

The role of Chinese EFL learners' rhetorical strategy use in relation to their achievement in English writing

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ABSTRACT: The present study aims to explore the role of Chinese EFL learners' rhetorical strategy use in relation to their achievement in English writing in Taiwan. It has been argued that traditional Chinese text structures (indirect style) continue to influence the contemporary English writing of Chinese students in expository writing text. The manner of Chinese communication style and the origin of traditional Chinese text structures, in particular the four-part qi-cheng-zhuan-he and the eight-legged essay structures were examined. In considering their influence upon the expository writing of Chinese students, it is argued that, although these conventions do influence Chinese students' writing in Chinese to some extent, they are unlikely to exert a great influence upon their writing in English. Data were selected from students in 10 university academic English writing classes in Taiwan (n =116 in total). English expository writings produced by 40 high- and low-achieving students indicate that they were mainly in contemporary Anglo-American direct rhetorical style rather than in traditional Chinese indirect style. In addition, from interviews with students, the findings show that teachers' writing instruction may be a crucial factor to influence students' writing rhetorical strategy use.

KEYWORDS: EFL, rhetorical strategy use, achievement, text structure, qi-cheng-zhuan-he, eight-legged essay, Taiwan.

INTRODUCTION

In second language education it is generally recognised that academic writing involves the use of elements of composition which are distinct from other forms of writing in English (Connor, 1996; Gutierrez, 1995; Hyland, 1994). When writing does not exhibit these features, it is negatively regarded as disorganized and incoherent (Cai, 1993; Hinds, 1987, 1990; Silva, 1990). Most native English speakers become familiar with appropriate conventions through their long educational experience. However, this may not be assumed or anticipated for non-native speakers, whose literacy skills were acquired in a different culture.

Contrastive rhetoric has been a paradigm for discussing second language composition for over forty years. Research in contrastive rhetoric (for example, Connor, 1996; Grabe, 2001; Grabe & Kaplan, 1996; Kaplan, 1966, 1983, 1988, 1990; Silva, 1993) hypothesises that rhetorical patterns could differ between languages and cultures. Students learning a second language may organise their essays using a pattern that could violate native readers' expectations. Resolving the issue of rhetorical difference is of particular importance to the teaching of writing, since awareness of any such variation is crucial to the development of communicative competence in language learners. It has often been suggested in studies of EFL writing assessment that EFL writers have specific problems acquiring the rhetorical patterns of English language,

academic discourse, and that the test scores of these writers may be affected adversely in high-stakes tests of English writing proficiency.

In 1966, Kaplan published his famous and controversial article on contrastive rhetoric, "Cultural thought patterns in inter-cultural education", which served as a basis for the study of contrastive rhetoric. The term "rhetoric" is used to denote elements of rhetorical organisation in written discourse. Rhetoric is a mode of thinking. It has to do with what goes on in a speaker's mind rather than what comes out of a speaker's mouth. The contrastive rhetoric hypothesis proposes that "each language and each culture has a paragraph order unique to itself, and that part of the learning of a particular language is the mastery of its logical system" (Kaplan, 1966, p. 14). Thereby, texts written in different native languages exhibit different organisational patterns as a result of differences in the cultural dimension. Connor (1996) defines contrastive rhetoric as follows:

Contrastive rhetoric is the area of research in second language acquisition that identifies problems in composition encountered by second language writers and, by referring them to the rhetorical strategies of the first language...[C]ontrastive rhetoric maintains that language and writing are cultural phenomena. As a direct consequence, each language has rhetorical conventions unique to it (p. 5).

Each language offers speakers an interpretation of the world that may be different from that of speakers of other languages. Kaplan's 1966 article shed new light on writing in different cultural settings. He argued that speakers of different languages have different cultural thought patterns that are reflected in how they organise writing; therefore, he proposed a diagram of five cultural rhetorical patterns in which English rhetoric is depicted as a straight line and Oriental rhetoric as a spiral. Kaplan further argued that rhetorical logic, how ideas are arranged in a text, is shaped by culture and that there is a preference for certain discourse patterns in each culture. ESL students' English writing is influenced by the rhetoric of their first language because they transfer their preferred discourse patterns into their written English, which often results in patterns that are unacceptable in English. Kaplan's general description of the direct English rhetorical pattern and the indirect oriental rhetorical pattern has triggered many studies on contrastive rhetoric. A lot of subsequent studies have been conducted to test his hypothesis and to qualify his brief generalisation of culturally influenced rhetoric. The conclusion reached from this, in general, is that different cultures may have different rhetorical strategies because people in different cultures think in different ways.

