Cultural Rhetorical Patterns in Students' Writing

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Session Overview

Who are our students?
Challenges with academic writing
- Cultural rhetoric / rhetorical patterns
- Student writing samples
Strategies to assist with academic writing
Activity/discussion
Six Characteristics of Academic Writing

- Audience
- Purpose
- Organization
- Style
- Flow
- Presentation

*Source: Swales and Feak, 2012*
Contrastive Rhetoric (R. Kaplan, 1966)

Contrastive rhetoric is the study of how a person's first language and culture influence his or her writing in a second language.

Premise: Logic is culturally bound. Rhetoric evolved out of the culture – it is not universal.

CR studies cultural thought patterns, modes of thinking specific to a certain language group, specific discourse level organizational patterns.

Organization and rhetorical patterns differ from language to language

Kaplan’s ‘doodles’:
Contrastive Rhetoric

- Applies to expository paragraphs.
- Emphasizes the importance of paragraph development in English.
- Cultural patterns transfer to students English writing.
- Roles of a reader and a writer.
- Kaplan himself revised elements of the theory
- The Theory has since evolved into what is known as ‘Intercultural Rhetoric’
Contrastive Rhetoric

Insights:
- Provides insights into the way students write culturally and individually.
- Ties culture with rhetoric and writing.
- Explains some common problems with organization in F-2 writing.

Criticism:
- Over-simplified.
- Focus on product vs. process oriented writing.
- Can be ethnocentric.
Contrastive Rhetoric

“Although foreign language proficiency is at the heart of writing, the real problem for overseas students is not language-related errors, but the fact that students have not met the expectations of the academic reader of the target language” (qtd. in Xing, Wang and Spencer 2008).

“The ESL text may seem to be organized inappropriately because the writer has either been taught differing organizational schemata or has not yet mastered the organizational patterns to produce structures that are acceptable in the discourse community in which the text is placed” (qtd. in Matsuda, 1997)
American Academic Rhetorical Style

5-paragraph essay organization
Obvious transitions
Accuracy, and the right “strength” of statements
Deductive reasoning
Linear (unity, no repetition), systematic
Always keep the reader in mind
Chinese (Asian) Rhetorical Style

- Poetic, metaphorical, relies on the wisdom of the past
- Repetitive (to enhance persuasiveness)
- Inductive reasoning
- Qi-cheng-zhuan-he structure
  ‘Beginning – ‘Development’ – Turn – End’
- May not directly state the author’s opinion
- Reader’s responsibility to understand the message
- Circular style
Arabic Rhetorical Style

Eloquence=effectiveness

Repetition/exaggeration
  (i.e., Parallel construction on sentence and discoursal levels)

Imagery and “lawful magic”

Words are tied to emotions and may not reflect facts as much as in the West

Abrupt shifts on the same theme
Writing Across Borders Video

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=quI0vq9VF-c (min 2.50 - 5.53; 9.28 – end)
Writing Across Borders – Part 2

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=koViA1gqiUs (min 0 - 1.32)
Please read the two writing samples.

Identify possible features related to a student’s cultural rhetorical writing styles.
Chinese (Asian) Rhetorical Style

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Repetitive (to enhance persuasiveness)
Inductive reasoning
Qi-cheng-zhuan-he structure
‘Beginning – ‘Development’ – Turn – End’
May not directly state the author’s opinion
Reader’s responsibility to understand the message
Circular style
Strategies

Remind of the basic paragraph structure (topic sentence, supportive details, conclusion)

Remind/introduce a 5 paragraph essay structure

Emphasize ‘standard’ paragraph format and length

Facts, figures, numbers, data, quotes (sparingly), reported speech
  ◦ Avoiding the general
  ◦ Remember to cite

Staying on topic
  ◦ Explicit references to American style

Ask specific questions
Arabic Rhetorical Style

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  (i.e., Parallel construction on sentence and discoursal levels)

Imagery and “lawful magic”

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Abrupt shifts on the same theme
The great person in my life is she. The special person I know well is she. The most important one to me is she. Whoever that she pronoun reflect I my mother, my wife, my sister and my daughter who hasn’t seen the (right yet) I mean. All of them were a good friend to me in all times and they help me in every life station I was. Really I can’t differentiate between them but I considered them all of them as the air that my spirit can breath.
Strategies

Remind of the basic paragraph structure (topic sentence, supportive details, conclusion)

Remind/introduce a 5 paragraph essay structure

Encourage to stay on topic

Avoid repetition and redundancy

Avoid run-on sentences

Impersonal voice examples (passive voice)
Activity

Read students’ essays.

In groups, discuss the following question:

If a student came to you with this essay, and knowing what you do now about rhetorical styles, how could you help them to

a) improve the essay according to their academic environment, and

b) become a stronger writer in the American rhetorical style?
General Suggestions for Rhetorical Differences

Provide feedback on the American academic expectation/ask questions:

◦ E.g. Instead of ‘Disorganized’, ‘Vague’, ‘Irrelevant’, say:
  ‘Your purpose is unclear. Please state the purpose of your essay in the first paragraph so I know what you will focus on’.
  ‘This paragraph presents three different ideas. Dedicate a separate paragraph to each idea and expand on each idea at a time’.

Do not correct every error. Instead:

◦ Point out the kind of errors and the kind of editing that has to be done
  E.g. Offer alternatives to awkward phrases or idiomatic expressions
    Edit/rewrite a sentence or a paragraph and ask a student to rewrite other paragraphs following your model.
General Suggestions for Rhetorical Differences

Emphasize the assignment and rubric. Use it as a guide and a tool.

Clarify the style of writing you are looking for with each assignment.

Collaborate with content area instructors.

Ask students what they meant (oral skills can be better developed), then encourage a student to write down what they said.

Consider asking students to write a short paragraph with the explanation of their writing process (perhaps with an outline) and encourage them to ask questions they may have for you.

Encourage outside of class group work for students do peer review of each others’ drafts. Working together to increase feedback.
Questions and Contact

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