**Literature Review of Japanese Contrastive Rhetoric**

**Brett CUMMING**

**Abstract**

This literature review serves to inform the reader on current literature on Contrastive Rhetoric (CR), with specific reference to teaching writing to Japanese students of English. It will examine the historical developments of CR and its present significance before then looking at possible reasons for unique characteristics of Japanese L2 writers and implications for teaching. Understanding the issues outlined here should help teachers to apply classroom strategies to facilitate development of students' overall writing skills through appropriate methodologies and sound pedagogical strategies.

**Introduction**

Although literature on the macro skill of writing in a second language (L2) spans half a century, more specific literature surveying Japanese learners of English is less prevalent. Common themes of L2 writing research in general vary and include acquisition models, literacy development, genre theory, ideology, composition studies, contrastive rhetoric, the relationship between reading and writing, text interactions and the process in L2 writing. Other equally important areas are the roles of motivation, instruction and technology, second language acquisition, threshold levels of L2 proficiency, methodology and cognitive processes.

This paper will begin with a brief history of research into L2 writing, followed by an overview of the historical developments of contrastive rhetoric (CR) and its present significance. This is followed by criticism of comparative research and CR then arguments for using CR in the L2 classroom. This paper concludes with a discussion of possible reasons behind the unique characteristics of Japanese L2 writers and implications for teaching.

**L2 Writing Research**

Research in the macro skill of L2 writing, according to Leki (as cited in Kaplan, 2010, p. 100), has seen a diachronic shift in focus from texts to processes to finally the coalescing of contexts of a socio-politic and disciplinary nature. Traditionally, especially (according to Hinkel, 2004, p. 8) prior to 1980, this focus on texts was a result of L2 rhetoric and composition predominately being taught through literature analysis, which was followed by the adoption of the "process-centered paradigm" (Hinkel, 2004, p. 8).

More specifically, the majority of research, according to Zhang (2008, p. 91), has centred on five main fields, namely:

1) L2 writers' characteristics (including variables such as L2 ability, psychological characteristics and social characteristics),
2) the writing process (including the role of L1 and L2 strategies such as the use of translation and restructuring),
3) feedback (and its effectiveness when conducted by teachers and peers),
4) L2 writing instruction and
5) L2 writers' texts (probing CR and relevant linguistic features) (Zhang, 2008, p. 91).

An evolution of studies in the field toward an interdisciplinary infrastructure has seen a trend to move away from examinations of decontextualized analytic models. Instead the contemporary focus is on developmental contexts that include the interconnectedness of linguistics, education, society and politics, which means a shift toward naturalistic or qualitative research methods (Leki, as cited in Kaplan, 2010, p. 107).

More recently, as a consequence of what Matsuda, Canagarajah, Harlau, Hyland and Warschauer (2003) describe as disagreements "on some of the most fundamental issues" (p. 152) in the field, change has become "not only inevitable but also desirable" (p. 152) to tackle socio-cultural and institutional contexts. Extemporaneous changes that are "demographic, technological and disciplinary" (Matsuda, et al., p. 152) are the essential driving factors in current L2 writing research.

**An Overview of the Historical Developments of**
**Contrastive Rhetoric and its Present Significance**

The role of CR in applied linguistics is significant and authors such as Connor (1996, p. 26) view this significance as reflecting the "enhanced role of teaching writing in ESL and EFL." CR as a research paradigm originally appeared in ethnographic studies, especially seminal work on discourse analysis conducted by Kaplan (1966) "as a pedagogical solution to the problem of L2 organizational structures" (Matsuda, 1997, p. 45). Kaplan believed languages were uniquely characterised by idiosyncratic rhetorical conventions influencing the process of composition and consequently interfered with L2 writing (Grabe & Kaplan, 1989; Kaplan & Grabe, 2002; Kaplan, 1966, 2000).

The two main hypotheses traditionally underlying CR can be "summarised as 1) each language or culture has rhetorical conventions that are unique to itself and 2) the rhetorical conventions of students' L1 interfere with their ESL writing" (Grabe & Kaplan, 1989; Kaplan, 1966, 1972, 1988). It is this culture, defined by Lantolf (1999, as cited in Hyland, 2003, p. 36) as a "historically transmitted and systematic network of meanings", which encapsulates schematic knowledge that contributes to the writing L2 students produce. Moreover, in concurrence with these hypotheses, I believe being explicit in addressing rhetorical differences between writing languages and cultures contributes to the acculturation of students and consequently more confident L2 writers who can better meet the expectations of their audiences.

