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The Role of Intercultural Rhetoric in ESP Education

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Abstract: Intercultural rhetoric (IR), previously called contrastive rhetoric (CR)¹, is “the study of written discourse between and among individuals with different cultural backgrounds” (Connor, 2011, p. 1). IR examines the influences of first language, culture, and education on the production of texts with the aim of advancing cross-cultural communication research as well as informing writers, editors, translators, and language and composition teachers and learners, among other users and producers of text.

This paper outlines the history of IR as well as highlights its current concerns and applications. In particular, attention will be given to the changing definitions of culture and their impact on research and practice in IR and English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Finally, sample applications of research to ESP instruction will be described.

Key Words: intercultural rhetoric (IR), contrastive rhetoric (CR), English for Specific Purposes (ESP), culture, cross-cultural communication, intercultural communication

Background

The identification of preferred patterns in texts and interactions across cultures and languages is important because this knowledge can inform ESP teachers and advanced learners. For example, graduate students, post-doctoral researchers, and other novice academic writers can use a corpus of articles to compare their own rhetorical and organization habits and lexico-grammatical choices with those of successful practitioners in the discipline. Teachers of writing for specific disciplines can benefit from the comparison of corpora of discipline-specific texts in different languages in order to identify potential pitfalls for their students. Such corpora comparisons thus help teachers to understand reasons for potential mismatches in the formulation of specific text types by students. Research article introductions are a well-studied example, where reliance on the practices in one’s native language can lead to a mismatch with the expectations in the target language. IR research can also shed light on successful strategies for business negotiations in situations where

a variety of languages and cultures interact to conduct commerce.

Studies of cross-cultural writing in ESL began with Robert Kaplan’s (1966) research into differences in organization of essays written in English by international students with a variety of backgrounds. Connor’s (1996) *Contrastive Rhetoric: Cross-Cultural Aspects of Second-Language Writing* set out to define contrastive rhetoric and establish it as a legitimate area of research in second language acquisition studies. The book reflected the interdisciplinary nature of this research and the resulting pluralism of the research methods. In building a theory of contrastive rhetoric, the influences on this newly defined field were identified. These influences included the two cornerstones of contrastive rhetoric, namely the transfer of first language patterns to a second language, and the theory of linguistic relativity (i.e., the notion that patterns of language and writing are culture-specific). New influences introduced in the book, however, were theories of rhetoric (writing as communication and persuasion is affected by audience),

¹ In the early 2000s, some postmodern second-language writing scholars launched a criticism of contrastive rhetoric, characterizing it as static and linking it directly to contrastive analysis, a movement associated with structural linguistics and behaviorism. In a 2002 article, Connor addressed these criticisms and to offer new directions for a viable contrastive rhetoric. In addressing the critiques, she aimed to draw attention to the broadening scope of contrastive rhetoric and considered that a new term would better encompass the essence of the field in its current state. To distinguish between the often-quoted “static” model and the new advances that have been made, Connor suggests it may be useful to use the term intercultural rhetoric instead to refer to the current models of cross-cultural research. However, over the following decade many scholars have continued to use the term contrastive to refer to the kinds of analysis they do, especially when describing quantitative corpus-based analyses of text that do not consider contextual influences.

text linguistics (texts and writing have systematic, analyzable variation), genre analysis (writing is task- and situation-based and results in discourse types), literacy (the activity of writing is embedded in culture), and translation (texts are translatable across cultures but may take different styles and forms). Connor's 1996 book defined contrastive rhetoric as "an area of research in second language acquisition that identifies problems in composition encountered by second language writers, and by referring to the rhetorical strategies of the first language, attempts to explain them" (1996, p. 5). The goal of the book was to give practical advice for researchers and teachers of ESL.