As mentioned above, the way we think and express ourselves could be one of the major barriers in intercultural communication (Chen & Starosta, 1998). Styles of expression not only reflect but also embody our beliefs and worldview. People from different cultures may have different styles of expression that can be separated into direct and indirect patterns. For example, in some cultures, they may prefer clarity in their conversations to communicate more effectively and come in general directly to the point. On the other hand, in other cultures, it is out of the question to disagree with someone's opinion in public. People will do that in a more private and personal atmosphere to protect a person from the "loss of face". Thus, a direct confrontation will be always avoided. In order to look further at how these differences with respect

to writing are formulated between Eastern and Western cultures, I will analyse how core values of communication styles between these two cultures are framed. The difference between direct and indirect writing patterns as a part of communication will also be examined later in the article.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding the differences between Anglo-American and Chinese communication styles

The differences between Anglo-American and Chinese communication styles are a result of the deep-rooted cultural values and worldviews upheld in these two cultures: *Individualism* vs. *Collectivism*. Individualism is “the opposite of collectivism; together they form one of the dimensions of national cultures. Individualism stands for a society in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after himself or herself and his or her immediate family only” (Hofstede, 1994, p. 261). Individualistic cultures are more self-centered and mostly emphasise individual goals. People from individualistic cultures tend to think only of themselves as individuals and as an “I” distinct from other people. They make little distinction between in-group and out-group communication. Collectivism “stands for a society in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong cohesive in-groups, which throughout people’s lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty” (Hofstede, 1994, p. 260). Collectivistic cultures have a great emphasis on groups and think more in terms of “we”. Harmony and loyalty within a company is very important and should always be maintained and confrontation should be avoided.

A key trait of Anglo-American culture is the emphasis on the individual (Chang, 1999). In individualistic cultures, people focus on individual achievements and incentives, and responsibility for decisions lies with individual initiative. The goal of communication is to exchange facts in order to make a deal. Language is used to facilitate information exchange, to clarify the most important issues and to resolve conflicts. The communication is direct and favors clarity and precision, with little regard for loss of face due to embarrassment, rejection or disagreement (Ting-Toomey, 1988). It is important to follow the rule of clarity, brevity and sincerity in communication. This is particularly in accordance with Grice’s conversational maxim of manner (1975): 1) avoid obscurity of expression 2) avoid ambiguity 3) be brief (avoid unnecessary wordiness) and 4) be orderly. Many guides to communication advise that one should answer the five “W” questions of “who, where, when, what and how” in oral or written communication so as to give the listener/reader a clear picture of what is being talked about.

In collectivistic, group-oriented cultures, indirect communication is preferred because the image of group harmony is essential (Scollon & Scollon, 1991). Where Anglo-Americans typically come straight to the point, the Chinese place a higher value on ambiguity and tact, and make significant use of implied meanings. Consideration for others leads to the development of communication that preserves each person’s public self-image or face (Brown & Levinson, 1978 & 1987; Lakoff, 1974; Ting-Toomey, 1988). For the Chinese, communication is more than just making a deal. It is also a

process of establishing long-term human relationships, embracing the concepts of hierarchy (rank and seniority), self and in-group/out-group relationships (Brown & Levinson, 1978 & 1987; Lakoff, 1974).

The Confucian idea of the hierarchical order of "the ruler and the ruled", "father-son", "husband-wife", and "older brother-younger brother" dominates interpersonal relationships and communication style in traditional Chinese culture. Talking is a means to reach the goal of establishing a relationship as well as an end, in that it serves to engage the parties in a process of getting to know each other. These concepts affect the way an individual relates him/herself to and interacts with other social members. Interlocutors are careful in judging others' intentions and positions in relation to their own. Language use is thus characterised by indirect expression, concern for the other's face, and emphasis on human relationships and feelings. Argument and disagreement are avoided, and seen as a direct challenge and a threat, causing one to lose face. That is why Chinese language is flowered with indirect expression serving to reach consensus and mutual harmony.

In describing Eastern and Western cultures, some researchers (for example, Brown & Levinson, 1978 & 1987; Chang, 1999; Lakoff, 1974; Ting-Toomey, 1988) use dichotomies such as collectivist/individualist and respectful/questioning. Chinese societies believed to be influenced by Confucian teachings are referred to as Confucian Heritage Cultures. These are then defined according to their difference from Western cultures. Much of the discussion, then, focuses on the ways in which the writing or social interaction or ideas about learning are perceived to be unlike those of the West. These different cultural values and assumptions may thus influence how people think, and how they express themselves both orally and in written texts.

The shape of discourse in English: Deductive (direct, explicit, linear)

It has been argued that Anglo-American, academic conventions privilege deductive forms in which an argument is clearly stated at the beginning, sections are signaled explicitly, evidence is presented and counter-arguments refuted. The English language evolves out of a particular Anglo-European cultural pattern (Hinds, 1990). The expected thought sequence is linear in its development. In written communication in English, for example, the paragraph begins with a topic statement and then proceeds to develop that statement using examples and illustrations. The central idea is related to all other ideas in the whole essay and therefore a good piece of writing is considered to be unified, with no superfluous information. A deductive pattern of topic introduction gives the main point first and then develops the argument by providing details and reasons (Hinds, 1990). The most important information is provided upfront; supporting information is given afterwards. This is the pattern preferred by Anglo-Americans in speaking and writing: tell others the main point first, and then add the relevant supporting details.

The shape of discourse in Chinese: Inductive (indirect, implicit, circular)

An inductive pattern of topic introduction refers to the message structure of putting supporting details or reasons first before the main point (Hinds, 1990). The goal of a text is to announce truth and arrange the argument such that it can be easily and harmoniously agreed upon by referring to communal, traditional wisdom. Chinese

writers need to “humble” themselves in the introduction of the text. Thus, good Chinese writers may suggest or infer rather than state directly, since to express a point of view overtly is seen as too individualistic. They may avoid a direct statement of the thesis in the opening sections of text. The thesis is mentioned towards the middle of the text, towards the end, or perhaps never clearly at all.

