Contrastive Rhetoric Revisited and Redefined

Edited by

Clayann Gilliam Panetta

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Foreword
What in the World Is
Contrastive Rhetoric?

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Contrastive rhetoric (CR),[1] although it has been available in the United States for about 35 years (Kaplan, 1966), has had virtually no impact on the traditional composition classroom in the United States (but see Villanueva, 1995). The reasons are fairly clear: Traditional composition teachers have tended to assume that they are addressing a monolingual, monocultural population (Kaplan, in press-c). Contrary to that assumption, students who are not native speakers of Standard American Schooled English (SASE) and who do not participate to any significant degree in the dominant U.S. cultural traditions have been entering composition classrooms in ever-increasing numbers through most of the last half of the 20th century.[2] They are likely to continue to do so, despite the fulminations of various conservative legislators who seek to have English declared the official language of the several states and of the United States and who seek to impose various draconian constraints on immigration.

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[1] I have never been happy with the designation *theory* for the notion of contrastive rhetoric; by definition, a theory can be tested, but I fear the notion *contrastive rhetoric* cannot really be tested in a satisfactory manner, because any test will be contaminated by the emic/etic problem.

[2] Students who are not native speakers of SASE include (at least) foreign students, immigrants (legal and illegal), Native-American students, Black students, Hispanic students, a variety of other hyphenated-American students (e.g., Asian-American), permanent resident aliens, students with political asylum status, and a variety of students who do not subscribe to dominant cultural assumptions (e.g., gay and lesbian students). Within this group are individuals who have English as their only language, but whose English is not SASE.

Admittedly, CR came into existence with the intent of addressing the needs of individuals for whom English was not a first language—specifically, foreign students in U.S. tertiary institutions. Composition teachers have assumed that CR was exclusively for English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) teaching and thus have felt justified in ignoring it. In the 1960s, the audio-lingual method was pretty well entrenched in ESL classrooms (and EFL classrooms too, for that matter). CR was intended to move learners beyond the memorization of dialogues, beyond regurgitation of set patterns, beyond exclusive concern with grammatical accuracy, and beyond concern only with the sentence. It was intended to facilitate reading and writing in English, creative use of the second language, and the ability to express one's ideas in text in the second language. Thus, it was not initially directed at the teacher in conventional (presumably) monolingual, monocultural environments. Since the 1960s, however, its usefulness in other environments has been discussed (Connor, 1996; Panetta, chap. 1, this volume).

CR assumes that languages differ not only in phonological, morphological, and grammatical features, but in the kinds of genres available to their speakers for the organization of discourse and in the rhetorical (and syntactic) features that co-occur with those genres.[3] This is not to suggest that the differences in syntactic and phonological features between English and a number of other languages have been ignored; on the contrary, a substantial number (see, e.g., Moulton, 1963; Stockwell & Bowen, 1965; Stockwell & Martin, 1965) of "contrastive analyses" of syntactic features are available in the literature, as are a number of studies of CR between English and other languages.[4] These con-

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[3]The term *contrastive* was adopted in the mid-1960s to differentiate "contrastive rhetoric" from the rash of "comparative" syntactic studies being undertaken at the time, the latter largely based on an early version of error analyses. It is implicit in the term *contrastive* that the rhetorics meeting across cultures and languages were also necessarily competitive (see, e.g., the discussion in Corbett, chap. 3, this volume).

[4]Specifically, Arabic (Hatim, 1991; Ostler, 1987; Sa'Adeddin, 1987, 1989); Australian Aboriginal languages/English (Eggington, 1990); "Chicano" Spanish/English (Montaño-Harmon, 1988, 1991); Chichewa (Chimombo, 1988); Chinese (Standard Written Chinese; Bloch, 1989; Campbell, 1989; Cheng, 1985; Dunkleblau, 1990; Scollon, 1991; Tsao, 1983); Finnish (Mauranen, 1993); French, Georgian, German (Clyne, 1987; Skyum-Nielsen & Schröder, 1994); Hebrew (Folman & Connor, 1992; Folman & Sarig, 1990); Hindi (Kachru, 1983); Japanese (Hinds, 1987, 1990; Neustupny, 1997); Korean (Chang, 1983); Marathi (Pandharipanda, 1983); Native-American Languages/English (Leap, 1983); Portuguese (Dantas-Whitney & Grabe, 1992); Romanian (Manoliu-Manea, 1995); Russian, Spanish (Mexican, Puerto Rican, etc.; Kamhi-Stein, 1995; Lux, 1991; Lux & Grabe, 1991; Ostler, 1992; Reid, 1988; Reppen & Grabe, 1993); Thai (Bickner & Peyasantiwong, 1988; Indrasutra, 1988); Turkish (Enginarlar, 1990; Oktar, 1991); Urdu (Baumgardner, 1987, 1992); Vietnamese (Soter, 1988). There is some work involving several languages; for example, English, French, and Arabic (Daoud, 1991; Reid, 1988); Dutch and other languages (Ulijn & Strother, 1995; Wijst & Ulijn, 1995); some of this work in particular registers/genres (e.g., business text in English and Japanese: Connor, 1989; Oi & Sato, 1990; conference abstracts in Chinese: Cantor, 1994); and there is some work on particular grammatical categories, for example, epistemic modals in Chicano English (Youmans,