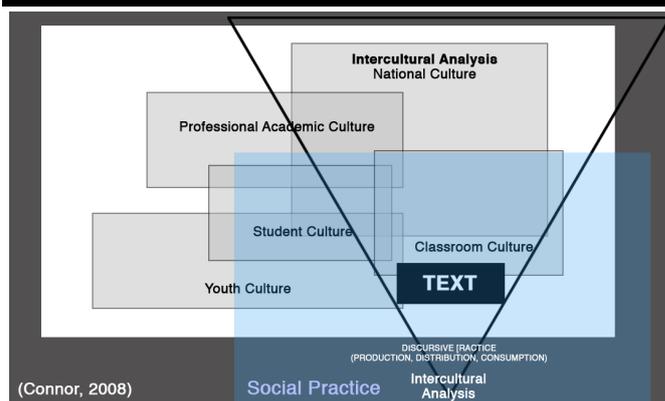
Contrastive Rhetoric brought about a renewed interest in the study of writing cross-culturally and an attention to the interdisciplinary potential of contrastive rhetoric. Subsequent years have witnessed several book-length publications on cross-cultural writing such as Panetta's (2001) edited book *Contrastive Rhetoric Revisited and Redefined* (on the use of contrastive rhetoric in first-language contexts), Kassabgy, Ibrahim, and Aydelott's (2004) edited book *Contrastive Rhetoric: Issues, Insights, and Pedagogy* (focusing on writing and translation, diglossia, second language acquisition, and pragmatics), and McCool's (2009) *Writing Around the World: A Guide to Writing Across Cultures* (offering practical advice for global writers). Several other published books include chapters on intercultural writing, e.g. Manchón (2009), Palmer-Silveira, Ruiz-Garrido and Fortanet-Gómez (2006), Ruiz-Garrido, Palmer-Silveira and Fortanet-Gómez (2010), and a special issue of the *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication* (2005), edited by Li and Casanave.

Most recent treatments of IR include Connor's 2011 book *Intercultural Rhetoric in the Writing Classroom* and Belcher and Nelson's edited book *Critical and Corpus-based Approaches to Intercultural Rhetoric* (2013). Belcher and Nelson are credited for the vision of shaping IR and moving the field forward. For anyone interested in acquiring initial knowledge about IR, their book is a must read.

Basic Tenets of Current Research in Intercultural Rhetoric

In 2008, Connor proposed a multilayered model of IR. Figure 1 shows the three major tenets of this model: (1) texts need to be seen in their contexts with meaningful contextual and purposeful descriptions, (2) culture needs to be complexified to include disciplinary cultures in addition to national/ethnic cultures, and (3) dynamic, interactive patterns of communication are important to consider, which leads to convergences among cultural differences. Of these three, the ESP teacher should consider culture to be of the utmost importance.

Figure 1: Multilayered model of intercultural rhetoric



Culture is a complex concept in today's world. Already in 1997, Heath referred to culture as one of the most contentious subjects in all humanities and sciences. Culture has been generally defined as the lifestyle of a group of people: values, beliefs, artifacts and behavior, and communication patterns. Mathews (2000) calls this traditional view "the way of life of the people" (p. 2). This definition leads to terms like 'American culture', 'Chinese culture', and 'Finnish culture', for example. Such a notion of culture has come under increasing attack in the post-War period, particularly noticeable in postmodernist criticism. For example, Keesing (1994) regards culture as largely the invention of Western anthropologists who simply needed "a framework for [their] creation and evocation of radical diversity." He believes that this essentialist notion of culture infiltrated our everyday discourse and, over time, led many Westerners to understand culture as something defined by objects and rituals, usually as they related to a non-Western "other" (p. 301). In other words, this notion allowed us to define ourselves by comparison to what we were not.

Considering these and other aspects of the evolving concept of culture, the ability to frame the concept of culture as used in IR research is critical. In fact, a review by Alan Hirvela (2009) of Connor et al.'s *Contrastive Rhetoric: Reaching to Intercultural Rhetoric* (2008) points out that the field of IR needs to develop "an effective and commonly agreed-upon construct for culture" for the field to continue (p. 287).

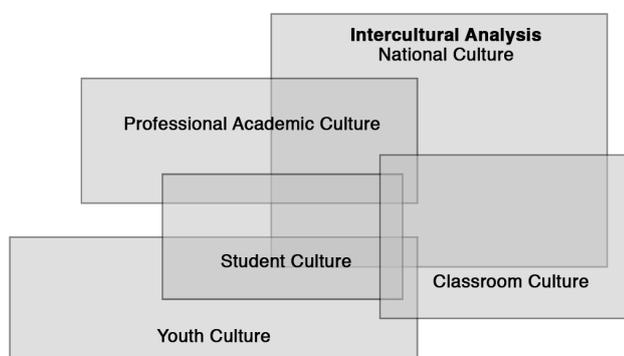
Dwight Atkinson (2004) wrote about the need for contrastive rhetoric to change its conceptualization from a "received" view of culture to an alternative view. A received view considers cultures as ethnic, national, and static; alternative views take into account the changing nature of global communication and the changing definitions of culture as previously described. The most useful concept in Atkinson's discussion of new cultural concepts for IR is the distinction between "large cultures" and "small cultures" (Holliday, 1999). This discussion would go on to shape the framework of

culture in IR. Legal culture, business culture, classroom culture, etc., can be analyzed using the same parameters as one uses for culture: norms, values, social practices, roles, hierarchies, and artifacts. We know from genre theory, for example, that various discourse communities have their own norms about genre characteristics and social practices about how to produce and consume these genres. Different norms for research papers often exist from discipline to discipline. Business executives in any given culture (national/ethnic and professional), for example, know what a typical sales letter looks like, and they have a schema about how sales negotiations are expected to proceed.