In contrast to the practice-orientated approach employed by contrastive linguistics (also referred to by some as 'differential linguistics') where similarities and differences are examined between

languages, CR has historically been interdisciplinary, variously representing interests in text linguistics (where a heavy focus was placed on linguistic text analysis), composition pedagogy, literacy development in addition to education, anthropology and translation studies. It is only recently (within the last two decades) that the trend in CR has come to encapsulate approaches that focus on genre analysis, ethnography and corpus linguistics (Connor, pp. 26, 27, 172; Connor as cited in Kaplan, 2010, p. 131).

There has specifically been a shift in this trend from a host of empirical studies of group comparisons to research on the investigation of students' L1 and L2 texts and more recently to writing processes (Connor, 1996; Matsuda, 1997 as cited in Hirose, 2005, p. 15). According to Kubota & Lehner (2004, p. 23), the field has also been broadened by "incorporating such concepts as power, discourse, and subjectivities". Critical CR in fact, although neither hegemonic nor monolithic, does address and challenge orientations to teaching that are assimilatory and essentialist (Kubota & Lehner, 2004, p. 20).

Instead of examining sentence level language, research in this field has also concentrated on a more macro level of discourse and text, taking into consideration aspects that are linguistic and psycholinguistic (Connor, 1996, p. xi). Whilst acknowledging the above criticism for its reductionist, deterministic, prescriptive and essentialist orientation (Leki, 1997; Spack; 1997; Zamel, 1997), the significance for CR is that writing and language are culturally based. This empowers teachers by providing them with the explicit awareness of differences in writing in different languages. In other words, it is in the teacher's interest when aiming for praxis to comprehend that the perception and belief of what constitutes sound, relevant, well-structured and logical writing differ from culture to culture.

More classic literature from the late Hinds (1987, p. 142 as cited in Connor and Kaplan) is also particularly considerable in the field of CR specifically regarding the typology of Japanese students of English. Hinds (1987, p. 142) cites characteristics of the Japanese language contrastive to English as being a "subject-prominent language with a grammatical relation subject-predicate," whereas English requires word order as an essential function of specifying the relationships in grammatical structures.

In summary, developments in what is now considered an independent field of research (Matsuda, 2003), Connor (1996, 2002) succinctly categorises four main areas of development and expansion into CR as: i) text linguistics through the use of discourse analysis, ii) writing as a cultural and educational activity, iii) classroom-based studies examining interaction between the teacher and

student and iv) contrastive genre analysis and genre theory.

In short, by redefining the scope of CR with what Panetta (2001) sees as "new horizons of CR pedagogy", researchers are now blessed with "an enriched array of methods, including corpus analysis, interviews, questionnaires, classroom observation, and the within-subject approach" (Xinghua, 2001, p. 62). Connor (2002, p. 506) believes the field of research in writing today is being influenced by new approaches and whilst "retaining its traditional pedagogical applications, CR is becoming more responsive to new currents in literacy research" as well as having a heightened awareness of social contexts and "particularity of writing activity." It is important to remember that CR is, as Connor (2002, p. 493) defines, a consideration of texts as not merely "static products but as functional parts of dynamic cultural contexts."

**Criticism of Comparative Research and Contrastive Rhetoric**

Comparative research that does exist in the field of L2 writing is often, perhaps due to complex data analysis, restricted to relatively small samples which aren't subjected to corpus analysis, resulting in conclusions that researchers, such as Hyland (2003, p. 35, 46) concur to be "inconclusive and sometimes even contradictory" which are further criticized for the prescriptivist nature of evaluating students' English for whether it is "correct" or not. Additionally, Zhang (2008) argues research in this field has been dominated by studies on L2 writing in English, skewing an imbalance of theories away from what should be a more global stance on the analysis of L2 writing theories.

In spite of laudable pedagogic intentions, constant criticism over the years of Kaplan's pioneering work has concentrated on general limitations and inadequacies, consequently resulting in a shift in research on CR to focus on similarities as well as differences. Leki (1991, p. 123) suggests one such inadequacy of research in this field generally to be its detachment from the context and process L2 writers go on in their production of texts. Overall, criticism has been addressed by researchers such as Xinghua (2011, p. 58) who have categorised inadequacies into three themes, namely explanatory factors, methodology and the research focus. Doubts have also been cast with respect to "prevalent contentions" made by researchers such as Hinds (2003, as cited in Hirose, 2005, p. 6), specifically questioning the distinctness of Japanese rhetorical structures in organisational patterns from English (Hirose, 2003).

