

Rhetoric: A Tale of Two Cultures

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Abstract

Writing is a complex process that transforms writers' thought into texts. Proficiency in writing is always one of essential purposes in language learning. However, mastering grammatical rules and sociolinguistic competence is not enough in language learning, particularly in an academic discourse. Foreign language teaching tends to focus on grammatical aspects of writing. However it is very difficult for foreign language learners to express their thought in completely unfamiliar rhetoric style. Therefore, contrastive rhetoric has an important role in applied linguistics. The paper initially discusses the two related concepts rhetoric and contrastive rhetoric, and then analyzes the differences between Chinese and English in key rhetoric aspects such as structure of composition, individualism vs. collectivism, logical thinking vs. imagery thinking and the responsibility of writers and readers. Finally, it examines the implications of contrastive rhetoric in foreign language teaching and intercultural awareness.

Keywords: *Rhetoric, contrastive rhetoric, Chinese rhetoric, English rhetoric, TESOL*

Introduction

Writing is a complex process that transforms the writers' thoughts into texts. Proficiency in writing is always one of the essential factors in second language acquisition. However, it is very difficult for non-native speakers to master not only because of grammatical problems, but also because of cultural barriers. Before Kaplan published the article "Culture Thought Patterns in Intercultural Education" in 1966, most educators teaching a foreign language to non-native speakers focused on grammatical problems in writing, such as diction and syntax. However, for L2 learners, it may be more difficult to express their thoughts in a completely unfamiliar rhetoric style. Therefore, the study of rhetoric and contrastive rhetoric between L1 and L2 is of great significance in L2 writing and teaching.

This paper seeks to provide some suggestions for L2 writing and teaching on the basis of the theories on contrastive rhetoric between Chinese and English. It will initially discuss what is rhetoric and contrastive rhetoric, and then contrastively analyze the differences between Chinese and English from a rhetoric aspect. Finally, it will focus on the implication of these theories in teaching L2 writing to Chinese learners.

What is rhetoric?

Rhetoric is an ancient discipline which can be traced back to ancient Greece, in which loquacity and competition were two prominent features of that civilization. The ability to persuade and self-express played an important role in society. Therefore, in the middle of the fifth century, the institution of rhetorical training was founded in Athens (Lawson-Tancred, 1991) and as Plato and Nichols (1998) stated, rhetoric, grammar and logic consisted of the medieval trivium in the Middle Ages. During its long scholastic history, many philosophers and scholars have given rhetoric definitions in different ways. Roberts (2004, p. 3) defined rhetoric as the "counterpart of Dialectic" and stated that the essence of rhetoric was persuasion, and that enthymemes were the substance of rhetorical persuasion. Coppee (1866, p. iv) defined rhetoric as 'the art of constructing and applying discourse, (which) is meant the

invention and arrangement of thought and its expression in language'. Caro (2004) interprets rhetoric as the art of oratory and the art of communicating effectively through writing.

In Greek history, rhetoric played an important role in public and political life. As Lawson-Tancred (1991) stated, rhetoric caused the rise of democracies and made public eloquence become a 'political indispensability'. Furthermore, rhetoric was a teachable skill that could be learned from skilled orators in rhetoric training, just like a modern university degree. It became a necessity for those who wanted to aim for a prominent position in society. According to Hawcroft (1999), traditionally rhetoric can be divided into five parts, 'invention' (finding proper materials), 'disposition' (arranging it), 'elocution' (expressing it), 'memory' (memorizing it) and 'action' (delivering it).

Just as ancient Greek is the home of Western rhetoric, Chinese traditional rhetoric also has profoundly influenced oriental civilization. As Lu (2000) states, Chinese traditional rhetoric can be dated from 8th century B.C. with the emergence of the classical text known as *Shi jing* (the Book of Odes) and *Shang shu* (the Book of History). However, as Needham, et al. (1954) points out, there is no clear definition of the term in Chinese literacy history. Compared with ancient Greek, traditional China literacy placed more emphasis on the written memorial rather than the speech performance and had its own stylistic features. For example, most Chinese literature has the ideal of a brief but pregnant style. Allusion to earlier literature is also a prominent feature. Besides, there is the habit of stylistic parallelism in literal form. In addition, ancient Chinese thinkers, just as Greek thinkers from 5th to 3rd century B.C., conceptualized rhetoric in moral, rational, dialectical and psychological terms.