Kaplan (1966) calls such an approach “indirection.” Discourse development follows “a pattern of turning and turning in a widening gyre. The loops revolve around the topic and view it from a variety of positions, but never address it directly” (p. 10). In addition, Connor (1996), for instance, outlines the traditional Chinese rhetorical style as follows. First, begin one’s evidence. Next, develop that. At the point at which this development is finished, turn the idea to a sub-theme where there is a connection, but this point is not directly connected to the major theme. Then, bring all of this together and reach a conclusion. Lastly, return to discussing the main idea (this is usually intended to reinforce the theme for the reader, but to English readers this seems like odd repetition, especially if the main idea is not explicitly stated).¹ (Therefore, Chinese rhetoric moves from specific (evidence, sub-points) to general (inferences → thesis). Finally, in traditional Chinese culture, verbose and indirect expression is considered to be an artistic and aesthetic way to express respect (Brown and Levinson, 1978 & 1987; Lakoff, 1974). In Chinese societies, the reader is expected to work hard to understand the meaning of an article; stating things too explicitly is an insult to the reader, because no room would be left for interpretation by the reader. In contrast, English writing expects that the burden of clarity will be assumed by the writer.

Kaplan (1972) tried to explore the basic features of the classical Chinese worldview in order for Anglo-American readers to better understand compositions written by Chinese. The traditional Chinese literary form could be one of the reasons. The literary form of the Chinese eight-legged essay (or *ba-gu wen*) loses its directness and coherence in an English reader’s eyes. Structurally the main body of this essay has eight parts – opening-up, amplification, preliminary exposition, initial argument, inceptive paragraphs, middle paragraphs, rear paragraphs and concluding paragraphs, and the fifth to eighth parts each have two “legs”, that is, two antithetical paragraphs, hence the name “eight-legged essay” (Cai, 1993). It has been used as the “prescribed essay form for the civil service examinations in China for five centuries” (Mohan & Lo, 1985, p. 518), and its influence continues to be strongly felt in Chinese discourse.

The eight-legged essay became the major written genre of the time under China’s feudal dynasties from the Fifteenth to the Nineteenth Centuries (Metalene, 1985). The opening lines of the Chinese eight-legged essay do not provide a thesis. This style of discourse prefers to state a topic, and then to steadily unravel it by building information before arriving at the important message. Thus, the eight-legged essay and imitations of classical literary language of the earlier eras of Chinese cultural greatness became the major written genre of the time. There were no further breakthroughs in literary writing, except for a style of artistically heightened descriptions of everyday life experiences, called *hsiao-p’in* (“little sketches”), which emerged in the 15th and 16th Centuries.

¹ See discussion and criticism in Kaplan, summarised in Connor, 1996).

Kaplan (1972; 1983; 1987; 1988) suggested the supposedly circular nature of Chinese rhetoric under the influence of the eight-legged civil service exam essay, which he claimed demonstrated a discourse style of talking around the central subject rather than attacking it directly. Thus a Chinese mode of presenting ideas is through a variety of indirectly related views. In addition, it is said that the Chinese style of writing is “qi-cheng-zhuan-he,” in other words, “opening, development, deviation, conclusion”, which consists of: 1) qi: to start, begin, open (but not to state one’s thesis statement); 2) cheng: to carry on, sustain, follow-up 3); zhuan: to turn, look at the problem from another angle; and 4) he: to conclude, whereby the writer’s real opinion is established or hinted at (Connor, 1996). It is thereby implied that Chinese writers introduce their main idea at the end of their essays “conclusion”. Table 1 contrasts some of the major features of English writing with Chinese writing.

Some issues raised in contrastive rhetoric

Kaplan’s controversial article inspired a new approach to second-language-learning research, and after almost forty years, it continues to stir up controversy among researchers and ESL writing teachers. The key question for contrastive rhetoric is whether there are differences between texts written by speakers of different languages and members of different cultures. Secondly, whether these differences result in poor marks in written assessment. The differences studied affect basically the organisation and structure of texts. Those who support Kaplan maintain that contrastive rhetoric provides important insights as to how culture-bound thought-patterns are reflected in ESL students’ writing and how those thought patterns limit their ability to communicate in written English. They insist that the best way for foreign students to succeed within the domestic academic environment is to produce writing that conforms to the conventions of written English and meets the expectations of native speaking readers.

Kaplan’s detractors, on the other hand, criticise him for the simplistic nature of his conclusions. Kaplan has been criticised for his somewhat simplistic generalisations about cultural differences in writing. They are concerned that the proponents of contrastive rhetoric fail to take into account the complexity of the writing process and refuse to recognise the importance of a student’s previous academic background when analysing texts. Carol Severino warns that uninformed use of the diagrams by teachers and textbook publishers “can lead to skewed, simplistic expectations and interpretations of ESL students and their writing and an ethnocentric, assimilationist pedagogical stance” (1993, p. 45). Previous research suggests, however, that first language (L1) writing expertise plays significant roles in second language (L2) writing (for example, Cumming, 1989; Sasaki & Hirose, 1996). Thus, readers should be aware that non-nativeness in L2 writing may be due to factors other than L1 rhetorical conventions. In addition, some researchers complain that Kaplan’s study places too much emphasis on the product of a writing task and not enough on the process the writer may have employed to produce it.