Researchers such as Pennycook (1988, as cited in Kubota & Lehner, 2004, p. 9) venture further to suggest aspects of egalitarianism and a "hidden political or ideological nature of the conventional knowledge created by CR" by implicitly reinforcing "an image of the superiority of English" in the

dichotomies between the coloniser and the colonised (Kubota & Lehner, 2004, p. 9). Kubota (1999, 2001 as cited in Connor, 2002, p. 493) also has been critical of what may be perceived as "a cultural dichotomy between East and West and the alleged resulting promotion of the superiority of Western writing", prompting Connor (2002, p. 494) to suggest a current and definitive framework.

Others, such as Ding (2007, p. 142), see research in the field of L2 writing as problematic and static due to "its tendency to oversimplify and essentialise non-Western rhetoric through the imposition of Western rhetorical concepts and theories". Tannen (1985, p. 212) too views CR as responsible in "buttressing stereotypes and hence exacerbating discrimination" when L2 writers are examined solely as members of a particular cultural group. In fact, by lumping all Asian CR together, this consequently makes it susceptible to overgeneralisations, placing all Asian rhetoric into the same mould. Moreover, doing so clearly disregards the differences between individual cultures and languages, based on the assumption that the boundaries of different nations characterise ways to classify different cultures. Consequently and in light of the criticism that exists, researchers such as Liebman (1992, p. 142) have proposed a framework for a "new contrastive rhetoric" that duly addresses texts in a variety of languages considering audience, the process of composition as well as the perceptions of purpose of writing.

### The Significance of Contrastive Rhetoric

The significance of CR in this study here is relevant, based on the above rhetorically distinguishable forms of text. This is despite the subsumption by the somewhat recent notion of knowledge being socially constructed, as per research conducted by Connor (1996). An important consideration and implication for ESL / EFL practitioners is that such rhetorical conventions particular to expository and academic writing in English are indeed difficult to grasp and require explicit guidance and instruction to students to gain a proper understanding.

### Possible Reasons for Unique Characteristics of
### Japanese L2 Writers and Implications for Teaching

Errors made by L2 writers should be understood as not simply manifested "deviations from native-speaker norms" but more dependent on the level of errors, a hindrance to fundamental communication (Kusuyama, 2006, p. 41). With respect to Japanese students, differences can be examined as stemming in part to L1. Connor (1996, p. 44) points to research carried out by Saisho (1975) who claimed that "Japanese (language) excels in expressing the writer's emotions, whereas English surpasses Japanese in logic, analytical ability, and succinctness."

Whereas English speaking secondary and tertiary education places emphasis on reports and essays with the ability to argue a point in a logical way, this appears to seldom be the case in Japan. On the contrary, such argumentative prose could be negatively interpreted.

Another noteworthy consideration Hinds (1987, p.142 as cited in Connor and Kaplan) examined related to content focussed specifically on the genre of business letters; the conclusion of which was that Japanese letter writing is situation based whereas English generally states both the situation and people involved. In this sense, it is relevant to have an understanding of the importance of culturally appropriate writing topics insofar as not to disadvantage the writing.

The aforementioned differences between English and Japanese with specific respect to compositional order also clearly show variation, i.e. introduction, development, turn and conclusion are considered the norm in Japanese compositions, as opposed to the order normally found in a linear and direct development of English essays. It is anticipated that through an understanding of these differences, practitioners will be better placed to explicitly guide their students through rhetorical conventions in the genres of academic and expository writing. However, it is not just the genre worthy of consideration, but also the social situation of the writing referring to the audience and purpose of the task.

On a different note, the concept of directness is yet another area explored in research in the macro skill of writing. For instance, Leki (2004, p. 95) believes the lack of explicitness by writers from East Asia which is normally found in English writing is a direct consequence of such writers who "work at suggesting"; it could be argued that inexplicitness in English would be conversely perceived as circuitous.

Hinds (1987) points to another contrasting point in writing, especially by Japanese students as being reader responsible, citing examples showing a lack of clarity but instead with associations of sensitivity. Significant findings were presented by Hinds (1987, p.144 as cited in Connor and Kaplan) in relation to this reader responsibility with his attributing this to the country's homogeneous nature. Conversely the ability and skill to communicate with clarity in English is infused into western culture. Hinds (1975, as cited in Hinkel, 2002, p. 32) also believes the clarity of text is not an objective of Japanese writers due to the lack of coherence and discourse unity in Japanese writing, leading to a large number of ambiguous lexis.

