

Contrastive Rhetoric and Writing in Another Language

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Abstract

Writing in another language has always been a difficult task. Using contrastive rhetoric theory as a theoretical framework, this study aims to focus on the effects of culture-educational patterns of Turkish EAL learners on English narrative essay writing. Narrative writings of 30 Turkish and 23 American college students were analyzed. The results showed that culture has some influence on the writing styles of students these college students, and contrastive rhetoric theory shows great promises to overcome these challenges.

Keywords: Contrastive rhetoric, intercultural rhetoric, Turkish writing, narrative writing, writing patterns

Introduction

Writing in the foreign language has always been a difficult task (Carson, 2001). Most of the research done on the English as an Additional Language (EAL) writing focuses on syntactical correction; and aims to make the EAL writing better in terms of its mechanics. However, proficiency in syntax is not enough to communicate in writing in the second language. Writing coherently and passing the message across in a meaningful way is as important as syntactically correct writing. Panetta (2009) highlights that “to persuade others of our intent and meaning, we depend on transactions between the speaker or writer and the audience and on logical connections between ordered information sets” (p. 13). So to communicate in the second language, in addition to learning the syntax, students need to focus on other components of a language as well.

Several theories have been developed to improve the writing skills of EAL students. One of the most popular, at the same time one of the most criticized, theories on EAL writing is contrastive (intercultural) rhetoric. Contrastive rhetoric has gained a lot of attention especially in foreign language education settings. Atkinson (2000) states that “contrastive rhetoric hypothesis has held perhaps its greatest allure for those in nonnative-English-speaking contexts abroad forced as they are to look EAL writing in the eye to try to understand why it at least

sometimes looks ‘different’-often subtly out of sync with what one might expect from a ‘native’ perspective” (p. 319). Contrastive rhetoric brought important new insights to foreign language education.

What is contrastive rhetoric?

Even though Kaplan’s (1966) ground breaking work is thought to be the first study on contrastive rhetoric, Connor et al. (2008) claim that origins of contrastive rhetoric goes back to Sapir and Whorf’s linguistic relativity theory. Whorf (1956) argued that the language people use affects the way they perceive the world. Languages are not just organizations of expressions but also “stream of sensory experience” (p.55). So the cultural and educational skills we gain through the use of our first language affect our world view and conceptual thinking abilities.

Contrastive rhetoric was first introduced to second language acquisition by Kaplan (1966) with his seminal work *Cultural Thought Patterns in Intercultural education*. Among other language skills, “effect of rhetorical patterns of written text has gained the most importance and has been investigated for more than thirty years” (Kubota & Lehner, 2004, p.8). Kaplan (1966) emphasizes that even the advanced level EAL students follow their native languages’ rhetorical patterns while writing in the second language, which causes them receive feedback from their teachers such as “The paper is out of focus ... lacks organization ... lacks cohesion” (Kaplan, 2001, p.13). According to him, the foreign students’ writings seem out of focus because the students are using a rhetorical pattern that violate the expectation of the native speaker. The students are using the rhetorical pattern of their first language which may not apply to the expectations of the Native English Speakers (NES). Kaplan (2001) underscores that it is as important to gain proficiency in the rhetorical pattern of the foreign language as to gain proficiency in its syntax and vocabulary.

Contrastive rhetorians highlight that there are different logic, rhetoric patterns for different societies. Kaplan (1966) claims that Anglo-European texts are linear; Semitic parallel; oriental, indirect; and in romance languages and Russian, digressive (See Figure 1).

