultural group” (Spack, p. 772), they may develop “a deterministic stance and deficit orientation as to what students can accomplish in English” (Zamel, 1997, p. 341). Land and Whitely (1989) point out that since CR judges how closely students’ writing conforms to Western genres, a better term for the practice may be “composition and colonization” (as cited in Matsuda, 2001, p. 247). As indicated above, despite well-intended desires to “show the legitimacy of different styles of argument across culture” (Connor, 2002, pp. 500-501), when teachers start to mark L1 patterns of rhetoric as negative transfer, the superiority of Western writing and argument gets promoted.

Finally, research indicates that culturally-bound L1 transfer does not apply to all writers. Silva (1993) cites several studies where the “composing process patterns... were similar in L1s and L2s” (p. 661). Kubota (1998) indicates that only “about half of the students... used similar patterns in their Japanese and English essays” (p. 81). Students with dissimilar essays either employed different strategies for each language, or did not follow any cultural model, since they had never learned argumentative writing. An even stronger reason to question the necessity of contrasting rhetoric is the fact that, in Kubota’s (1998) study, “one of the best ESL expository essays exhibited Comp+Ind, a pattern identified as specific to Japanese” (p. 88). This shows that students’ essays can remain coherent even when L1 cultural patterns are used. A study by Santos (1988) as cited in Xing, Wang and Spencer (2008) reveals that 178 native-English professors, who studied two 400-word non-native English compositions, concluded that lexical errors, not

form, were the essays' most serious problems (p. 72). Hirose (2003) also concludes that research regarding the organizational patterns of Japanese students varies (p. 182), so Japanese writing should not be viewed as a particular type. She even suggests that the Japanese argument patterns are not dissimilar to Western forms (p. 183). As a result of these observations, to understand the effects of L1 transfer, more studies must take place.

In summary, when research documents cross-cultural differences, and L2 writing is not perceived as coming from the student, but, instead, from the student's culture, stereotypes and discrimination persist. To combat this "static" view of CR (Matsuda, 2001, p. 242), a "dynamic" approach (p. 247), where researchers and teachers realize that writing comes from a variety of sources, must be promoted.

### **The Case for a New Approach**

A dynamic view of CR (Matsuda, 2001, pp. 247-251) should be adopted, where teachers and researchers view writers' texts as influenced by everything that makes up their background, not just their culture. In fact, Bhatia's (2008) model of discourse regards writers' ethnographic perspective as only one type of influence (p. 171). This perspective combines with others, including socio-critical, cognitive, and institutional, to create writers' "textual perspective" (p. 171). Along with expanding writers' backgrounds, dynamic CR also alters the traditional/colonial push to conform to Western genres by attempting to "[uncover] something of the attitudes, values, and beliefs of the communities of text users that genres imply and construct" (Hyland, 2002, p. 114). Rules and conventions still apply, but the entrance requirements become looser since "each writer's or reader's expertise as a member of the community influences the area of the shared discourse community" (Matsuda, 2001, p. 249). Once part of the community,

students can also start to influence the genre's direction. With this wider encompassing, more accommodating, viewpoint, students have much to gain from a dynamic CR.

### **The Benefits of Studying Contrastive Rhetoric**

#### ***Contrasting Rhetoric Helps Students Improve As Writers***

When Japanese university students learn to develop an argument in their L1 by incorporating “exigence, audience, and constraints” (Bitzer, 1968, as cited in Jenkins & Hinds, p. 342), they employ patterns and persuasive strategies to fit the expectations of their Japanese audience, but when they apply these culture-specific strategies to English essay writing, however, L1 transfer occurs. The only English writing these students may ever have done involves direct translation and the re-writing of grammatically incorrect sentences in preparation for university entrance exams (Otlowski, 1998, p. 420). This mirrors Mohan and Lo's (1985) older observation that English writing instruction is “strongly oriented to sentence-level accuracy rather than to discourse strategies of organization” (p. 529). For these students, and those who may not even be comfortable with L1 rhetorical strategies, teachers should model and contrast discourse patterns and methods of persuasion prevalent in Japanese and Western rhetoric in order to develop “multicultural pluralism” (Connor, 1996, p. 7), that is, the ability to creatively and acceptably express ideas in other cultures.