Hinds (as cited in Connor, 1996, p. 42) uses the terminology "quasi-inductive" to refer to the

organisational pattern that requires more of the reader than English which contains both deductive and inductive patterns, a dichotomy often made between writing styles. Often the placement and presence of the thesis statement or topic sentences in Japanese writing may be more difficult to locate as they may be implied rather than explicitly stated referred to by Hinds (as cited in Connor, 1996, p. 42) as "delayed introduction of purpose".

English however generally uses deductive styles that are more favoured and contribute "directly to the overall coherence of the composition" (Connor & Johns, 1990, p. 89). To clarify, inductive writing is seen as having the characteristic of the thesis statement placed towards the end whilst deductive writing has the thesis statement in the initial position. Reasons behind the inductive nature of writing by Japanese is summarised by Hinds (1975, as cited in Hinkel, 2002, p. 31) as "to convince the reader of the validity of the writer's position and lead the audience to support the writer's stance, instead of employing overt persuasion, which may be considered to be excessively direct and forceful."

Other pertinent examples of possible reasons of what is considered uniqueness of Japanese rhetorical expression in English can be examined at a syntactic level, in particular the use of transition statements which Hinds (1987, p.146 as cited in Connor and Kaplan) states as providing "appropriate transition statements so that the reader can piece together the thread of the writer's logic that binds the composition together". It should be noted though that the absence of subtleness in the use of similar cohesive devices in Japanese is often intentional to allow the reader to determine the relationship between the different parts of the writing.

## Conclusion

To conclude, gaps of a significant nature that exist in the literature include the relation of Japanese L2 writers in English and the writing pedagogy and organisational patterns of L1 and L2. Perceptions, of readers too with respect to what constitutes sound writing, are also a gap in present literature. Ultimately, the argument for further research on errors specific to Japanese EFL students in the macro skill of writing is compelling and convincingly based on numerous studies concluding in negative transfer, namely interference of writing conventions in L2 writing. This has been hypothesised and substantiated by Kaplan (1966, 1972, 1988; Grabe & Kaplan, 1989 as cited in Kubota, 1998, p. 69) with the principal findings showing that "each language and culture has unique rhetorical conventions". Thus, it is hoped that ongoing research through empirical studies in the field of characteristic errors of Japanese L2 writers will shed some additional light on these gaps.

In summary, a systematic review of literature and existing empirically based studies show numerous characteristics relating to the uniqueness of Japanese L2 writers of English, citing reasons for errors and discrepancies in applying conventions in the macro skill of writing, in addition to the significance of CR. Incorporating self-reflexivity in CR and understanding the epistemology between this and the fluid nature of culture allow teachers to develop a pedagogy that is not static but encourages ongoing critique with regards to teaching strategies and diachronically looks at norms and patterns. Moreover, areas such as these and language typology are considered particularly applicable with the objective of empowering teachers to be better positioned to specifically help Japanese students overcome challenges associated with cross-cultural writing contexts in English, in order to develop increased confidence and competence in this macro skill.

**List of References**

Connor, U. (1996). *Contrastive rhetoric: Cross-cultural aspects of second-language writing.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Connor, U. (2002). New directions in contrastive rhetoric. *TESOL Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No. 4, Winter 2002, 493-510.

Connor, U. & Johns, A. M. (Eds.) (1990). *Coherence in writing, Research and pedagogical perspectives.* Virginia, VA: TESOL, Inc.

Connor, U. & Kaplan, R. B. (Eds.) (1987). *Writing across languages: analysis of L2 text.* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Cornbleet, S., & Carter, R. (2001). *The language of speech and writing.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Ding, H. (2007). Confucius's virtue-centered rhetoric: a case study of mixed research methods in comparative rhetoric. *Rhetoric Review, 26* (2), 142-59.

Grabe, W., & Kaplan, R. B. (1989). Writing in a second language: Contrastive rhetoric. In D. M. Johnson & D. H. Roen (Eds.), *Richness in writing: Empowering ESL students* (pp. 263–283). New York, NY: Longman.

Harama, H. (1997). *A longitudinal study of linguistic and rhetorical development in the academic writing of a Japanese ESL student.* MA dissertation, University of Victoria, Canada.

Hinkel, E. (2002). *Second language writers' text, Linguistic and rhetorical features.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Hinkel, E. (2004). *Teaching academic ESL writing.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Hirayanagi, Y. (1998). Writing to improve analytical and organizational skills. *The Language Teacher, 22* (12), 21-23.

Hirose, K. (2001). Persuasive writing in L1 and L2: A look at Japanese EFL students' rhetorical organization strategies. *JACET Bulletin, 33*, 43-56.