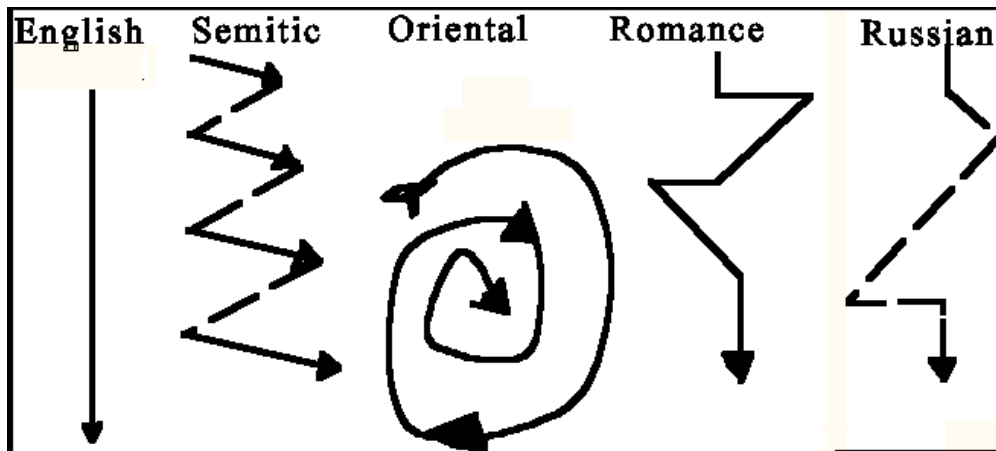


Figure 1. Kaplan's (1966) diagram on cross-cultural writing patterns
 Source: Kaplan, R. (1966). Cultural thought patterns in intercultural education. *Language Learning*, 16(1).

Contrastive rhetoric theory assumes that culture specific rhetoric patterns affect the writing of the EAL students in a negative way and Kaplan suggests that EAL students should learn to “write essays in an Anglo-American study model constructed with straight line of development” (as cited in Connor, 1996, p. 16). However, it should be highlighted that contrastive rhetoric does not assess or emphasize the effect of L1 on L2 writing in terms of syntax or phonology; but in contrastive rhetoric “the interference manifest itself in the writer’s choice of rhetorical strategies and content” (Connor, 2002, p. 494). So the writing styles of the students and the effect of their culture and cultural-educational skills in choosing the certain writing styles is the subject of contrastive rhetoric.

Changes in the Contrastive Rhetoric Theory

At the outset of the contrastive rhetoric, audiolingual method was very popular and the EAL students were expected to correct the mistakes they do in EAL writing by imitating rhetorical writing patterns of the second language. Kubota and Lehner (2004) highlight that in the past “researches supporting contrastive rhetoric hypothesis recommended making rhetorical differences explicit, raising students’ awareness of such differences, and acculturating students through language exercises with concrete models that meet audience expectations” (p. 13). However, with the development of more prescriptive language teaching in the area of contrastive rhetoric study has been expanded “to an interdisciplinary area of applied linguistics incorporating theoretical perspectives from both linguistics and rhetoric (Connor, 2002). Writing has been accepted to be a cognitive act,

rather than just descriptive rules. The reader and the context of the writing gained as much importance as the writer and the genre of the writing. Writing is accepted to be “interaction within a particular discipline or scholarly community” (Connor, 1996, p. 18). The first research that has been done on contrastive rhetoric may seem simplistic compared to the advanced research methods; however, Connor (2002) highlights that numerous researches have been conducted on contrastive rhetoric and the researchers investigated the subject from different perspectives. Kaplan (1987) admits that he “in the blush of a discovery, overstated some both the differences and his case” (p. 11).

Even though some researchers believe that contrastive rhetoric improved the teaching of EAL writing “in particular in the area of English for Academic Purposes university settings” (Connor et al., 2008, p. 1), contrastive rhetoric has been severely criticized for the last decade for several reasons: Over-generalizing the term “Oriental” (Hinds, 1983), insensitivity to cultural differences (Scollon, 1997; Spack, 1997, Zamel, 1997), for being so simplistic in research methodology (Matsuda, 1997), promoting the superiority of Western writing (Kubota, 2001).

Some of these arguments are invalid because since the students address the readers of the second language (L2), and since L2 is English in this case, it should not be accepted as seeing the Western writing as superior than the others. In fact, Walker (2004) highlights that writing in another language besides English would require the native English writers to conform to the L2 under the same circumstances. Kubota and Lehner (2004) claim that “critical contrastive rhetoric encourages teachers and students to critically reflect on classroom practices such as comparing and contrasting L1 and L2 rhetorical patterns and teaching/learning “preferred” discourse patterns of the target language” (p. 9).