trastive analyses (e.g., Kaplan et al., 1983), however, are largely restricted to the level of the sentence.[5] It is an assumption of CR that discourse is not simply a collection of (more or less) correct syntactic structures, but rather represents a complex multifaceted, multidimensional set (Connor, 1996; Scollon, 1997). Language is not—cannot be—an isolated system, and grammar cannot be equated with language. As Enkvist (1997) put it:

> The important point is to realize that the text is the father of the sentence, and that text strategies come before the syntactic formation of individual sentences. Giving a sentence its textual fit, its conformity with the text strategy, is not a cosmetic surface operation polishing the sentence after it is already there. Textual fit is a far more basic requirement, determining the choice of words as well as the syntactic structure of a sentence. To modern text and discourse linguists this is so obvious that it seems curious that grammarians and teachers of composition have, through the centuries, spent so much time and effort on syntactic phenomena within individual sentences, while overlooking the fundamental questions of text strategy and information flow. (p. 199)

A SET OF QUESTIONS

The individual who does not participate in the monolingual, monocultural assumptions that dominate the composition classroom is faced with five terrible questions:

1. What may be discussed?
2. Who has the authority to speak/write? Or: Who has the authority to write to whom under what circumstances?
3. What form(s) may the writing take?
4. What is evidence?
5. What arrangement of evidence is likely to appeal (be convincing) to readers?

1995). Some work has been directed specifically to ESL teaching (Ferris, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994a, 1994b; Ferris & Hedgcock, 1998) or to language assessment (Weasenforth, 1995). Additionally an "eclectic philosophy of language" based on CR and rhetorical theory has been developed (Kowal, 1994). Biber (1988, 1992, 1995) introduced a multidimensional model of analysis employing complex computer-based techniques, and that model has been employed by some of the researchers enumerated here. Shirley Ostler at Bowling Green University has a number of the unpublished studies and is usually happy to share them for the cost of copying and postage; contact her at sostler@bgnet.bgsu.edu.

[5]In the 1970s and into the 1980s, empirical research was the dominant form; empirical research often involved counting various features in text. In that time frame, the features available for counting were syntactic features. Many of the early studies in CR were based on contrasts of the occurrence of countable features.

1. What May Be Discussed? This question must occur to composition teachers when they assign essay topics. English speakers, for example, are loathe to discuss bathroom functions, whereas speakers of Thai have no problem with that topic. Because abortion is a political issue in the United States, it might be considered appropriate to assign, as a topic for a class essay, some discussion of issues surrounding abortion; after all, virtually every U.S. politician and virtually every newspaper and television editorial writer has a position on the matter. In Northern Europe (Finland, Norway, Sweden, etc.), abortion is exclusively a medical question, and the subject simply wouldn't be discussed. To illustrate, as Dellinger (in press) noted, for example:

> Abortion in Finland is a very personal issue, as are many such issues, including religion itself. If it [abortion] is discussed at all, then it is considered a medical question. In any case, because of the assumption that it has to do with medicine, it is not a political issue, and certainly does not belong to the public world of television news discourse.

On the other hand, in devoutly Roman Catholic countries (e.g., most of Latin America), the question is essentially taboo, as it is a religious issue not open to debate. It should not be surprising that speakers of other languages may seem to suffer from writer's block when such a topic is assigned.

2. Who Has the Authority to Speak/Write? In U.S. composition tradition, anyone—even a lowly student—has the authority to write and to hold and express an opinion, but in more traditional cultures, the young have no such authority. As a consequence, students tend to quote (or at least parrot) those whom they perceive to have authority. "Youngsters" do not have the authority to hold a new or original opinion. In U.S. composition classrooms, learners so inhibited may be accused of failing to exercise critical thinking, but they may not see themselves as authorized to undertake such an act. Scollon (1991) showed that social hierarchy is carefully structured in Chinese society, that an individual of lower status must wait for an individual of higher status to invite communication, and that an individual of higher status has an obligation to do so. In English, the rules are not quite so clear except in extreme cases—for example, in interactions between a military officer and an ordinary soldier, or in interactions between a school administrator and a student (Kaplan, 1997). In the final analysis, it is the "expert" who has the authority to write—even in English.