Characteristics of effective writing in English for an Anglo-American academic audience	Examples of some contrasting characteristics in the Chinese culture/language
Writing is viewed as a tool to accomplish a task (that is, to express a point or present an argument)	Writing is viewed as a way of engaging the emotions through beautiful language.
Focus on clarity, directness, and getting to the point	Focus on the language's richness or the ability to repeat ideas in a variety of ways; digression is seen as a way of linking the subject under discussion to other issues to show a wider range of knowledge
Direct, explicit statement of main idea(s)	No direct statement of main idea(s), with readers expected to infer the writer's main point
The writer is responsible for including explicit signals – such as transitions – to show logical links between ideas and make connections clear	Explicit signals are not necessary; the writer shows respect for the reader's intelligence to make inferences
Information is expected to be highly specific	Information is expected to be highly philosophical
Specific evidence (facts, statistics, examples) are used to support arguments	Traditional wisdom and authority are used to support arguments
Heavy use of deductive reasoning (movement from the general to the specific)	Heavy use of inductive reasoning (movement from the specific to the general)
Emphasis on the individuality and originality of ideas	Emphasis on traditional wisdom and shared cultural knowledge

Table 1. Effective writing in English and Chinese for academic contexts²

As the study of culture and written discourse has entered the 1990s, contrastive rhetoric researchers have found it necessary to broaden their interests to include not only the texts that students are writing, but processes that students go through as they work on their writing and the social and cultural contexts in which those processes are situated. In “Research frontiers in writing analysis”, Connor (1996) drew on L1 process theories to argue that an L2 model of writing must emphasise both process and product. Connor introduced the method of topical progression analysis to demonstrate that a text-analysis approach can be effective in a process-oriented class. Part of the tendency to overgeneralise comes from a methodology that traditionally emphasised written texts as finished products. Lacking an understanding of how writers dealt with the process of making those texts, researchers failed to distinguish developmental factors in student writing from factors related to students' native cultures.

² Adapted from handout by Dr. Margery Tegey, “The international student as academic writer”, Georgetown University Writing Center Seminar, November 13, 2001.

While Connor's article represents a shift toward the process model, Joan Carson's 1992 study reflects a growing awareness of socio-cultural aspects of writing. In her study of writing in China and Japan, Carson examined the process of literacy acquisition in both cultures through her analysis of the social roles of writing, and the history and practice of schooling. As discussed by Kadar-Fulop (1988), she made the point that the function of literacy itself can be very different in different countries. Therefore, she argued that it is not possible to compare written texts in themselves and make sense of them without also considering the writers' reasons for writing, beliefs about what an essay is, and so on. In other words, the contrastive rhetoric researcher must also consider the function of literacy in the society of the writers, the function of literacy in education in that society, and the domain of literacy in schools.

In Connor's 1996 book, she summarised the main methodologies used by contrastive rhetoric researchers, classifying them into the following six categories: "reflective inquiry", "quantitative descriptive research", "prediction and classification studies", "sampling surveys", "case studies and ethnographies", and "experiments (quasi and true)" (p. 156). Of those main methodologies, one particularly promising method for studying the writing processes – and the social/cultural contexts of those processes – of ESL students is that of qualitative case studies and ethnographies. Grabe and Kaplan (1996) echoed a similar concern: they urged further investigations into the issue of reader expectations, and writing to be taught as a process and as a social construction of meaning.

RESEARCH METHOD

The present study includes the student-writers' self-evaluations of their own English texts in terms of organisation in its design, because such data were expected to give insight into what they thought of their actual patterns compared to their backgrounds, beliefs, learning processes and schoolings, as reported by them retrospectively. The present study addresses the following three sets of research questions.

1. What rhetorical strategies do students adopt in English writing tasks?
2. Is there any difference in rhetorical strategy use between high- and low-achieving students?
3. What are teachers' writing instructions in terms of teaching rhetorical strategies?

Research design

Setting of the study and participants

The participants were selected from students in 10 university, academic English, composition classes in Taiwan (n = 116 in total). They were second- and third-year students taking English composition courses in a public university during the 2004-2005 academic year. Data were collected through the analysis of English expository writings produced by 40 high- and low-achieving students. In this study, the definition of high-achieving students in English writing was the average top two students based on multiple scores in English writing graded by university teachers who taught in the English composition classes for the whole academic year. The

definition of low-achieving students in English writing was the average bottom two students. In each class four students (the top two and bottom two) were recruited to participate in this study. The students had the opportunity to write English expository composition in class. The writing topic was: "Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? It is better for children to grow up in the countryside than in a big city. Use specific reasons and examples to support your answer." (See Appendix for students' English writing samples.) They were interviewed to further scrutinise their choices in adopting a "direct" or an "indirect" approach.

Regarding English writing, instructional background, all the students took a course in the basics of academic writing when they were in their second and/or third year. The course focused on organising and developing essays with particular attention given to logical and appropriate language use for expository writing. These writing courses were taught mainly by native, English-speaking professors; students learned the key concepts of formal writing, such as topic sentence and the three-part structure of introduction, body, and conclusion, and had written expository/academic essays, some of which were revised on the basis of teacher feedback. The ultimate goal of these writing courses was to prepare students to develop academic writing skills necessary to write a research paper in English.