Contrastive Rhetoric and its developmental tendency

Contrastive Rhetoric is an area of research in second language acquisition, used to explain the second language writers' problems in composition by contrastively analyzing the first language and second language rhetoric strategies (Connor, 1996), a new term emerging in applied linguistics since 1966 when Kaplan published his article "Cultural Thought Patterns in Inter-Cultural Education". Before 1966, second language educators in fact acknowledged the existence of the cultural factor for non-native speakers in second language learning, but the recognition was limited to the level of grammar, that is, diction and sentence structure. In Kaplan's article, he analyzed some paragraphs of ESL students with a different cultural background and found, as Connor (1996) pointed out that Anglo-European languages followed linear development, whereas Oriental languages used an indirect approach; the Roman and Russian languages have the habit of using digressive and extraneous material to express writer's ideal. Therefore, Kaplan (1966) drew to the conclusion that rhetoric varies from culture to culture and even from time to time within a given culture. After the article was published, Contrastive Rhetoric as a new study area in applied linguistics attracted the interest of a number of scholars. Along with further research, Kaplan's primary theories of contrastive rhetoric, has been criticized. He ignored the linguistic and cultural difference among speakers in one "Oriental" group, for example, by putting Chinese, Japanese and Korean speakers in one Oriental group. He only considered the negative influences of the first language on the second language. Although the primary theories of contrastive rhetoric had some weaknesses, the new study model introduced the linguistic world to a real insight that writing was culturally influenced.

In the past three decades or more, Contrastive Rhetoric research has seen such significant changes that the primary theories have become too limited to account for all the data. Connor (1998), therefore suggested that in the context of applied linguistics, Contrastive Rhetoric had taken new research directions in the following four areas: (a) Contrastive text linguistic studies compared how texts are formed in different languages and within the cultural context. The study went beyond the traditional sentence-level and text categories that ranged from expository texts, argumentative texts to narrative texts. (b) Studies of writing as cultural and educational activity described the teaching of writing in the first language and second language in different cultures, thus helping teachers to deeply understand students' written styles. (c) Classroom-based contrastive studies examined different cross-cultural patterns in group work and behavior, thus helping teachers form and adjust to a peer response writing group in process-based classes. (d) Genre-specific investigation researched rhetoric features in different genres, such as journal articles, business reports and letters of application.

Contrastive Rhetoric between Chinese and English in text linguistic

Contrastive rhetoric (Connor, 2004) always maintains that language and writing, to some extent, are cultural phenomena and different cultures having different rhetorical features. Moreover, the rhetorical conventions and linguistic patterns of the first language often influence on the ESL writing and even cause interference. In 1966, Kaplan's pioneering study contrastively analyzed several paragraphs of ESL students' essays and drew to the conclusion that essays written in the Anglo-European language usually develop as a linear model, whereas oriental essays use an indirect model and often put the point at the end of the composition. The study, as a new study domain, is successful in providing the fundamental theory for Contrastive Rhetoric of the Anglo-European language and the Oriental language. However, this conclusion was too general and too brief, neither explaining the specific language in the Anglo-European language group or Oriental language group, nor explaining the cultural reasons behind the rhetoric feature. In order to improve on the Kaplan's theory, in the forty years following, many scholars have been researching and providing more specific knowledge in this area, including more details about the Chinese and English language. Due to vastly different cultural backgrounds, the Chinese and English languages have obvious differences in rhetoric, specifically in the following aspects.

The structure of composition

There are obvious differences in the organization of Chinese and English composition. English composition usually follows the "introduction-body-conclusion" mode. In the "introduction", writers usually present some related background information first, and then narrow down the information to the topic. Next, usually in the last sentence of the introduction, writers provide the thesis statement of the essay. In the "body" section, as Kaplan (1966) states, every paragraph begins with a topic sentence followed by some subdivisions of the topic, each supported by examples, facts or illustration, developing the central concept to other ideas in the whole composition to prove or argue a point. In the "conclusion", writers usually restate the ideals of the thesis and then make some comments on the topic, including a summary or evaluation. This kind of English composition mode is not accidentally established. In the second quarter of the fifth century B.C., many handbooks focusing on rhetoric were published. According to Aristotle and Kennedy (1991), these books seem to have outlined the logical parts into which a speech in a court of law should be divided. The first part is a prooimion, or introduction, in which seek to arouse attention of the jury, then a diegesis, or narration, of the facts of the case from the point of view of the speaker. Next is a pistis, or proof. In this section, speakers will argue against the opponent to prove their own opinions. The final part of a speech was the epilogos, or conclusion, in which section speakers would restate their opinions and draw a conclusion for the whole speech. Although it is the outline of public speech, it can be regarded as rudiment of Western modern composition.