Connor et al. (2008) points out that these criticisms on contrastive rhetoric are not true in that they assume contrastive rhetoric is static and “frozen in space”(p. 3). In fact, contrastive rhetoric has changed a lot with the development of teaching techniques. Kaplan also confessed that the first introduction of contrastive rhetoric was not a detailed work that was prepared with a deep data analysis (Connor, 2002). Connor (1996) also highlights in her book that during the 1990s the contrastive rhetoric field has been experienced a paradigm shift “broader definition that considers cognitive and socio-cultural variables of writing... has been substitutes for a purely linguistic framework” (p. 18)

One of the recent research findings is that since writing and writing rhetoric is a learned skill at school, the newly learned rhetoric may affect even the first one, which means that L1 learning styles can influence the L2 writing and the opposite also may be the case. (Uysal, 2008, p. 185). The extensive research on the subject has shown that CR is an important part of second language acquisition research and its deep benefits should be utilized in EAL classes.

The effect of learning the culture specific writing requirements improves L2 reading skills as well. Kang (2006) states that “knowing culturally preferred narrative features and evaluative elements in English narrative discourse may help comprehending English reading passages” (p. 402). Learning the writing discourse patterns will increase the meta-linguistic awareness of the students to these patterns and make even the reading passages more comprehensible for them.

Soler-Monreal et al. (2011) investigated the writing styles of Spanish and English PhD students in their dissertations. They found that the dissertations of Spanish and English students changed greatly in terms of their length. “The introductions in the English corpus tend to be longer and present more subdivisions than Spanish ones, and longer ones contain subsections and sub-subsections” (p. 6). The English dissertations also had some moves back and forth, i.e. the authors of English theses tend to refer back to the previous information they have cited in the earlier sections of the introduction. “The first striking difference between the corpora is that the English PhD thesis introductions have a more complex organization (they contain a total of 145 moves vs. 50 in the Spanish corpus)” (p. 8). One of the most important findings of this study is that authors of English dissertations have more interest in informing the audience about the previous research that done and which gap their study is filling. However, Spanish writers “tend to emphasize the presentation of their own work” (p. 9).

Uysal (2008) used quantitative methods for her analysis. She recruited 18 Turkish participants who were living in US. Some of these participants were graduate students in US, some were housewives and some are taking ESL classes at a college in USA. To make sure that all of the participants had a certain degree of education in writing, Uysal (2008) chose participants that had a bachelor degree in Turkey. The participants wrote two argumentative essays one in English and one in Turkish. The subjects of English and Turkish essays were different. Uysal (2008) found that all of the participants had introduction, development and conclusion parts in their essays. When they were asked, the participants stated that they learned to use these parts at schools both in Turkey and USA. The participants all used thesis statements (some put them initially in the introduction part and some of them put them in the conclusion part). However some of the participants did not use any topic sentences. Uysal (2008) explained this diversity as “participants demonstrated some rhetorical preferences similar to both stereotyped English and Asian writing preferences surprisingly parallel to Turkey’s geographical location right in the middle of East and West” (p. 194).

Uysal (2008) also found that the participants used some of the rhetorical patterns of English writing in Turkish essays of the participants and concluded that there was a bidirectional transfer in students writing. To illustrate, frequent use of transitions is a signal for transfer from English to Turkish for Uysal (2008).

In her study, Kang (2006) recruited 42 Korean college students and 28 American college students. Kang's (2006) study revealed that Korean native speakers used different narrative styles than the American students. Kang (2006) concluded that the differences between the American and Korean students' writing styles were caused by the cultural rhetorical patterns of Korean speakers.

Narrative Essays

Kang (2006) states that narratives are the earliest discourse forms acquired by children. Narrative essays tell "about an event... This type of essay retells a meaningful event and, either historical and personal" (Lindler, 2005, p. 260). Even though there have been excessive research on argumentative essays and contrastive rhetoric, there has not been much research on narrative essays and contrastive rhetoric (Dyer & Friederich, 2002).

Schanck (1990) classifies narratives into five main categories.

1. Official stories: These are the stories that we learn at or from official sources such as school or work.
2. Invented stories: These stories are created by people.
3. Firsthand stories: The stories that people tell about their own lives.
4. Secondhand stories: These stories are the firsthand stories of others that we retell.
5. Culturally common stories: The stories that are from our environment. No one person tells them, but everyone knows these stories.