The fact that all the participants had some formal writing experience in English is important, because Chinese EFL students often lack such experience; whether they have writing experience or not has been found to influence writing quality. Although they may not have been highly experienced writers in English, they all wrote compositions as part of the entrance examination in English and had some experience in academic writing in English at the university as explained above.

Analysis of English discourse organisation

In order to examine the English discourse organisation, the present study applies the types of analysis originally employed by Kaplan (1966): the location of a thesis statement. A thesis statement is a declarative sentence that states what the writer wants the reader to know, believe, or understand after having read the essay. This sentence contains the main idea that controls the content of the entire essay. The thesis statement is usually considered the most important sentence of the essay, because it outlines the central purpose of the essay in one place. A good thesis statement often expresses a writer's opinion or attitude on a particular topic. This makes the thesis statement more specific and requires the writer to explain or prove his/her opinion in the essay.

This study focuses on whether students choose to write their English expository composition in a "direct" or in an "indirect" approach and on the influence of teachers' writing instruction on students' discourse organisation in their expository composition. The location of the opinion-stating sentence was identified as one of the following four: Initial (stated in the introduction), Middle (in the middle section), Final (in the conclusion), or Obscure (not clearly stated). There were no cases of more than one position taken in the same text. In this study, the direct approach was defined as one where the writing clearly indicated its thesis statement and disclosed the purpose of the writing at the very beginning; in contrast, the indirect approach was one where the purpose of the writing was not clearly pointed out at the very beginning and was vague. A writer's position statement either for or against was

considered as a thesis statement. The discourse organisation of the location of the opinion-stating sentence was identified for each text as one of the following two: deduction (thesis stated in the introduction: the writer's opinion precedes a supporting reason / the writer's opinion and a preview statement of a supporting reason are followed by the reason), or induction (thesis stated in the middle or final section: a supporting reason precedes the writer's opinion).

Furthermore, the macro-level rhetorical pattern was identified for each text as one of the following four, major macro-level patterns:

1. Deduction (explanation): The writer's opinion on the topic is presented and then supporting reasons are enumerated.
2. Deduction (comparison): The writer's opinion on the topic is presented and then a supporting reason is presented by comparing or contrasting two elements.
3. Induction (explanation): The main idea is placed at the end and preceding arguments constitute supporting reason(s) for it.
4. Induction (comparison): The writer's opinion is realised in the final section; the preceding arguments constitute premises or reasons which are arranged in a form by comparing or contrasting two elements.

Lastly, the presence of a restatement at the end of the text was the other important feature in English writing. The restatement of the topic at both the beginning and the end of a passage is generally regarded as good academic style in English. Although in the restatement the content is parallel, the wording is expected to be different.

In the present study, the coding was done by the researcher and an experienced EFL writing instructor. There was 98% agreement for the location of the opinion-statement sentence, 98% for the macro-level, rhetorical pattern, and 100% agreement for the existence of the restatement. The coding was also done by the student writers themselves. Three months after the participants wrote the English compositions, each of them was assigned to read the compositions they had written to analyse them in terms of the types of analysis explained above. Between the coders and each participant, there was 98% agreement for the location of the opinion-statement sentence, 98% for the macro-level rhetorical pattern, and 100% agreement for the existence of the restatement. In addition to the types of analysis, follow-up interviews of 40 participants were conducted in person, in which they analysed their own English compositions in Chinese language concerning the following points: (a) whether the English writing differed from the Chinese writing in terms of location of position-taking statement and supporting evidence; (b) why they thought their Chinese/English writing texts were either similar or different; and (c) how they could improve their texts if they were to revise them. All the quotes from student interview responses were translated into English by the researcher.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Rhetorical strategies used by high- and low- achieving students

Table 2 presents the results of the two coders' analysis of the organisational patterns

of students' compositions. As shown in Table 2, while all students wrote more of their English expository composition using a direct approach, there were different discourse organisations in their selections for both direct and indirect approaches. Of the 40 writing samples collected, regardless of whether they were high- or low-achieving students, most of them adopted the deductive rhetorical pattern; that is, they put the thesis statement at the beginning rather than the middle or final position, except for two high-achieving students who put the thesis in the middle and final position. When overall organisational patterns were examined, 33 students (82.5% – 15 high-achievers and 18 low-achievers) used deduction (comparison), 6(15.0%) deduction (explanation) and 1 (2.5%) induction (comparison). The only student who was a high achiever adopting the inductive rhetorical pattern enumerated supporting reasons by comparing. The dominant use

	High achievers	Low achievers
	Number	Number
Location of thesis		
1. Initial	18	20
2. Middle	1	0
3. Final	1	0
Macro-level patterns		
1. Deduction (Explanation)	4	2
2. Deduction (Comparison)	15	18
3. Induction (Explanation)	0	0
4. Induction (Comparison)	1	0
Conclusion / summary/ restatement		
1. Yes	18	16
2. No	2	4

Table 2. Breakdown of rhetorical strategy use

of deduction (97.5%) in the present study can be explained by suggesting that, because the students had had some experience or training in English writing, they presumably acquired the deduction pattern through such educational experience. They consciously applied their learned rhetorical patterns to this writing task.