In contrast, "qi-cheng-zhuan-he" is the common structure of modern Chinese composition. According to Connor (1996), *qi* is the preparation of the topic; *cheng* is the introduction and development of the topic; *jun* (*zhuan*) turns to a seeming unrelated subject; and *he* is the conclusion of the whole essay. In fact, as in English composition, the structure of Chinese composition is influenced by Chinese classical rhetoric-"eight-legged" essay. The essay form played an important role in Chinese literary history, according to Kaplan (1966), from the middle of fifteenth century when the "eight-legged" essay became the standard style of the civil service examination to the early twentieth century. The "eight-legged" essay consists of eight fixed parts. The first part, as Ge (2001, p. 238) states, is called "break open the topic", in which the writer would introduce the topic by quoting related classic text. The second part is "accept the topic", which is a declaration of the general treatment of the topic. The third and fourth parts are the two introductory paragraphs, addressing the topic and conveying a similar meaning with a parallel structure and diction. The following two parts are the centre of the essay, discussing the points of the topic. In the final two parts, writers would restate the main theme and draw a conclusion on the whole piece. From the above stated, we can find that both the organization of the "eight-legged" essay and "qi-cheng-zhuan-he" illustrates that in Chinese composition, the introduction does not directly focus on the thesis but explains the relationship with the classic text and the reason why the writer chooses the topic as a necessary component. Moreover, the "delayed" argument usual-

ly appears in the “zhuan” parts or in the third and the forth parts of “eight-legged” essay. Besides, the “implicit” thesis statement usually appears near the end of the essay, so Hinkel (2002) notes that compared with Anglo-American writing, Chinese composition is more inductive than deductive. However, other scholars, such as Hinds (1987) consider that the rhetorical styles of Chinese composition are neither inductively nor deductively organized since writers usually do not provide a clear thesis statement either at the beginning or at the end of the essay instead of allowing readers to think through and interpret the main idea. In conclusion, as Shen (1989) argues, “from surface to core” is an essential rule in Chinese composition and the rule requires writers to reach a topic gradually and systematically instead of abruptly.

Individualism vs. Collectivism

Due to different cultural backgrounds and traditions, the Chinese and English distinct rhetoric styles are also manifested by different attitudes on “self” in the compositions. In fact, there is a different belief system in individualism and collectivism. In English compositions, writers are encouraged to express their individual opinions in logic or inductive-deductive reasoning, so we can feel the obvious individual color in an English persuasive and expository essay. As Connor (1996) notes, Western process theory of writing emphasizes voice of the individual, so this leads to directness and explicitness. Therefore, according to Matalene (1985), the Western sense of rhetoric is like an exploratory technique for individual to approach the truth and inspire the audiences’ action and change. Furthermore, originality is another rhetorical feature of English compositions. In the case of the writer’s use of others’ opinions to support or prove his/her points, the other’s opinion certainly appears in the form of quotation (direct or indirect quotation) in the composition. Gregg (1983) stated that citing references is a cultural practice based on individualism. Western writer want careful support of their own ideas or their own unique invention and their readers want more supportive information that enables them to continue their own inquiries. In fact, as Hinkel (2002) notes, many properties of persuasion of the Aristotelian discourse are still widely accepted in Anglo-American academic writing and reflect the rhetorical tradition, for instance, the expression of the writer’s personal goal and opinions, factual validation of points of view and propositions.

Chinese composition, however, has a different rhetorical feature. The Chinese concept of self makes it difficult for Chinese writers to express their own opinion so directly in their composition. They, as Connor (1996) notes, rely on appeal to history, tradition and authority, and they often cite references from historical and religious classical texts or proverbs instead of expressing themselves. However, these saying and allusion for western readers are distractions. According to Chinese tradition, citing from classical texts is one of the ways to express respect for authority, and to accept traditional values and social norm is regarded as polite behavior. Moreover, Chinese writers have a different interpretation of the concept of style, arrangement and invention. Matalene (1985, p. 794) pointed out, “For the Chinese writers, style means manipulating one’s memory bank of phrases, arrangement means filling the forms, and invention means doing it the way it has been done.” He also stated that this kind of rhetorical feature was formed because great religions of China all de-emphasize the importance of the individual. Confucianism ordainates the group to the individual; Taoism subordinates the group to Nature; Buddhism denies the self exist and Marxism rejects bourgeois individualism. To this today, Confucian persuasive methods still play an important role in modern Chinese rhetoric. According to Hinkel (2002), the Confucian argument is based on the harmonious exchange of ideas between the writer and the audience and does not promote the ideas of one individual. Matalene (1985) argues that the primary function of rhetoric for the Chinese is to promote social harmony and cohesion, so they always repeat the maxims, proverbs and analogies in fixed forms and express them in well-known phrases.