Children start using narratives at very early ages. It was found that mothers educate their children to use the narrative structures that are accepted and valued in their societies (Blum-Kulka; 1993; Kang, 2003; Melzi, 2000). Blum-Kulka (1993) investigated the conversations at dinner tables of Israeli and American families and found cultural difference plays an important role on the discourse patterns used by the speakers of both languages.

Melzi (2000) focused on the narrative dyads of Spanish-speaking Central American and English-speaking European American mothers and found differences on the conversational focus of these parents. According to Casanave (2005) narrative plays an important role in L2 writing and research; and also "more accurate narrative inquiry in L2 writing research can potentially help L2 writing researchers dismantle stereotypes of cultural pattern" (p. 29).

Even though this is one of the most commonly used writing style in EAL and mainstream writing classes, narratives and L2 writing has not been studied enough (Dyer & Friederich, 2002; Kang, 2006; Sun, 2011). In addition, there is not much research focusing on the narrative skills of Turkish EAL learners in their English essay writing. Most of the studies done on Turkish narratives

focused on oral narratives more than written narratives (Furman & Ozyurek, 2007; Genc et al., 2006; Kuntay & Senay, 2003), or focused on the Turkish narrative telling in writing (Ozyildirim, 2009) but did not compare them with another language. Akinci, Jisa and Kern (2001) analyzed the differences in narratives of bilingual Turkish children (ages 5, 7 and 10) in Turkish and French, and compared and contrasted these written narratives. Akinci et al. (2001) found minimal differences in the written narratives of the Turkish and French. Students made less mistakes and formed longer sentences in French. Akinci et al. (2001) attributed these differences to more frequent exposure of the students to French narratives at school.

In this study, I will focus on the firsthand narratives in Schack's (1990) categorization. This study aims to focus on the effects of culture-educational patterns of Turkish EAL learners on English narrative essay writing by asking how Turkish EAL learners' written narratives in English similar or different from American native English speakers writing?

The Study

For this study 30 Turkish and 23 American college students were recruited. The participants signed a consent form to participate in the study and their participation was totally voluntary. Participants were asked to write a firsthand personal narrative essay about "what they did last summer". Even though all of the students from Turkey were university students, their proficiency level in English was different. All of the participants asked to write the essays in English, Turkish EAL learners were asked to write the essays in Turkish as well.

The English language proficiency levels of the students were very different. Turkish participants had 5 years of formal English education on average. These students are studying at different colleges in Turkey and all of them are studying at the intensive English Program at their colleges. Intensive English Programs are prepare their EAL students for academic English. For one academic year, participants take intensive English classes, and at the end of the year they take a test similar to TOEFL, if they cannot attain a certain score, they cannot graduate from the program.

The native English participants were university students at a Midwestern state university in USA.

Results

Disregarding all of the grammatical mistakes, while analyzing the data, I first divided each narrative into T-Units. Hunt (1977) describes the T-units as "a T-unit is a single main clause plus whatever else goes with it... Perhaps it is safe for

us to think of T-units as the shortest grammatically complete sentences that a passage can be cut into without creating fragments—but it is safe to do so only so long as we remember that two main clauses must be counted as two T-units” (p. 92). After I divided the narratives into clauses, I analyzed the narratives in terms of following narrative aspects: *narrative length, orientation, overall organization*.

Narrative length

The number of clauses used by the Turkish EAL learners and English Native Speakers (NES) was different. The mean for clause number NES was 9.2 and it was 16.7 and 26.1 for Turkish EAL learners and Turkish narratives respectively. Turkish students wrote longer stories in both in English and in Turkish.