Interviews with students

Location of thesis

In this study, most participants put their positions in the initial section and used the deductive pattern in English writing. Thirty-eight participants (95%) stated their positions in the initial section, 1 (2.5%) in the middle section, and 1 (2.5%) in the final section. Most participants used deductive patterns and some, although a much smaller number, chose the inductive pattern. The results do not support the view that Chinese people prefer the inductive style. The participants' overall tendency to state their point of view initially in English do not appear to conform to the following discourse features pointed out as typical writing by Chinese as suggested by Connor (1996) and Kaplan (1966): overall organisation moving from specific to general; no strong specific position taken by the writer, thus leaving more up to the reader; and presentation of the topic in the introduction without indicating a specific point of view about it. In addition, based on the distribution between the high- and low-

achievers, the findings also showed that the inductive pattern – putting the thesis in the final section – may not necessarily violate the rhetorical pattern whereby native English speakers prefer to indicate the thesis at the beginning in English writing as suggested by Kaplan (1966, 1988).

Why did most students make a position statement at the outset of their writing? It is likely that past writing instruction led them to do so and to employ the deductive organisational pattern. More explicitly, they reported that they believed a thesis statement should be made at the very first position, which they surmised they had been taught at school. They learned to locate the thesis statement in the initial position and consciously put this knowledge into their writing practice. In follow-up interviews with them, participants who put their positions initially in texts said that they made conscious decisions in locating their position statements. For example, B1 stated that she made a conscious effort to put her position initially in writing. She clarified this by explaining that:

I usually place my thesis statement in the first or second sentence in English writing. The freshman and sophomore English composition teachers taught us to write in this way. Possibly many English teachers in Taiwan also teach in this way because the Chinese composition is likely to use the mao-ti method (indirect approach). At the beginning no point is given and irrelevant things are stated. Then the main theme emerges at last. Therefore, Chinese people are likely to write too many useless words. English teachers point out that no useless word should be written and the thesis statement should be given in the first sentence. [...] The Chinese composition is more indirect. [...] The thesis statement is likely to be located at the end of an essay.

B4, the other participant who put the thesis at the beginning in English writing, had a similar point of view to B1. She gave her explanation as follows:

I think in terms of Chinese and English writing strategy use, they are quite different. The Chinese writing puts emphasis on qi-cheng-zhuan-he. The meaning of it is that unlike English writing, the thesis is not disclosed at the beginning. [...] You have to be qi-cheng-zhuan-he. That is to zhuan – turning the point to a deeper perspective. Finally, a conclusion is given. [...] Basically, it is not easy for Chinese writing to contain a thesis statement. If it does appear, it should be between cheng and zhuan, and is unlikely to be at the beginning. At least I would not put it in the first paragraph.

C1, who put the thesis statement in the introductory paragraph in English writing, explained that:

There is more tolerance in the Chinese writing for you to write the points you want to raise. However, there seems to be no such case in English writing. The teacher expects to read your thesis statement in the first paragraph. [...] I think the Chinese writer and reader are more patient in facing the writing. Probably the way in which the Chinese writer expresses a meaning is a bit more indirect. [...] In Chinese writing, I, as a reader need to read two, three or more paragraphs and link the first and last few sentences together, so that I am able to get the main idea. [...] I think in Chinese writing the thesis statement is likely to be placed at last. Or the essay may be filled with that atmosphere without the thesis being stated. For instance, in the Chinese reading test, it usually asks you for the main idea or for a summary after reading an essay. The question is often what does the author in this article intend to express? Then it gives you items to select; however, those sentences do not appear in the article. Therefore

the test aims to deduce the atmosphere of what the article is intending to imply. [...] On the other hand, as for the English test, it intends to ask you the topic sentence, thesis statement, summary of the article or if the article goes further, what will be discussed next? [...] English writing is often very direct while Chinese writing is a bit indirect. When I read articles in Chinese newspapers, they usually start with some short stories and I usually get to know the main idea at last. The English writing, however, is clearer in the first paragraph.

D3, who put her thesis statement initially in English writing, gave the following explanation:

I think there are some differences regarding my writing strategy use between Chinese and English writing. [...] Unlike English writing, Chinese writing does not place so much emphasis on the thesis statement. If it is included in an essay, I think it is likely to appear in the conclusion. [...] I think perhaps it is influenced by *wen-yen-wen*. The thesis is often placed in the final position. The Chinese writing method is unlike English writing, it is not so direct. Often I do not write an essay in *kai-men-jian-shan* ("open the door and then you see the mountain"). I usually write it by going to the point layer by layer, sometimes with a big reverse. [...] I think my Chinese writing is a bit like the inductive method. I write down the points with examples first and then indicate the main purpose of my essay.

D4 reported that what she learned through English writing instruction at university was, among other things, to state the thesis statement preferably in the introductory paragraph. She said that she made a conscious effort to put this into practice while writing.

Although there were entrance exams on Chinese composition, the teachers did not seem to teach it a lot. [...] It seems that Chinese composition is more flexible and no one says what I have to write in a particular paragraph. However, there already seems to be a structure over there in the English composition. [...] At least according to what I have learned so far, the organisation is much stressed and it has to be so. I just follow what has been taught in the composition class.

A5 was among very few students who did not put the thesis statement in the initial position in the writing. Her explanation is as follows.