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.

Hirose, K. (2005). *Product and process in the L1 and L2 writing of Japanese students of English.* Hiroshima, Japan: Keisuisha.

Hyland, K. (2003). *Second language writing*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Kaplan, R.B. (1966). Cultural thought patterns in inter-cultural education. *Language Learning 16*, 1-20.

Kaplan, R. B. (1972). *The anatomy of rhetoric: Prolegomena to a functional theory of rhetoric.* Philadelphia, PA: Center for Curriculum Development

Kaplan, R. B. (1988). Contrastive rhetoric and second language learning: Notes towards a theory of contrastive rhetoric. In A. C. Purves (Ed.), *Writing across languages and cultures* (pp. 275–304). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Kaplan, R. B. (2000). Response to "on the future of second language writing". *Journal of Second Language Writing*, *9*(3), 311-320.

Kaplan, R. B. (Ed.) (2010). *The Oxford handbook of applied linguistics* (2nd ed.). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Kaplan, R. B., & Grabe, W. (2002). A modern history of written discourse analysis. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, *11*(3), 191-223.

Kroll, B. (1990). What does time buy? ESL performance on home versus class compositions. In B. Kroll (Ed.), *Second language writing: Research insights for the classroom* (pp. 129-154). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

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. & Lehner, A. (2004). Toward critical contrastive rhetoric.    *Journal of Second Language Writing, 13*, 7-27.

Leki, I. (1992). *Understanding ESL writers, a guide for teachers.* Portsmouth, NH: Boyton / Cook.

Leki, I. (1997). Cross-talk: ESL issues and contrastive rhetoric. In C. Severino, J. C. Guerra, & J. E. Butler (Eds.), *Writing in multicultural settings* (pp. 234–244). New York, NY: The Modern Language Association of America.

Littlecott, G. (2008). No title. *Language and Culture, Aichi University Journal, 19* (7), 93-105.

Matsuda, P. K. (1997). Contrastive rhetoric in context: A dynamic model of L2 writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing 6* (1), 45-60.

Matsuda, P. K. (2003). Process and post-process: a discursive history. *Journal of Second Language Writing 12*, 65-83.

Matsuda, P.K., Canagarajah, A. S., Harklau, L., Hyland, K., Warschauer, M.    (2003).    Changing currents in second language writing research: a colloquium. *Journal   of Second Language Writing* 12, 151-179.

Matsumoto, K. (1995). Research Paper Writing Strategies of Professional Japanese EFL   Writers. *TESL CANADA JOURNAL / REVUE TESL DU CANADA* Vol. 13, No.1, Winter 1995

Nishigaki, C., Chujo, K., McGoldrick, S. & Hasegawa, S. (2007). A cross-sectional         contrastive analysis of Japanese students' English composition skills. *The Journal of ASIA TEFL.* Vol. 4, No. 1, 27-54, Spring 2007.

Panetta, C. G. (Ed.) (2001). *Contrastive rhetoric revisited and redefined.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Scott, D. & Usher, R. (Eds.) (1996). *Understanding educational research*. London, UK: Routledge.

Silva, T. (1993). Toward an Understanding of the Distinct Nature of Second Language Writing: The ESL Research and its Implications. *TESOL Quarterly 27*: 657-677.

Silva, T. (1994). An examination of writing program administrators' options for the placement of ESL students in first year writing classes. *WPA* Vol. 18, Numbers 1/2 Fall/Winter 1994, 37-43.

Spack, R. (1997). The rhetorical construction of multilingual students. *TESOL Quarterly*, 31, 765–774.

Takagi, A. (2001). The need for change in writing instruction in Japan. *The Language Teacher*, 25(7), 11, 5-9.

Tannen, D. (1985). Cross-cultural communication. In T. A. Van Dijk (Ed.), *Handbook of discourse analysis* (pp. 203–216). New York, NY: Academic Press.

Wang, W. Y. & Wen, Q. F. (2002). L1 use in the L2 composing process: an exploratory study of 16 Chinese EFL writers. *Journal of Second Language Writing* Vol. 11 : 3 225–246

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 and Technology*, 12, 2, 71-93.

Xinghua, L. (2011). Directions in contrastive rhetoric research. *University of Reading Language Studies Working Papers*, Vol. 3 (2011), 58-65.

Zamel, V. (1997). *Toward a model of transculturation*. TESOL Quarterly, 31, 341–352.

Zhang, J. (2008). A comprehensive review of studies on second language writing. *HKBU Papers in Applied Language Studies* Vol. 12, 89-123.