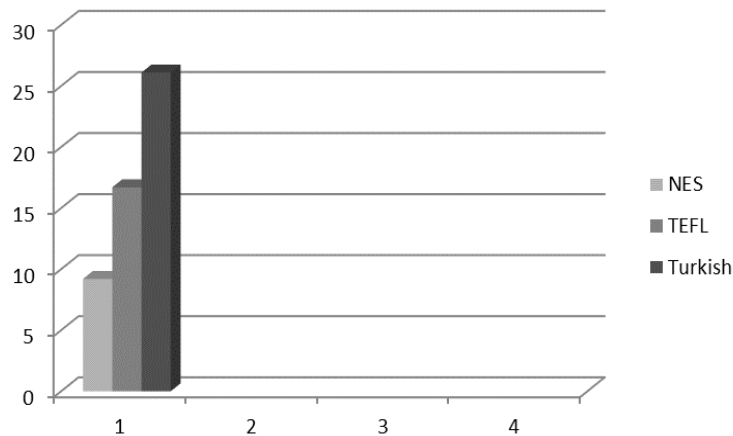


Figure 2. Narrative length of the essays

Turkish EAL learners tended to write simple sentences by not using any conjunctions. However, NES preferred to use conjunctions and combine the sentences. They indicated the cause and effect; beginning and end relationships for the events in their essays. Turkish EAL writers tended to list the events and did not make many connections between the events. These results may be attributed to the fact that English is the second language of the Turkish EAL students and they may hesitate to form complex sentences in English. However, when the Turkish EAL students’ essays in Turkish were analyzed, it was observed that Turkish EAL students used the same structure in their Turkish essays as well. They did not form complex sentences in Turkish and they tended

to list the events that happened in their summer vacation in their Turkish essays as well.

Overall organization

In term of overall organization, all of the participants, NES and Turkish EAL learners had an introduction, body, and conclusion in their English essays. The introduction part of the essays was very similar for Turkish EAL learners and NES. They included a thesis statement.

However, the body part of the essays was different in that the NES tended to focus on one important event in their summer vacation and describe the event; but Turkish EAL learners tried to list all of their summer vacation without focusing any of them in detail. NES used more description of characters and place and include more abstracts i.e. emotions, stating expectations, comparisons of expectations with reality and evaluation of events in their essays than Turkish EAL learners.

The average number of events that the Turkish EAL students cited in their essays is three and this number was 2.1 for NES. Turkish EAL learners tended to cite the events they experienced chronologically like a list and then finish their essays in an evaluative way such as “It was a great summer”, “it was a boring summer”. Turkish EAL learners made the conclusions about their summer for the readers.

Participant nine, male Turkish EAL learner, describes his summer vacation as follows:

I went to Afyon, Antalya ad Mersin last summer. Afyon was great because there was a spa. Than [sic], I went to Antalya. There was a beautiful beach, a lot of tourists and night clubs. Sun was very good in Antalya. Antalya’s hotels and night clubs are very famous.

Finally, I went to Mersin. There is my house in Tomuk in Mersin. I swam in swimming pool and sea.

NES also made comments, yet NES tend to make comments on the specific events happening during the summer such as “It was a great way to pad my savings account”, “It was a great summer job”. Turkish EAL writers did not put their voices and ideas in their essays as much NES writers.

Participant 10, a NES female, described her summer vacation as follows:

The bulk of my summer was spent in the works place a student could imagine-the classroom. Because of crazy scheduling and degree

requirements, I was enrolled in three courses totaling nine credit hours. For an eight-week session that's a big load.

On top of my studies, I also found myself working almost twice as much as I had originally intended. While I had only asked for twelve to fifteen hours a week at work, I had been assigned about thirty. While this was certainly somewhat tiring, it was a great way to pad my savings account for the coming semester.

The Turkish EAL learners also comment on the events but 23 Turkish EAL learners out of 30 finished their essays by making an evaluative comment about all of the events they experienced during the summer for the readers. These students used descriptive just for places but not for people around them. However, NES avoided making descriptions of people but they described the environment, their job, and their feelings in their essays.

Orientation

It has been found that the Turkish EAL learners tended to describe the events in order and also describe the places that the events took place. NES did not describe the place, time of the events as much as Turkish EAL learners but they tended to describe the effects of certain events on themselves. They were describing the events and while combining the events they wrote sentences like "This trip thought me the importance of patience" and their emotions on what they did.