> Experts are people who, through their publications and research, have reached wide audiences, whose opinions and views serve as authority sources, who have produced some of the key touchstones of the [discourse] community: [Shirley Brice] Heath's and [Elinore] Ochs' work on language socialization, [R. B.] Kaplan's research in contrastive rhetoric, [William] Labov's analysis of narrative, [John] Swales' work on genres, [Deborah] Tannen's work in discourse analysis, among

others. All of these individuals ["experts"] have long-standing influence on the field [of Applied Linguistics]: Their work serves as templates on which the rest of the [discourse] community builds, and their thoughts are embodied in specific textual forms particular to academic writing. (Ramanathan & Kaplan, 2000)

Young students do not have such authority and may be reluctant to venture any opinion, or may be unable to discuss the topic because it does not occur in their first-language discourse.

3. What Form(s) May the Writing Take?   This is really a question of available genres. It is an assumption of CR that genres are nothing more nor less than conventional solutions to recurring communication problems. Although students who are native speakers of other languages may bring with them a rich inventory of genres, there may be a mismatch between the genres in the other language and those in English, or the genres may serve unexpected purposes, or the co-occurring syntactic features may be quite different. Most speakers of English recognize that a sonnet, for example, is a poetic form and that it would probably be inappropriate to present a cooking recipe in the form of a sonnet, and most English-speaking readers would be likely to reject a sonnet which merely conveys a cooking recipe. The subject matter of sonnets is part of "what everybody knows." Berkenkotter and Huckin (1993) suggested that "knowledge production [in different disciplines] is carried out and codified largely through generic forms of writing: lab reports, working papers, reviews, grant proposals, technical reports, conference papers, journal articles, monographs and so forth" (p. 476). The generic form plays an important role in the process of knowledge dissemination. "Kaplan's (1966) controversial 'doodles' article would not have fueled research in contrastive rhetoric had he written it in the form of a memo, for instance. For one thing, *Language Learning* would not have accepted it for publication" (Ramanathan & Kaplan, 2000).

The speaker of another language or variety brings with her or him a rich inventory of various genres; the problem is that those genres may be utterly inappropriate in an English-speaking academic context (see Woolever, chap. 4, this volume). The sets of genres in different languages may not overlap to any significant degree; it is a serious fallacy to assume that the genres of English are in some way universal. Trueba (1986) wrote:

Issues regarding "language handicaps" and "academic underachievement," are social phenomena that surface in the form of linguistic deviance and are then "interpreted by the experts." The traditional assessment of concept formation is based on the assumption that, if the child does not demonstrate in an appropriate linguistic form that s/he recognizes a concept (or concepts) and its (their) interrelationships in those domains "all normal children" know, the child is handicapped. A perfectly normal child who has just arrived from a linguistical-

ly, socially, and culturally different country [or community], by not being able to produce in oral or written text the expected linguistic forms, becomes—ipso facto—"abnormal" in the eyes of the educator. (p. 48)

4. What Is Evidence? The question of the nature of evidence is critical. First there is the problem of fact versus opinion. Learners of English as a second or foreign language often are misled by the use of such devices as the factive opener in English; a sentence that begins with the phrase "it is true that . . ." (or some similar structure) may indeed transmit an unsubstantiated opinion despite its opener. Furthermore, learners often cannot differentiate the relative weight in authority between something that appears in a weekly newsmagazine and something that appears in a scholarly journal. Students arriving from traditional cultures may be inclined to quote, as authority, the content of canonical religious texts or the writings of famous historical figures.

Some years ago, a student of mine—a Saudi Arabian and a devout Muslim—wrote a class paper for me, in a language policy course, on the rise and fall of world languages. When he treated Greek, Latin, French, and English, he was able to bring to bear economic, social, historical, political, military, and other pertinent factors, but when he discussed Arabic, he was only able to say that Arabic was the language of Allah and of the Holy Koran. His religious orthodoxy prevented him from exploring evidence pertaining to his own language. The only pertinent evidence he could invoke derived from the special status of that language.

5. What Arrangement of Evidence Is Likely to Appeal to Readers? This final question is really a question of audience. Novice writers may not be aware of audience considerations. No matter what teachers say about audience, novice writers understand intuitively that they are writing for the teacher, because it is the teacher who has authority over the text (i.e., the assignment of a grade; see Bliss, chap. 2, this volume). Novice writers coming from different linguistic systems may have different assumptions about the appropriate form of address to the teacher (or any audience).[6] All novice writers, but especially writers who are not native speakers of English, understand that a teacher is an authority figure, but:

- They may have difficulty perceiving any distinction between "the person who may be addressed" (in the system from which they come) and the teacher.