Originally I wanted to say the countryside was better. [...] However, later I felt that both sides [city and countryside] were good even though I thought the countryside was possibly better. [...] I did not feel I wrote the thesis. That is, I did not select the choice by myself. Although most people live in the city, I think living in the countryside is also a good choice. If I have an opportunity again, I want to select the choice by myself at the end. [...] I did not indicate whether I agreed or disagreed. I thought there were advantages and disadvantages to live in both the city and the countryside.

In summary, the present results concerning the initial location of main ideas can be interpreted in several ways. First, the participants apparently used their learned knowledge of stating the main ideas initially. They might have over-generalised the "rule" about placing the thesis statement in the initial position (Rinnert & Kobayashi, 2001). These students' interviews suggest that they had learned to locate their main points in the initial position and consciously put this knowledge into practice. Whichever instruction influenced their conscious decision, the effects of instruction can be surmised to have been made across languages. In addition, it is also likely that

the opinion task itself influenced their choice of organisational pattern. The explicit task of taking a position on an issue may have pushed them to express their position for/against the given topic at the outset of their writing.

Macro-level rhetorical patterns

In the present study, both the participants favored Deduction (Comparison), that is, they enumerated supporting reasons after presenting their positions (see Table 2). More specifically, 33 participants (82.5%) used Deduction (Comparison) and 6 (15%) Deduction (Explanation), and 1 (2.5%) used Induction (Comparison). None of the participants in this study used Induction (Explanation), in which the main idea is placed at the end and preceding arguments constitute supporting reason(s) for it. Dominant use of Comparison in the present study can be explained in several ways. Firstly, because the participants had some experience in English expository/academic writing, they presumably acquired the Deduction (Comparison) pattern through such experience. Secondly, as some students actually explained in their interviews, they consciously applied their learned rhetorical patterns (position-stating in the introduction → supporting the position with reasons → restating the position in the conclusion) to this writing task. Thirdly, it was also likely that the opinion task itself influenced their choice of Comparison/Explanation. The explicit task of taking a position on an issue may have pushed them to make the comparison to justify their positions for/against the given topic in their writing.

Presence or absence of summary statement

As shown in Table 2, in terms of the results of presence/absence of conclusion/summary/restatement in the final section, most students wrote a position restatement. In 34 out of 40 (85%) of the writings, the writer's opinion on the topic was re-presented or what was discussed in the text was summarised. The remaining 6 (15%) presented neither opinion nor summary in the final part of the writing.

Most of the students thought that there was supposed to be a conclusion in the final part of their essay. For example, A1 said, "I just followed that outline, an opening with two supporting details following it. Then I had a conclusion. [...] I think I should write a summary or something at the end. Without such a summary statement, the ending doesn't sound like a closure." Similarly, A2 said, "At the end, I had a conclusion. [...] I kept the habit of writing an outline. I think this is good and makes my thought pattern clear." By the same token, B2 gave the explanation as follows. "At the end I had a conclusion. [...] I thought my outline made the essay more structured." B5 reported that "In the first paragraph, I wrote something about why I agreed. Then I explained the reasons. In the last paragraph I restated which one was better. My last paragraph was a conclusion." B6 illustrated that "I wrote my first, second and third examples. If I felt I had enough, I ended up with a conclusion to restate what I said in the introduction in the first paragraph." A7 also had a conclusion at the end. She gave a similar explanation to the others mentioned above. "At the end I restated my thesis statement. That is, I repeated what I mentioned. It was a bit like a summary of the previous paragraphs."

In summary, there was not so much difference found in the organisational patterns between high- and low-achieving students' writings with regard to their rhetorical strategy use. The participants showed their preference for the initial positioning of their thesis and deductive type organisation, and most of the participants seemed to

have an awareness of writing a conclusion in their writings. In some cases, however, there were differences in terms of the use of explanation or comparison in body paragraphs. Their prior writing instruction or experience presumably exerted an influence on their writing. The results suggest that deductive patterns may not be difficult for Chinese students to learn to employ, especially in their English writing, and instruction can be effective in this respect.

CONCLUSION

In summary, discourse features are trends, not absolutes, and are provided as an illustration of the variation possible in written discourse. An understanding of possible differences in rhetorical patterns will give us a better understanding of the possible gap between the expectations of teachers and students. This can also be reflected in tutorials in which students are aware of and comfortable with what is expected of them. Teachers need consciously to teach academic genres and, in so doing, understand that not all students will have the same assumptions about what is appropriate and valuable. In addition, cultural differences in the organisation and presentation of ideas should be considered in the assessment of written work and provision of feedback to different students. It is important to recognise the cultural foundations of the techniques of writing and give a prominent place to explanation of essay-writing requirements and patterns. Teachers can, for example, convey the discourse requirements and conventions of writing in different languages (Kaplan, 1988). Students need to be informed that in all modes of written assessment, there is a great deal of emphasis placed on different presentation, and progression of ideas is expected.

I believe that contrastive rhetoric has a lot to offer to teachers and students. Firstly, it explains patterns of writing in different languages and cultures. Purves (1988) emphasises that the understanding of the rhetorical deviations among languages “would bridge the gap between cultural encoding and decoding” (p. 19). He suggests that instructors should be aware that, in essence, “differences among rhetorical patterns do not represent differences in cognitive ability, but differences in cognitive style” (p. 19). Contrastive rhetoric stresses that one style of writing is not better than others. Secondly, gaining cultural competence will allow for understanding of similarities and differences that will lessen miscommunication and misunderstanding, and increase cultural insight. Contrastive rhetoric helps teachers to make students aware of different writing styles and different audience expectations when writing in other languages. Thirdly, it is not likely that a writer can make effective use of an alien writing style just by imitating it (Kaplan, 1988). What must be taught then is also the ideological process through which one arrives at the form. This means the perception underscoring the organisation and presentation of information sequences. For L2 students to become effective writers, one must focus on process as well as product form.