Logic thinking vs. imagery thinking

As Heisey (2000) states, the system of logic of Western cultures based on Aristotle’s theory and the syllogism as the cornerstone of Western thinking pattern influenced Western culture for 2500 years. According to Aristotle and Roberts (2004), the essence of rhetoric is persuasion, and enthymeme is the substance of rhetorical persuasion. Aristotle (Cohen, Nagel, & Corcoran, 1993) also states that all propositions either assert or deny something of something else. Enthymeme is incompletely-stated syllogism, that is, an argument consisting of three propositions in which two are premises and the third is the conclusion, so enthymeme usually consists of one of the premises and one conclusion. It fol-

lows that western classical rhetoric has always emphasized inductive-deductive reasoning. Therefore, English composition in fact is the process of “proof” and “be proved”.

As stated in the essay earlier, syllogism is the completed interpretation of enthymemes which are the substance of rhetorical persuasion. Thus, rhetorically, by the influence of tradition, the Western composition is the proving process that consists of precise and strict premise and conclusion. In contrast, according to Heisey (2000), Chinese people prefer imagery thinking. For example, *Yijing* is one of the obvious features of Chinese rhetoric. *Yijing* is a Chinese word, in which “yi” means mind or consciousness, and “jing” means environment. An ancient approach in writing which has existed for many centuries is still employed in modern Chinese literature. According to Shen (1989), *yijing* is the essential approach that distinguishes Chinese literature and criticism from Western literature and criticism. Shen also explains that *yijing* is a writing process of creating a pictorial environment or mental picture while reading a piece of literature. Almost all critics consider that *yijing* is not a logical thinking process, namely, not a process of premise-conclusion, which is the fundamental feature of Western rhetoric. In Chinese composition, the writers often use imagery analogy or through related images of objects to state concepts or express their ideas. Heisey (2000) gave an example in his book, *Ren* (Benevolence) of important concepts in Confucian thought which appeared 105 times in the Chinese classical masterpiece “Analects of Confucius”, but Confucians did not give a clear definition of it. It follows that Chinese rhetoric emphasizes imagery thinking than abstract conceptual ideas.

The Responsibility of Writers and Readers

Hinds (1987) claims that different languages have different degrees of readers’ and writers’ involvement. Using English and Japanese as an example to explain contrastive analysis, he pointed out that in English, the writer was primarily responsible for effective communication, including making a clear and well-organized statement, whereas in Japanese, it is the reader’s responsibility to understand the article’s structure and the writer’s intention or position, since, as Suzuki (1975) indicates, Japanese writers were used to giving hints or ambiguous meaning instead of making an explicit explanation of their views in compositions. Although Hinds used Japanese as example in his analysis, he repeatedly stated that Japanese and Chinese shared similar characteristics in the writer’s and reader’s responsibility. For example, there is the amount of conjunctions or phrases in English, such as furthermore, as well as, in addition, however, as a result, consequently, then, as soon as, although, even though, otherwise, therefore, so that, until, instead of etc. These transition statements not only have different meanings but also they have different uses and conventions in English compositions. As Hinds (1987) stated, these transition statements are very important in English composition and English writers have the responsibility of using appropriate transition statement in compositions to make their logic and views explicit. In contrast, Chinese has less transition statements than that of the English. Chinese rhetoric, as Hinkel (2002) notes, usually adopting ambiguous forms of persuasion, such as overstatement, generalization and analogy, is inclined to reduce the writer’s responsibility for logic and explicit viewpoint.

Complications in TESOL writing for Chinese learners

Contrastive rhetoric, as a new study area, provides a different angle to deal with the problems confronted by L2 learners and instructors. Proficiency in writing is always one of the purposes of second language learning and teaching. Proficiency in writing, in fact, has two requirements. One is on the grammatical level - words and sentence; the other is in the rhetorical level— composition convention. However, many educators in second language writing pay more attention to L2 grammatical rules than rhetorical conventions. As a result, although L2 learners have the ability to use accurate words and sentences in their composition, it is still difficult for them to conform to the second language’s rhetorical style. By comparing L1 and L2 in the rhetorical aspect, educators and learners are able to realize the problems in the teaching and learning process.