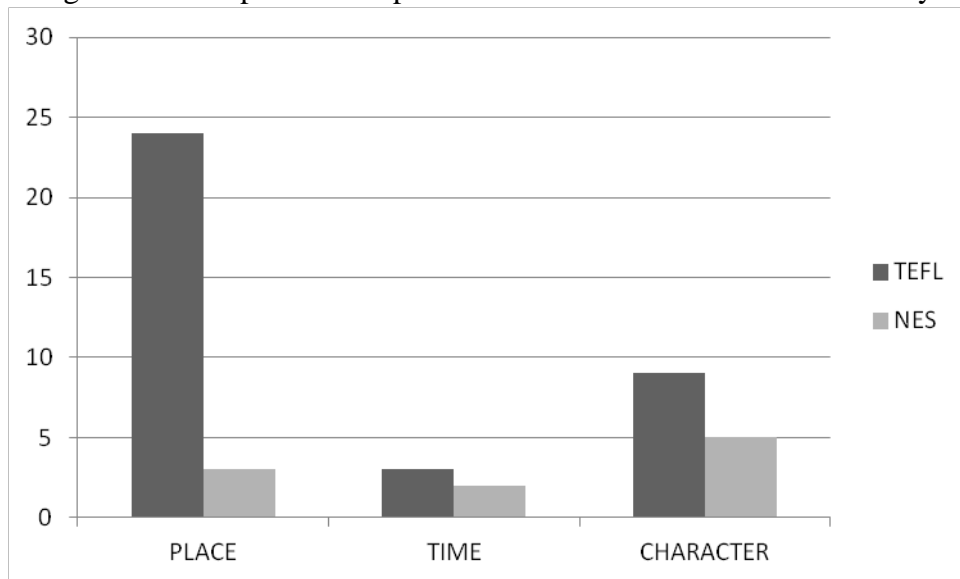


Figure 3. Use of orientation in essays

Participant 23, a female Turkish EAL writer, described his summer vacation as follows:

Last summer, I went to Gaziantep. I stayed uncle's home with my cousin. I like animals so I went to zoo with my cousins. I saw a lot of animals. We went to picnic. We played volleyball. It's enjoyable. I went to department store. I did shopping. I bought a lot clothes and shoes. I loved do shopping. I went to restaurants and cafes with my cousins.

Gaziantep foods very good [sic]. I had a good time. Everything was very fantastic.

Participant one, a female, NES described her summer vacation as follows:

Summer vacation! I absolutely love summer vacation. Last year's was filled with tons of adventures. I went on four different trips-Chicago, Cofumel (Mexico), Camping and Houston. Each trip meant something different to me and taught me valuable lessons. I started my trip off with my mother, sister, nephew, and I taking a train from St. Louis to Chicago. This trip taught me the importance of patience while traveling, since our train was delayed by hours.

Discussions and Implications for teaching

In this study it has been observed that Turkish EAL learners and NES have some commonalities and differences in terms of their English narrative essays. The similarities are in that both Turkish EAL learners and NES tend to use a thesis sentence and a conclusion sentence in their essays.

The differences are more obvious especially in terms of the length of the essays. Turkish EAL learners tend to write longer narrative essays in both Turkish and English. They have several repetitions during their essays. Turkish EAL learners tend to focus on several events in their descriptions compared to NES who usually focus one or two events.

In addition, Turkish EAL learners mostly tend to state the event and describe the place it took place. However, NES tend to state the importance of the event by making it clear how it helped them to improve personally, emotionally or even financially. NES not only describes the events but also states the importance of it in their lives.

Even though there were a lot of similarities in terms of narrative writings of Turkish EAL learners and NES, there were also a lot of differences. Uysal (2008) highlights that "cultural-educational factors still were found to constitute an important part of second language writing process and products" (p. 197). So it is very important for EAL teachers to be aware of the specific writing requirements of the second language and train their students to be aware of these requirements

to enable the development of discourse strategies that are more appropriate for the target language. To illustrate, the Turkish EAL learners should be aware of the type and amount of information that NES tend to provide in narratives are different than Turkish EAL learners do. So to express themselves and their ideas better, not to sound “unnatural” in the second language, they need to learn the rhetorical patterns of writing in the target language.

Connor (1996) highlights that “contrastive rhetoric was not meant as a teaching pedagogy but as a knowledge and awareness on differences in writing patterns across cultures” (p. 166). If the teachers recognize the possible differences in the rhetoric style of different languages, it will be much easier for them to help their students with their needs.