By contrasting rhetorical macrostructures, students can observe the differences between Japan's commonly used “specific-to-general (inductive) pattern” and Western countries' “general-to-specific (deductive)... pattern” (Silva, 1993, p. 664). Hinds (1990) describes Japan's commonly used “quasiinductive” style as a “delayed introduction of purpose [where] the main ideas do not appear until the end and... the paragraphs before

the main ideas do not constitute the reasons or evidence for the main ideas” (as cited in Kubota, 1998, p. 70). This complements Connor’s (1984) view that Japanese writers often incorporate “less linking of concluding inductive statements to the preceding subtopics of the problem” (Silva, 1993, p. 664). Japanese formal compositions also often follow a “*ki-sho-ten-ketsu*” formula, characterized by the “unexpected topic shift introduced by the *ten* paragraph” (Kubota, 1998, p. 70). Even more elusive to Western readers, Japanese writers may also use the “‘Omission’ pattern where they do not [even] present the thesis statement, hesitating to take either the pro or the con position” (Kamimura & Oi, 1998, p. 311). The absence of a thesis, however, is becoming less common – for example, 86.67% of the Japanese students in Kamimura and Oi’s (1998) study provided a thesis statement at the beginning of their essays (p. 311). This may be a result of Japan’s Westernisation - university entrance exams and job applications now contain questions requiring Western-style argumentation, so “practice books on *shoronbun*” abound (Hirose, 2003, p. 184). This being said, Kaplan’s (1966) original observations remain supported, as, even in the Western essay format, Japanese writers still “often try to incorporate both sides of an argument, with their position fluctuating throughout the essay” (Kamimura & Oi, 1998, p. 311). These fluctuations, referred to as “reservation” (p. 310), result from students’ desire to demonstrate an understanding of counterpositions, and they can take the form of “for and against” or “for-against-for-against” (Oi, 1984, as cited in Silva, p. 664). As a final difference, writers’ concluding position may not even be the same as the position taken in the beginning (Kamimura & Oi, 1998, p. 311). Western readers would have a very difficult time accepting this rhetorical structure. In fact, when Japanese students incorporate any of the above

strategies into their English writing, consciously or otherwise, they risk not meeting the requirements of Western discourse communities, groups where their English professors surely have membership. Therefore, just like the five foreign exchange students in Leki's (1995) longitudinal study who began to receive higher marks for their essays after taking an EAP writing course (p. 256), Japanese writers of English can benefit when they learn to follow Western-structured essay formats.

Students also benefit from contrasting Japanese and Westernized techniques of persuasion. As Japan is a "high context culture" (Hall, 1976, as cited in Jenkins & Hinds, 1987, p. 341), messages are "deeply embedded in shared assumptions and human relationships" (Okabe, 1987, as cited in Kamimura & Oi, 1998, p. 318). Therefore, persuasive techniques tend to involve more "affective appeals" (p. 308), rather than appeals of logic, in order to "evoke empathy" (p. 314). To discover some affective differences between Western and Japanese writing, Kamimura and Oi (1998) compared American and Japanese students' persuasive essays on capital punishment. While American students commonly referred to God and the cost to taxpayers, Japanese students commonly used the subjunctive mood to invoke compassion (e.g. "If I were parents of a person who was killed by that man..." [p. 317]), and they employed emotional phrases, such as "sad" and "sorrow" (p. 318). Kamimura and Oi also report Japanese students' more frequent use of hedges, or softening devices, such as "I think" and "maybe" (p. 318). Similarly, Silva (1993) refers to Oi's (1984) study, where "her ESL subjects were inclined to be more tentative and less hyperbolic than their NES peers" (p. 664) and to Connor's (1984) study where "her ESL subjects' texts had less adequate justifying support for claim statements" (p. 664). As the above studies indicate,

Japanese and Western writers often use different techniques in their attempts to persuade, so by learning and adopting Western forms of persuasion, Japanese students can at least align their writing to Western readers' less affective expectations.

