

The Historical Evolution of Intercultural Rhetoric

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Abstract

Language is deeply related to personal identity and complex culture within our society, which are hard to define with simple perspectives or theories. Those who want to teach English as a Second/Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) to foreign students need to know about the connection of language learning and culture including personal identities affecting students' L2 learning. This paper focuses on the synthesized review of the historical development of intercultural rhetoric starting from contrastive rhetoric originated by Kaplan's article to current trends of intercultural rhetoric dealing with various factors affecting L2's language learning and various research methods. This paper also gives reasons why ESL/EFL teachers should understand variations of writing patterns within different languages. It also gives ideas how to facilitate learners' learning English as L2 and how to cope with L2 learners' writing difficulties in class.

Keywords: contrastive rhetoric, intercultural rhetoric, ESL, EFL, culture

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Introduction

Teaching English as a second language is different from teaching hard science with objective universal facts or formulas. Language is not a simple tool to communicate with or express ourselves but a very complex thing weaved by many invisible factors such as culture and personal identities. Language is the product of the culture within the society and the media to produce the culture of the society, too. Since Kaplan's (1966) article about contrastive rhetoric, many researchers have kept doing researches in the interdisciplinary field of rhetoric to facilitate L2 learners. In order not to nurture English as a Second/Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) learners who produce or mimic a target language without being aware of themselves or their own cultures, we need to know about the factors affecting language learning as well as the knowledge of language. That's why an ESL/EFL teacher should know the history and the future of international rhetoric.

History of International Rhetoric

Kaplan, who did a research on the relationship between different cultures and languages, published an innovative article leading to intercultural rhetoric later in 1966. His research was based on foreign college students' writing and he found out that each foreign student showed the typical logic and the language patterns based on each of their own cultures. In other words, their L1 and their culture affected strongly their L2 writing and L2 learners needed to know the logic of English above learning the form of English (Kaplan, 1966). His interesting graphical representation called "doodles" showed the result of their different unique writing style from English, Semitic, Oriental, Romance and Russian. For example, the typical writing pattern of

Oriental students used an approach by indirection whereas English students preferred a direct and linear approach. Based on these results, he proposed contrastive rhetoric as a pedagogical model saying, “Contrastive rhetoric must be taught in the same sense that contrastive grammar is presently taught” (Kaplan, 1966, p.14).

Ever since Kaplan proposed contrastive rhetoric, there have been so many criticisms about it. Many researchers criticized because they thought contrastive rhetoric was too static and focused too much on the cultural difference based on the limited range and data (Liebman, 1992). Moreover, they thought contrastive rhetoric misled students to conform to the pattern and logic of English disregarding L2 learners’ own identities. They suggested contrastive rhetoric should be more dynamic with consideration of many other factors to affect L2 learners’ rhetoric using more various methods (Matsuda, 1997; Connor, 2004).

Specifically, Liebman (1992), who researched difference between Arabic and Japanese rhetorical instruction, suggested that teachers need to be aware of students’ different instructional background to teach them more efficiently. And he criticized contrastive rhetoric had a narrow view of rhetoric. What he wanted to say is ESL/EFL teachers should have a wide and open view of the contrasts between the rhetoric influenced by their students’ different cultures paying attention to language uses in different cultures as well as language forms.

Kubota (2004), who analyzed inductive characterized Japanese style called *ki-sho-ten-ketcu*, warned us that teachers should not be caught by stereotyping convention of writing and not to overgeneralize cultural differences relying on limited pieces of evidence. One of the basic features of language and culture is always changing rather than being static. As Kubota (2004) pointed out, we need to be aware of danger of stereotype and overgeneralization. It is dangerous to generalize something relying on limited and data. Therefore, we need to be careful when we

generalize or conclude the result of research in the field of intercultural rhetoric.