Thus, Holliday provided a concrete model of small cultures in educational settings (1994, 1999). Large cultures have ethnic, national, or international group features as essential components and tend to be normative and prescriptive. Small cultures, on the other hand, are non-essentialist and based on dynamic processes that relate to cohesive behaviors within social groupings. Small cultures avoid culturist ethnic, national, and international stereotyping: “In cultural research, small cultures are thus a heuristic means in the process of interpreting group behavior” (1999, p. 240). Small cultures are rooted in activities, and a specific discourse is one of the products of small culture. According to Holliday, “In many ways, the discourse community *is* a small culture” (p. 252).

Classrooms also can be said to have their own culture. Holliday described a classroom using his model. In it are various overlapping social institutions and practices, such as national culture, professional academic culture, student culture, etc. (Figure 2) that represent some examples of the cultures that can be found in a single educational setting.

Figure 2: Interacting cultures in an educational setting [adapted from Holliday (1999) and Atkinson (2004)]



A complex notion of the interactions of different cultural forces emerges when one analyzes the small and large cultures present in a given situation, such as in Holliday’s classroom model. National culture overlaps with other, smaller cultures such as professional-academic culture,

classroom culture, student culture, and youth culture. This is important for teachers of writing to take into consideration in ESL and EFL situations, where the makeup of the class includes students from such diverse disciplines as engineering, nursing, business, liberal arts, etc., in addition to the diversity in terms of age, gender, and national and socio-economic backgrounds.

However, given the controversial nature of boundaries as they relate to identity construction against socio-historically informed power differentials, culture has become a burning issue, not just in the world of EFL/ESL, but in 21st century scholarly discussion as a whole. Defining culture has never been easy, especially because definitions tend to freeze concepts in time. ‘Culture’ continues to be one of the most complex words in the language (Williams, 1983, p. 87). Whereas early notions of culture, the “received view,” consider large groups as sharing a definable culture (ethnic, national, international), postmodern views see culture as “a dynamic, ongoing process which operates in changing circumstances to enable group members to make sense and meaningfully operate within those circumstances” (Holliday, 1999, p. 248). Thus, culture has become less and less a national consensus, but “a consensus built on common ethnic, generational, ideological, occupational, or gender-related interests, within and across national boundaries” (Kramsch, 2002, p. 276).

Particularly relevant to the EFL/ESL community, and especially to ESP practitioners, is the notion of culture from the bottom up, i.e. from the perspective of the individual. Atkinson (1999) and Atkinson and Sohn (2013) argue that people live “culturally” and propose the cultural study of the person. They aim to describe culture as represented in the lives of its individual users from their perspectives. Thus, they focus on the *cultural nature of the individual* (how sociocultural influences contribute to individual identity) as well as on the *individual nature of the cultural* (how cultural material is actively interpreted, appropriated, and (re)created by individuals).

Recently Published Research in ESP/EAP

As the domain of writing in ESP/EAP has expanded from the teaching of essay writing to other genres in academic and professional contexts, genre analysis has provided IR researchers with methods of analysis that supplement the discourse analysis methods used in previous contrastive rhetoric research. The development of genre analysis (Bhatia 1993; Swales 1990) has been beneficial for IR research as it has forced researchers to compare textual and contextual features of the same specific genre across different cultures, whereas previous to genre analysis there was the danger that apples were being compared to oranges. In addition, this focus on the rhetorical analysis of specific

genres by genre analysts has led IR research to expand into many additional academic and professional genres.

The number of comparative empirical genre analyses has been staggering in the past two decades. Published studies have compared the rhetorical moves and linguistic features of the research article in a number of disciplines in various countries (e.g. Ventola and Mauranen 1991; Duszak 1994; Golebiowski 1998; Moreno 1998; Bielski and Bielski 2008; Mur Dueñas 2008; Pabón Berbesí, and Dominguez 2008; and Vladimirou 2008). Other genres that have been studied across cultures include the business letter request (Yli-Jokipii 1996; Kong 1998), the sales letter (Zhu 1997), the grant proposal (Connor and Mauranen 1999; Feng 2008), the application letter (Upton and Connor 2001), the letter of recommendation (Precht 1998, 2000), web pages (McBride 2008), and newspaper commentaries (Wang 2007, 2008). The empirical studies referenced above illustrate the expansion of the genres studied interculturally in English for specific purposes. Many of the above use rhetorical moves analysis (e.g. Connor and Mauranen 1999; Feng 2008), but other linguistic analyses are also used to identify and explain cultural differences in writing for a specific genre. Mur Dueñas (2008) uses metadiscourse analysis to examine Spanish-English contrasts in academic research articles, while Wang (2007, 2008) applies systemic-functional appraisal theory (Martin and White 2005) to evaluate newspaper commentaries in Chinese and English.