Generally speaking, contrastive rhetoric complications in TESOL make educators of a second language realize that there are different rhetoric conventions existing in different cultures. Hence, in the teaching process, educators should maintain a positive attitude towards their students’ deficiency. As Purves (1988, p. 19) stated, “When students, taught to write in one culture, enter another and do not write as do the members of the second culture, they should not be thought stupid or lacking in ‘higher

mental processes' as some composition teachers have stated". The differences only exist in different rhetoric conventions resulting from a distinct cultural background. As grammar, rhetoric is also learnable and teachable in second language classrooms. Kaplan (1966, p. 20) points out, "contrastive rhetoric must be taught in the same sense that contrastive grammar is presently taught." Besides, contrastive rhetoric provides more detailed theories or information for educators to understand the rhetoric background of the students' first language, which is useful to analyze the reason of the students' deficiency in second language learning process and how to make their compositions conform to the target language's style.

Specifically, for Chinese learners, Chinese is their first language. Due to L1 transfer, there are possibly some inappropriate rhetorical features appearing in English compositions. According to the contrastive rhetoric analyzed before, the biggest problem is the difference in culture and thinking mode. Therefore, educators should firstly develop the students' cultural awareness during the learning and teaching process, as Shen (1989) claimed that to some extent, learning the convention of English composition is learning the values of western society. Due to the influence of Chinese traditional culture and rhetoric, Chinese learners are usually inclined to use ambiguous paragraph structures or indirectly express their views in their composition. In view of this problem, educators should introduce the conventional English paragraph and composition structure and the essential knowledge about topic sentence, thesis statement, supporting sentence and conclusion etc. Kaplan (1966) introduced some specific methods to help students understand the English composition structure. For example, supplying students with a disordered paragraph and asking them to rearrange it in the English composition convention. Also, students need to learn the usage of transition statements of the English composition and understand it is the writer's responsibility for making the structure of composition explicit in English composition. In addition, educators should encourage students to express their view directly, and as Shen (1989) notes, establish multiple sets of "self" concept and express "self" according to western society values.

Furthermore, since English rhetoric emphasizes on logical thinking and Chinese imagery thinking, it is important for Chinese learners to cultivate their logical and critical thinking ability in the process of learning and teaching English writing. According to Elsegood (2007), due to the lack of critical thinking skills, our students are always confused about how to present a clear view in their composition, how to support their view sufficiently and how to strength their own claims and to weaken opposing claims. Therefore, he also suggested that educators should make students realize that western intellectual tradition has a critical view of knowledge construction, then let students understand that all academic writing, to some extent, are based on the "claims and supports" analysis, and teach students to use the "claims and supports" approach to construct their own view in their writing. Besides, students need to be taught general knowledge about logic, such as premise, conclusion, fallacy and how to establish a logical relationship among the elements of facts.

Conclusion

L2 writing teaching and learning is a complicated process in second language acquisition. Since 1966 when Kaplan raised the new concept Contrastive Rhetoric (CR) as a new study area appeared in applied linguistics and intended to provide new theories for second language teaching and learning. The paper mainly focuses on contrastive rhetoric between Chinese and English, and some suggestions to Chinese learners of English. After contrastive analysis, we can find that besides differences in origin, Chinese and English rhetoric are also different in the following aspects: composition structure, writers' self awareness, thinking pattern and the writers' and readers' responsibility in compositions. "Introduction-body-conclusion" is the fixed feature of English whereas "qi-chen-zhuan-he" is the main characteristic of Chinese. Moreover, the purpose of English composition is to express the writers' individual views and to inspire the readers' action, while Chinese composition is to promote social harmony and harmoniously exchange ideas between writers and readers. Therefore, English rhetoric has strong individual color. Contrastively, Chinese rhetoric emphasizes collectivism to a certain extent. In addition, the Chinese and English different thinking patterns also reflect in their composition. The Western are inclined to logical thinking and the Eastern to imagery thinking. Therefore, precise and logical reasoning is the prominent feature of English rhetoric whereas creating mental and a pictorial environment is obviously characteristic of Chinese literature. Furthermore, there are different writers and

readers' responsibilities in Chinese and English composition. The purpose of all these theories is their application in teaching and learning L2 writing. For Chinese learners of English, the biggest problems lie in differences of culture and thinking patterns. Therefore, educators should integrate cultural awareness into the teaching and learning process, while cultivating the students' logical and critical thinking ability.

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