Contrastive rhetoric offers some pedagogical tools for dealing with L2 writers, not only suggestions for how to shape a class or a writing assignment, but also an understanding of how and why students may be resistant writers. The resistance may come from struggles with the differences between the target rhetoric and the ones they control, or it may come from feeling that their voices are devalued as they

struggle with how to accommodate and negotiate their hard-learned proficiency with mastery of a new discourse. It addresses the need of multicultural and multilingual students to understand rhetorical structures, such as coherence and logical ordering in order to become successful persuasive writers. Thus it offers L2 teachers the chance to enrich their pedagogy both through new strategies and through a deeper understanding of their learners. These brief glimpses of contrastive rhetoric may indeed assist people in gaining a more expansive understanding of the complexities of culture and rhetoric. After all, the trend of global interdependence has created an ever-shifting cultural, economic and technological reality that defines the shrinking world of the 21st century. In order to survive in this ever-shrinking global world, we also must learn to see through the eyes and minds of people from different cultures, and further develop a global mindset. In other words, ability in intercultural communication has become an indispensable element for reaching the goal of a global mindset. We should pay more attention to indigenous cultures, and look at their attitudes toward writing practices and differences in communicative style. We need to identify core constructs with which we are unfamiliar, and are in danger of overlooking. Increased sensitivity is thus important because of this global change.

LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

A few limitations and suggestions are worth summarising here, by way of expressing caution about interpretations but also to make recommendations for future research. Firstly, the present study on students' argumentative writings was situated and explored only in the school context. Writings in other contexts need be investigated further. For example, Chou's 1989 study analysed 20 articles from a Chinese newspaper published in Taiwan and found that paragraphs in those Chinese essays possessed distinct unified topics and "a direct movement of ideas in the paragraphs was favored" (p. 256). In the business area, Zhu (1997) analysed sales letters written in Chinese in the People's Republic of China using a rhetorical moves analysis (Swales, 1990). The study indicated that the letters in the sample followed an English linear development. These references may support the notion about the changing nature of contrastive rhetoric. Yet, it is important to maintain the importance of conducting this kind of empirical study.

Secondly, with the aim of contributing to L2 writing, this study was an attempt to gain further insight into English writing by Chinese students. The similarities and differences in contrastive rhetoric in English writing between students with high and low achievement in English writing merit further research. Finally, from a more theoretical perspective, a purely contrastive rhetoric study, like the present one, is useful in that it reflects what writers actually do when they write. This study, being exploratory in nature, seeks to stimulate further research in the area of writing rhetorical strategy use. Therefore, all the findings should be tested by future research.

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APPENDIX**Student's English Writing Sample [Direct Approach: Deduction (Explanation)]**

Many people think it is better for children to grow up in the countryside than in a big city. Generally they think in the countryside, there are more natural places for children to have fun. After school, they can run and shout with their friends in the squares surrounded by nature. Besides, in the countryside, there is less competitive pressure. Children don't need to go to cram schools but spend time with friends or family; therefore, they will enjoy their childhood. I quite agree with those opinions, but I think children in a big city will gain more intellectual benefits (Thesis Statement).

First of all, in a big city children have more opportunity to gain information. There are libraries, museums, art centers, etc. for children to explore and broaden their knowledge. Except for learning limited knowledge at school, they can learn from the ample social resources. Second, since transportation in a big city is convenient, children can go to countryside easily. On the weekends, they can take a trip to the countryside, so they can learn not only in a big city but also in the countryside. As a result, their experience is not confined to a city or a countryside. Third, many educational organizations will hold meaningful activities for children in a big city. Those activities are very interesting and useful for their intellectual development.

Indeed, the intellectual benefits for children to grow up in a big city surpass that in the countryside, so I think growing up in a big city is better for children.

(All the errors are left intact.)

Student's English Writing Sample [Indirect Approach: Induction (Comparison)]

There are advantages and disadvantages both growing up in the countryside and in a big city. Most of the children nowadays grow up in a big city. So it seems more practical to raise kids in the cities. However, living in the countryside is also a good choice.

There are several reasons for parents to raise their children in the big city. The education in the big city is better than that in the countryside, and children are able to gain information more quickly. Besides, life in the big city is easier and more convenient.

However, living in a big city is not perfect. Compared with children living in the countryside, those living in the big city lack the opportunity to be closer to nature. Also, those living in the city usually grow up in a more indifferent surroundings than children in the countryside because people in the countryside generally are more familiar with each other. In a big city, it is more difficult to know people outside the circle of family and friends.

Although it is rare that parents nowadays choose to raise their children in the countryside, there are good reasons that they should try doing that if it is possible. There is no definite answer to whether it is better to grow up in the city or in the countryside (Thesis Statement). The principle for the parents to decide where they are going to raise their children is that they should choose the place that will benefit their children best.

(All the errors are left intact.)