Pedagogical Applications of Intercultural Rhetoric

Recent research has reported promising results from implementing IR-oriented writing instruction for East-Asian students in China (Xing, Wang, & Spencer, 2008), Japan (Yoshimura, 2002), and Korea (Walker, 2006). Each study showed improved writing effectiveness when students were made aware of audience expectations and shown ways to avoid negative transfer from L1 to L2. In addition, Yoshimura showed the effectiveness of using the students' L1 in the EFL writing class.

Two sources provide clear pedagogical strategies for using intercultural rhetorical approaches in the writing classroom. Reflecting on contrastive rhetoric, Casanave (2004) shows how it has helped teachers build awareness about different conventions of writing in different cultures. She mentions that differences that affect writing across cultures have included rhetorical patterns of organization, composing conventions, cohesion and coherence patterns, writing conventions affecting choice and frequency of text types, and knowledge of audience expectations. Although contrastive rhetoric was never meant as a method for teaching, it has encouraged such teaching techniques as reorganizing scrambled sentences and identifying

topic sentences, as explained in such well-known teacher reference books as Ferris and Hedgcock (2005) and Reid (1993).

Casanave (2004) recommends a three-pronged approach to applying contrastive rhetoric in the classroom that considers the contexts of writing more carefully, and thus is consistent with the directions of IR:

1. Teachers should encourage their students to analyze the purposes of their writing and analyze their audiences carefully: "This kind of investigation may involve breaking down students' stereotypes of their L1 and L2 and helping them come to a more complex understanding of how their L1 rhetoric creates meaning" (p. 46).
2. Teachers can ask students to compare L1 and L2 texts with regard to paragraph and discourse-level organization (preferably at intermediate and advanced levels of instruction). The comparisons of L1 and L2 texts within the same genre can be taken to full text levels. In other words, students who need to write research papers could be analyzing published articles across language or disciplines. This could be especially helpful for writers who have had practice in writing those genres in L1s.
3. Teachers can involve students in examining audience and reader expectations in different cultures. Casanave's discussion of Xiaoming Li's (1996) study of what teachers in the United States and China consider "good" writing is an eye-opener and could serve as a model. Evaluating six student narrative essays in each of the respective languages, Li (1996) found that U.S.-based teachers valued logic and strong openings, whereas the Chinese teachers valued sentiments and moral messages. Casanave suggests that students in classes could react to texts written for the same purposes in L1 and L2 and discuss cultural expectations for certain types of writing.

Casanave's suggested techniques are consistent with the premises of IR: context and text are important, and interactions among native and nonnative speakers bring new insights about norms of writing related to specific genres in English.

Walker (2011) discusses a variety of methods and techniques he has successfully implemented in teaching writing to Southeast Asian college students. He recommends using teacher conferencing and peer-response activities to help students write more

rhetorically effective English academic essays. Walker suggests several student-centered activities instead of lecturing about rhetorical styles. In particular, student journals can be used as part of turning students into ethnographers by assigning students targeted questions concerning the essays and articles they read in the writing process. These questions would make students compare rhetorical patterns in English and their L1. Walker offers a number of helpful strategies for effective peer-response sessions and teacher conferences in a rhetorically oriented revision process.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed the role of intercultural rhetoric in ESP in terms of its basic tenets, recent research, and applications of ESP. We maintain that IR is a focal interest to ESP researchers and teachers. This recognizes that intercultural rhetoric should not be seen in its 1996 contrastive rhetoric state. The field continues to expand as its regularly held international conferences and resulting published volumes confirm (Connor et al, 2008; Belcher and Nelson, 2013).

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3 Prior Literature NSW language education context, intercultural communication within languages syllabus outcomes of moving between cultures and making linguistic connections (Board of Studies, 2003) Students describe intercultural competence as their ability to compare their languages and cultures and negotiate an identity within those two or more languages and cultures Bilingual identity being the ways that bilingual people position themselves between two languages. Academic success for non-native English speakers in English-medium international schools: The role of the Secondary ESL department. Intercultural Rhetoric and ESP/EAP Ulla Connor, PhD Chancellor s Professor of English Keywords: contrastive rhetoric, intercultural rhetoric, ESL, EFL, culture. The evolution of intercultural rhetoric. 3. The Historical Evolution of Intercultural Rhetoric 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. While English plays a crucial role as an international language, we need to pay attention to world English with diverse forms and logic.