Dealing with the development process of contrastive rhetoric, we have another eye-catching research done by Matsuda (1997). He proposed the dynamic model embracing (a) the writer's and the reader's backgrounds, (b) shared discourse community, and (c) the interaction of the elements of L2 writing within the dynamic context (Matsuda, 1997, p.53). His model is valuable and deserves close attention because he tried to interpret the text with the view of the writer and reader whereas the previous research focused only on the responsibility of writers. Thanks to his model, the field of rhetoric has leaped over a little static feature of contrastive rhetoric.

As we review the history of contrastive rhetoric, contrastive rhetoric has been in the center of criticism despite the initial idea evoking follow up many researches. Based on the critics and modification of contrastive rhetoric, Connor (2004) proposed the term *intercultural rhetoric* instead of contrastive rhetoric embracing more dynamic intercultural settings, more broadening research area and new method approaches such as ethnographic approach. In sum, we might say the term *intercultural rhetoric* was not a scratch term and contrastive rhetoric has evolved into intercultural rhetoric by being influenced by new approaches and by responding to new currents in literacy research (Connor, 2002).

The Connection of Culture and Contrastive Rhetoric

We can't deal with language learning without mentioning culture. According to Holliday (1999), we need to distinguish large culture from small culture: Large signifies 'ethnic', 'national' or 'international' entities and small culture signifies any cohesive social grouping. Kaplan's doodle showed different cultures have their own unique rhetorical inclinations and was a typical product derived from the view of large culture focusing on the ethnic difference of each culture.

However, L2 learners are individuals with their own identities within their sub society of their ethnic society in terms of small culture. What is the most shortcoming of Kaplan's article?

Kaplan (1966) implied superiority and inferiority of languages in a subtle way. The standard of analysis was English and the other 4 languages were used for comparison. Basically, a standard means it is recognized as a model of authority or excellence. English seemed superior to students' own language. Based on Kaplan's doodle, ESL/EFL students were not following the traditional logic or pattern of English and they were forced to obey the logic or patterns of English as most English users did. In other words, they were supposed to get rid of their own identities when they write in English. Under the name of teaching writing, students' culture was totally disregarded. As I mentioned above, this was the outcome of big culture perspective. In terms of small culture, students language uses are determined by their small social groupings or activities wherever there is cohesive behavior regardless of their ethnic or national boundaries (Holloday, 1999).

Nevertheless, there is a fuzzy boundary between big and small culture. Students are definitely influenced by their big and small culture. For example, the Arab learners showed their typical apologies patterns compared to that of the native English speakers and the patterns were based on the religious belief or values (Wahed, 2011). In the case of religion in the Arabic countries, it's really hard to discern whether religion is part of big culture or small culture. In spite of this, we should say it's the matter of individual's small culture not the matter of Arab learners.

Conclusion

Matsuda and Atkinson (2008) pointed out that we need more experts in this field and we need to align methodologies and to go beyond the analysis of texts and dissolve contrastive rhetoric reintegrate into other disciplines. Fortunately, many researchers share these matters

through adding new ideas or methods to the previous contrastive rhetoric research. For example, the new notion of *tertium comparationis* which means common platform of comparison was introduced to identify texts for corpora or to select textual concepts to be studied in the corpora (Connor & Moreno, 2005).

The world is getting smaller and smaller and becomes a global village due to the modern high technology and active interaction with each other in the world. While English plays a crucial role as an international language, we need to pay attention to world English with diverse forms and logic. To be competent and valuable ESL/EFL teachers, we should have in-depth knowledge of language itself, but the more important qualification is that we need to consider students' identities and their small cultures affecting their learning, rather than imposing the logic or patterns which are to the taste of American English on students.

The world is changing at this moment and each person is different from one another. Therefore, to define culture and to set up a theory to cover these fluid features might be impossible in some ways. However, ESL/EFL teachers should always keep in mind that teachers' role is not only teach English forms but also help students to perceive the world with an open view, to open up to the diverse culture, and to be proud of themselves and their cultures at the same time. What we have to do now is we ourselves should open up to others of diversity. Otherwise, we can't make students open up to the world. We should remember these two things: (1) There is no more so-called standardized English produced by White Americans, but it is just American English. (2) There are no superior or inferior cultures in the world, but they are just different from each other.

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