It is very important for EAL teachers to be the aware of the culture-education differences between languages and increase their knowledge in terms of English writing discourse patterns. Most of EAL writing still focuses on syntax and vocabulary development yet research shows that even the most advanced EAL students may produce syntactically perfect writing samples which would be criticized for being non-cohesive, linear and even understandable. As stated above, most of the Turkish EAL learners focus more than three events in their narratives while NES tend to focus on just one. This kind of essays may sound too overwhelming for NES and non-native students may lose credit for that.

Contrastive rhetoric should not be perceived as a way of assimilation of EAL writers but it should be appreciated as a way of expressing oneself better in the second language by using the rhetorical patterns of the target language. The teachers should highlight these differences to their students. No matter if it is native or foreign language writing, there is always a place for creativity of the students. Contrastive rhetoric does not kill the creativity and uniqueness of the EAL students; on the contrary, it enables them to express their unique and creative ideas in L2 writing in a more cohesive and understandable way.

In addition, teachers need to teach the cultural differences explicitly in order to help their students to be successful in the second language environment. Connor (2002) states that “Teachers of English and others, such as consultants in grant proposal writing, need to educate students or clients about readers’ expectations” (p. 505). Walker (2004) highlights that just teaching the rhetorical patterns on the target language and expect students to learn them may not be an effective strategy. However, EAL teachers can ask their students to write on a topic and then providing some sample writings of native speakers on the same topic for a comparison of the rhetorical patterns. The students and the teachers can discuss the similarities and differences in small or large groups.

Walker (2004) found in his dissertation research that teaching students about contrastive rhetoric was especially important for lower level EAL students. Learning about contrastive rhetoric helped the improvement of writing styles of

these students a lot. Walker (2004) also states that especially teacher conferencing individually with the students was very beneficial for the students. But the success of the teacher-student conferencing for contrastive rhetoric also has some regulations. In these meetings, the students should be encouraged to talk about their ideas and thinking strategies, “not about teacher’s agenda and assignment clarifications” (Walker, 2004, p. 110). So EAL teachers should attract the attention of especially lower-proficiency EAL students to rhetorical patterns of the target language and when it is necessary help students individually.

In addition, Kubota and Lehner (2004) found out that quality of writing in L2 is closely linked to quality of writing in L1. Students who write in L1 observed to write better in the L2 also. This result indicates that practicing writing is another indicator of better writing in L2. The students should be encouraged to write a lot in EAL classrooms and the teachers should help students see the different uses of rhetorical patterns in L2 with several examples.

Xing, Wang and Spencer (2008) also found that online education can provide a great source for increasing the cultural and rhetorical writing of EAL students. Accessing to online courses abroad may not be possible for all EAL students and teachers; however, EAL students and teachers can use online platforms such as Wiki and Blogs, and find opportunities to exchange writings with native English speakers.

Limitations

This study aims to close a gap in EAL narrative writing. However, I believe the low number of the participants was a limitation in this study. Conducting this same study with a bigger number of participants would eliminate this limitation. In addition, in this study participants were asked to write one essay. It would have been very beneficial to ask participants write multiple essays over longer periods of time to observe the reoccurrence of the patterns.

Conclusion

This study shows that the students should be taught about contrastive rhetoric especially at lower levels of instruction. It does not mean that learning about the contrastive rhetoric will solve the all ills of the EAL essay writing. However, as stated above it will help students to write in a more cohesive way in the second language. In addition, the instructors themselves should educate themselves about the role of culture and contrastive rhetoric. This study supports the previous research stating that contrastive rhetoric play a very promising role in helping EAL learners (Hinds, 1883; Reid, 1989; Walker, 2004; Uysal, 2008). Studies on EAL writing proved that only teaching the rhetorical patterns of the second language is not effective. EAL teachers and writing teachers should be aware of

contrastive rhetoric and if possible learn more about the rhetorical patterns of their students' first language. This will help teachers to better scaffold the writing patterns of their students. Teachers may benefit from different teaching methods to increase the awareness of their students towards contrastive rhetoric. The teachers can lecture about the rhetorical differences between the native and target languages of the students, use peer learning and benefit from online interaction forms.

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