Students can benefit from dynamic CR as it highlights the differences in cultural texts. By exposing themselves to Western forms of “argument superstructure” (Gilbert, 2004, p. 64) and persuasion, they give themselves the tools to “improve their academic performance despite shortcomings in English language proficiency... at the microstructural level” (p. 64).

### ***Contrasting Rhetoric Helps Students Understand Cultural Values***

As “text is not simply the sum of its morphosyntactic components” (Kaplan, 2005, p. 382), contrasting rhetoric also facilitates the understanding of cultural values. If it is true that, according to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, “the particular language we speak influences the way we think about reality” (Lucy, 1997, p. 291), then when students study other cultures’ “discoursal macro-patterns” (Enkvist, 1997, as cited in Kaplan, 2005, p. 386), they begin to more clearly understand their own and other cultures’ views of reality. Just as language and thought may be “identical at the level of conceptual or semantic representation” (Lucy, 1997, p. 306), rhetorical patterns may be identical to the thought processes of the cultures in which they are used. Since rhetorical patterns of deduction and rational appeal are commonly encouraged in Western writing, and rhetorical patterns of induction and emphatic appeal are commonly encouraged in Japan, it can be inferred “if intellect is an instrument of understanding for Americans, it is intuition that is valued among the Japanese” (Barnlund, 1975, as cited in Kamimura & Oi, 1998, p. 308). Other cultural values that become embedded in writing include levels of allusiveness and

directness. Students can contrast traditional Japanese essays with lower-context Western essays in order to rank the level of allusiveness. They can then see how valued the unstated can be in Japan (Jenkins & Hinds, pp.341-342). Regarding directness, when letters of request are contrasted, students can see how much more direct Western writing can be (Connor, 2002, p. 503). Even at the lexical level, value differences become apparent. In Japan, depending on the writer's status in relation to the intended reader, special pronoun and verb systems must be used in order to indicate proper levels of humility and respect (see Carroll, 2005). When writing to a Western audience, Japanese students must readjust these levels so that their writing appears natural. As the above examples indicate, students can benefit from CR so that they are more able to appropriately align their texts with the value system of their intended audience.

***Contrasting Rhetoric Helps Students Understand Discourse Communities***

As “it is not grammatical rules, but text strategy that determines the choice of syntactic and lexical structures” (Kaplan, 2005, p. 377), Japanese writers of English can learn about differences in discourse expectations by contrasting culturally-based genres. According to Swales (1990), genres are “the properties of [discourse] communities that are used in the communicative furtherance of... goals” (as cited in Angelova, 1999, p. 492). For a writer to gain acceptance into a discourse community, “there must be an agreement between the generator and the receiver – a compact – to participate in the process” (Kaplan, 2005, p. 383). Readers participate by keeping in mind genre expectations, and writers participate by conforming to and understanding the genre's "structure, style, content and intended audience" (Swales, 1990, as cited in Hyon, 1996, p. 695). For example, in American and Japanese business letters, the intended audience

may be similar, but the structure, style, content, and even goals differ greatly. Students eventually wanting to do business in the United States should understand that in American business letters, the attempt is “to get the reader to appreciate the benefits of doing what the writer wants (Jenkins & Hinds, 1987, p. 330), not to come up with the “format and language which will most effectively establish or maintain the appropriate relationship between reader and writer” (p. 336). Also, while Japanese business letters begin with a comment about weather or the time of year (p. 336), American business letters begin only with a salutation. Other genres, such as essay, journal article, newspaper article, science review, biography, fiction, and poetry all contain culturally-bound structures, styles, and content, so students must carefully follow discourse community conventions in order to “tap into the dynamic consensual construction of [Western culture’s] knowledge-through-discourse” (Leki, 1991, p. 136). Unless Japanese students schooled in grammar translation also use CR to learn genre and the expectations of discourse communities, they will remain illiterate at the macro-level.