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[6]It is important to remember that few other educational systems give as much attention to writing as the U.S. system does (see, e.g., Kaplan, 1995). It is also important to remember that assumptions about age, race, gender, and socioeconomic class (deriving from the student's background) will color the text produced.

- They may fail to understand that the teacher is (on the other hand) not exactly like a peer, whom the student knows how to address.
- They may underestimate the teacher's ability to identify stylistic differences and catch plagiarism.

Mauranen (1993), in a contrastive study of Finnish and English, showed that writers differ in their culturally determined rhetorical practices, and that these differences manifest themselves in typical discourse features and in the way the writers are perceived by readers:

> [Writers] differ in some of their culturally determined rhetorical practices, and these differences manifest themselves in typical textual features. *The writers seem not to be aware of these textual features, or the underlying rhetorical practices.* This lack of awareness is in part due to the fact that textlinguistic features have not been the concern of traditional language teaching in schools. Sometimes text strategies are taught for the mother tongue, but rarely if ever for foreign languages separately. Such phenomena have therefore not been brought to the attention of [writers] struggling with writing. . . . *Nevertheless, these sometimes subtle differences between writing cultures, often precisely because they are subtle and not commonly observable to the non-linguist, tend to put . . . [various] native language [writers] at a rhetorical disadvantage in the eyes of [other language] readers. . . . This disadvantage is more than a difference in cultural tastes, since it may not only strike readers as lack of rhetorical elegance, but as lack of coherent writing or even [coherent] thinking, which can seriously affect the credibility of non-native writers.* (pp. 1–2; italics added)

These five terrible questions can be summed up in one overwhelming question: "Who writes what to whom, how, when, where, and to what end?" The first part of the question—*who writes what to whom*—implicates the basic relationship between reader and writer as well as the issue of "what may be discussed." The question is also impacted significantly by the performative abilities of both the writer and the reader. *How* implicates the question of the kind of evidence to be invoked. *When* implicates the chronology of the event involved; this is not a question of verb tense but rather a question of the existence of co-text.[7] There are no cooking-recipe sonnets to my knowledge, but there are lots of sonnets, produced over a long historical time. *Where* implicates the language to be used, the register appropriate to the act in a particular setting, and the pre-text that exists as a template for the act. *To what end* raises the question of audience; that is, what sort of response/reaction does the writer intend to evoke/provoke? These matters can be interrelated in a model

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[7]The matter of co-text is most easily demonstrated through the development of science and technology texts. Science is, by definition, cumulative, every innovation based on a thick body of preceding science writing. Thus, every science text is "formed" on the basis of previously existing science text, and such forms as the scientific article are defined by the co-existence of a great body of other science texts (see, e.g., Atkinson, 1999; Kaplan, in press-b).

of writing (see, e.g., Grabe & Kaplan, 1996, for a number of different models, and Kaplan, in press-a, for the most recent iteration of a model that has been evolving over the past decade).

Learning these things about writing cannot be left to the learner's intuition; rather, these things have to be taught explicitly—anew in every generation (see Panetta, chap. 1, this volume). Halliday (1978) wrote:

> What is learning to read and to write? Fundamentally, it is an extension of the functional potential of language. Those children who don't learn to read and write, by and large, are children to whom it doesn't make sense; to whom the functional extension that these media provide has not been made clear, or does not match up with their own expectations of what language is for. Hence, if the child has not been oriented toward the types of meaning which the teacher sees as those which are proper to the writing system, then the learning of reading and writing would be out of context, because fundamentally, as in the history of the human race, reading and writing are an extension of the function of language. This is what they must be for the child [and for the L2 learner] equally well. (p. 57)

What Halliday said about reading and writing for the child is true also for second/foreign language learning (as distinct from acquisition) among children and adults—especially learning to read and write—to achieve literacy; if it doesn't make sense to the learner, there is little or no motivation to learn.

WHAT ABOUT CONVENTIONS?

Many so-called writing classes, both for native speakers and for those for whom SASE is not an available discourse, are not really "writing" classes at all; rather, they are classes about the surface of writing. This is not to say that the conventions of writing can be ignored; they are no more transparent than is the structure of discourse. The use and size of margins,[8] the numbering of pages,[9] the indentation of paragraphs, the use of hyphens (both in conjoined phrases and at the ends of lines),[10] the uses of punctuation and spacing,[11] the learning of spelling[12] (and the use of dictionaries)—all these have to be learned because there is nothing self-evident about them and because conventional practices vary widely across literate cultures. But these are not factors in writing—rather,

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[8]In writing systems in which linear movement is right-to-left or top-to-bottom, the conventions governing margins are rather different than they are in left-to-right English.