### **Applications – Teaching Contrastive Rhetoric in the Classroom**

Although not a curriculum in itself, dynamic CR provides many ideas for teaching. A major benefit is that students can learn analytical and writing skills they may not have even learned in their L1. In the “paragraph-pattern approach... [students] copy paragraphs, analyze the form of model paragraphs... put scrambled sentences into paragraph order... [and] they choose or invent appropriate topic sentences” (Raimes, 1983, as cited in Matsuda, p. 242). Although Leki (1991) severely criticizes the “prescriptive nature and deterministic view” (Matsuda, p. 242) of this approach, students can use it to learn about Western readers’ expectations. Xing et al. (2008) report the

benefits of an online collaboration between a British and Chinese University, where students of both nationalities contrasted essays on the same topic, isolating five categories of rhetoric. Regarding how to learn Western genre and values, students could contrast several newspaper articles about international events in order to see what information gets prioritized. Like in the Hinds and Jenkins' (1987) study, students could also literally translate Japanese business letters and then contrast them with American business letters - by studying their own culture's forms of rhetoric, and then presenting them in Western rhetorical patterns, students can also take advantage of the current trend of incorporating culturally recognizable material as a way to facilitate comprehension and learner interest (see Jahangard, 2007). With this advantage in mind, Cheung (2001) used Hong Kong pop to teach English to Hong Kongese students (p. 146). In conclusion, regardless of what CR-inspired writing activity is drawn upon, since the intention is for students to learn culturally-situated forms of rhetoric, teachers should assess assignments globally, checking students' work for target rhetorical patterns and features.

### **Conclusion**

Kaplan's (1966) pigeonholing of Asian writing as circular does not do justice to all the varied forms of rhetoric and styles in use. What it does do, however, is hint at the possibility that language and culture play a role in shaping L2 writing. A dynamic view of CR that considers these factors, as well as individuals' unique perspectives, and the bi-directional influence of discourse communities, can help dispel notions of cultural stereotyping and dominance, thereby assisting students on their way to becoming ambicultural. Regarding how CR can help, since "textlinguistic features have not been the concern of traditional language teaching" (Mauranen, 1993, as cited in Kaplan, 2005,

p. 382), contrasting rhetorical patterns and genres lets students understand the “morphosyntax of the target language... at the intersentential level” (Kaplan, 1988, as cited in Matsuda, p. 243). Also, by learning the rules of composition in a foreign language students can learn the values of that society. This dual competence becomes “mutually transformative rather than oppositional” (Jenkins & Hinds, 1987, p. 347). Indeed, “the code-switcher” becomes a “metalinguistically aware” “rhetorical power player” (Villanueva, 1993, as cited in Zamel, 1997, p. 347). Going even further, Xing et al. (2008) state that by contrasting rhetoric, students begin to create and define a new identity and balance it with their old identity (p. 73). Dynamic CR does not just help students understand “the formal trappings of the genres they need to work in”; more importantly, it also helps them grasp “all of the ‘life’ embodied in texts” (Bazerman, 1988, as cited in Hyon, 1996, p. 699).

### References

- Bhatia, V. (2008). Genre analysis, ESP and professional practice. *English For Specific Purposes*, 27(2), 161-174.
- Carroll, T. (2005). Beyond *keigo*: Smooth communication and the expression of respect in Japanese as a foreign language. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 175/176, 233-247.
- Cheung, C. (2001). The use of popular culture as a stimulus to motivate secondary students' English learning in Hong Kong. *ELT Journal*, 55(1), 55-61.
- Connor, U. (1996). *Contrastive rhetoric: Cross-cultural aspects of second-language writing*. New York: Cambridge UP.
- Connor, U. (2002). New directions in contrastive rhetoric. *TESOL Quarterly*, 36(4), 493-510.
- Gilbert, K. (2004). A comparison of argument structures in L1 and L2 student writing. *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication*, 14(1), 55-75.
- Hirose, K. (2003). Comparing L1 and L2 organizational patterns in the argumentative writing of Japanese EFL students. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 12, 181-209.
- Hyland, K. (2002). Genre: Language, context, and literacy. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 22, 113-135.
- Hyon, S. (1996). Genre in three traditions: Implications for ESL. *TESOL Quarterly*, 30(4), 693-722.
- Jahangard, A. (2007). Evaluation of EFL materials taught at Iranian public high schools. *Asian EFL Journal*, 9(2), 130-150.
- Jenkins, S. & Hinds, J. (1987). Business letter writing: English, French, and Japanese. *TESOL Quarterly*, 21(2), 327-349.
- Kachru, Y. (1995). Contrastive rhetoric in world Englishes. *English Today*, 11(1), 21-31.
- Kamimura, T., & Oi, K. (1998). Argumentative strategies in American and Japanese English. *World Englishes*, 17(3), 307-318.
- Kaplan, R. (2005). Contrastive rhetoric. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning* (pp. 375-391). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