[9]That is, the problem of where to put such numbers on the page and how to indicate continuation; for example, U.S. text doesn't, but various other systems use the abbreviation PTO (or its equivalent) to indicate onward movement.

[10]In nonsyllabic languages, line-end hyphenation does not occur between syllables.

[11]In character-based languages, each character occurs in the middle of an imaginary box; so too does punctuation.

[12]Semitic languages do not present vowels in the orthography.

they constitute important prewriting skills. Learning to write a passive structure is a prewriting grammatical skill, but learning when, where, why, and how to use a passive structure is indeed a function of writing.

WHAT ABOUT L1 INFLUENCES?

Writers select and arrange textual material in terms of their "abilities to convey just those analyses . . . of event[s] that are most compatible with the linguistic means provided by their languages" (Berman & Slobin, 1994, p. 12; see also Kellerman, 1995). The rich inventory of syntactic and discourse elements learners bring with them from their first language and from their prior education will color their writing in the second language. CR—which started its life as a means to get beyond the limitations of the audio-lingual approach to language teaching—now constitutes a notion that pervades rhetoric and composition issues across the curriculum and provides the means for teachers and students to understand why writing—which may be conventionally and syntactically "correct"—remains out of focus to readers of SASE. CR applies to learning to write in any population not highly practiced in SASE, and the absence of familiarity with SASE approaches may be derived at least from differences in gender (see Micciche, chap. 6, this volume), in ethnicity, in race (see Comfort, chap. 7, this volume), in sexual orientation (see McBeth, chap. 8, this volume), and in educational and experiential background.

WHAT'S WRONG WITH CR?

CR has been criticized as a notion steeped in xenophobia and restrictive of the learner's freedom to experiment with deviant forms of discourse. This is simply not the case. CR came into existence as a notion designed to help learners manage the discourse structure of SASE. To the extent that the use of SASE is xenophobic and framing of a particular power structure, CR is guilty of the charge. CR emerged as a notion designed to inculcate a standard of schooled discourse. To the extent that it does so, it is guilty of limiting learners' freedom to use other discourse structures. Learners are free to pursue whatever experimentation they wish, once they have control of some basic standard. To the extent that such experimentation may result in texts that constitute mazes defying comprehension, it may be inappropriate to encourage experimentation (see Scoggins, chap. 5, this volume). (Of course, it is the case that lack of discourse fluency may mask simple stupidity, but that is a separate issue, beyond the capacity of CR to explain and beyond the scope of this discourse.) CR has implications for any population that, for whatever reason, brings deviant rhetorical practices to texts written in SASE for SASE-speaking readers. It is conceived as a means of understanding SASE rhetoric, creating SASE discourse, and thereby achieving communication

with SASE-speaking audiences. It was never intended to be replacive; rather, it was always perceived as being additive—contributing to the resources available for discourse-building among bilingual populations, whether that bilingualism/bidialectalism implicates another language, another variety of English, or any variety based on English but different from it in "significant" ways (e.g., African-American vernacular English, Asian-American vernacular English, Hispanic-American vernacular English, Native-American vernacular English—although these are labels that tend to group together significantly different population segments and to suggest unfortunate stereotypes). Significant ways may include semantics, morphology, grammar, and rhetoric, and in some cases phonology.

A COMPENDIUM

The chapters in this volume examine the issues as they pertain to various populations—gay and lesbian individuals, speakers of various hyphenated-American vernacular Englishes, women—and the ways in which the notion of CR contributes to an understanding of genre, curriculum, special-purpose writing (e.g., business), and the various transmission media. In an ideal world, the volume might have been expanded to consider other populations, for example, the deaf (users of ASL), the blind (users of Braille), and—of course—speakers of any number of particular languages; and the volume might have been expanded to explore other features of discourse, for example, devices of cohesion and coherence, modal verbs, hedges, politeness features, and so on. It might even have explored the CR problems arising in translation and interpretation (Burrough-Boenisch, 1998). While it is undeniably true that a book must have pages, it is also true that a book cannot exceed some rational number of pages—partly because the technology of bookbinding remains limited, and partly because publishing costs would soon exceed practical limits. What the world may need is a new massive multicultural corpus base where the problems can be explored beyond the limitations of any single focal point. In the absence of such a massive corpus, readers will find this volume a valuable introduction to the potential uses of CR in the composition classroom.

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