- Kubota, R. (1998). An investigation of L1-L2 transfer in writing among Japanese university students: Implications for contrastive rhetoric. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 7(1), 69-100.
- Kubota, R. (1999). Japanese culture constructed by discourses: Implications for applied linguistics research and ELT. *TESOL Quarterly*, 33(1), 9-35.
- Leki, I. (1995). Coping strategies of ESL students in writing across the curriculum. *TESOL Quarterly*, 29(2), 235-260.
- Lucy, J. (1997). Linguistic relativity. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 26, 291-312.
- Matsuda, P. (2001). Contrastive rhetoric in context: A dynamic model of L2 writing. In T. Silva & P. Matsuda (Eds.), *Landmark essays on ESL writing* (pp. 241-256). Mahwah, NJ: Hermagoras Press.
- Mohan, B. & Lo, W. (1985). Academic writing and Chinese students: Transfer and developmental factors. *TESOL Quarterly*, 19(3), 515-534.
- Otlowski, M. (1998). The writing process and CALL: Hypermedia software for developing awareness of structure in writing. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 11(4), 419-425.
- Silva, T. (1993). Toward an understanding of the distinct nature of L2 writing: The ESL research and its implications. *TESOL Quarterly*, 27(4), 657-677.
- Spack, R. (1997). The rhetorical construction of multilingual students. *TESOL Quarterly*, 31(4), 765-774.
- Verbeem, J. (2004). Match or mismatch?: Coursebook tasks and the learning styles of Japanese EFL students (M. Ed project, Brock University, 2004).
- Xing, M., Wang, J., & Spencer, K. (2008). Raising students' awareness of cross-cultural contrastive rhetoric in English writing via an e-learning course. *Language Learning & Technology*, 12(2), 71-93.
- Zamel, V. (1997). Toward a model of transculturation. *TESOL Quarterly*, 31(2), 341-343.

HMM08/09

**LING5P05  
MARKING GRID -PAPER**

Grade	CONTENT	ORGANIZATION & STRUCTURE	GRAMMAR, STYLE & MECHANICS	OVERALL DESCRIPTION
90-100 A+	Reflects knowledge of issues; offers new insights; extension of current ideas. High level of synthesis with informed critical evaluation. Relevant and supported conclusions derive from discussion. Recent references; astute connections; integration of course material	Thesis clearly maintained throughout development; Paragraphs develop a topic sentence, provide support and a concluding or transition statement.	Excellent control of rhetorical structures, paragraph development, variety in sentence structures and length; appropriate academic vocabulary. Referencing is consistently accurate and consistent with APA conventions	Exceptional in all respects: informed, original, creative and well written
80-88 A	Reflects knowledge of issues; extension of current ideas High level of synthesis Relevant and supported conclusions Recent and relevant references, integration of course material	Thesis maintained throughout; Paragraph development reflects academic writing conventions.	Control of rhetorical structures, paragraph development, variety in sentence development; appropriate academic vocabulary Referencing is consistent and accurate.	Excellent paper
75-78 B+	Identifies and interprets relevant issues, summarizes current ideas. Basic synthesis; limited analysis. Discusses relevant sources. Reflects most key sources; refers to course material	Thesis maintained through most of paper. Paragraph development reflects understanding of conventions. Conclusion	Overall grasp of academic writing conventions, organization and standard grammar. Lack of variety in rhetorical and/or sentence structures.	Good paper that lacks certain key features
70-72 B	Recognizes basic facts and ideas relevant to the topic; comprehensive descriptive treatment; retrieves and reflects on information without much integration. Provides a supported conclusion. Refers to course material.	May provide statement of purpose only, without articulating a thesis. Presents material in clear sequence.	Evidence of understanding of academic writing conventions; control over sentence structure and grammatically accurate	Adequate paper; reflects baseline for graduate paper.
Below B	Not a passing grade See individual comments			