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Toward critical contrastive rhetoric

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Abstract

A traditional approach to contrastive rhetoric has emphasized cultural difference in rhetorical patterns among various languages. Despite its laudable pedagogical intentions to raise teachers' and students' cultural and rhetorical awareness in second language writing, traditional contrastive rhetoric has perpetuated static binaries between English and other languages and viewed students as culturally lacking. Various criticisms that have challenged assumptions behind traditional contrastive rhetoric as well as a critical scrutiny of pedagogical issues, including the politics of explicit teaching of linguistic forms, indicate a need for establishing alternative conceptual frameworks. Such frameworks seek to critically understand politics of cultural difference and explore situated pedagogy that challenges essentialism. By incorporating poststructuralist, post-colonial, and postmodern critiques of language and culture, critical contrastive rhetoric reconceptualizes cultural difference in rhetoric from such perspectives as relations of power, discursive construction of knowledge, colonial construction of cultural dichotomies, and rhetorical plurality brought about by diaspora and cultural hybridity. When put into practice, critical contrastive rhetoric affirms multiplicity of languages, rhetorical forms, and students' identities, while problematizing the discursive construction of rhetoric and identities, and thus allowing writing teachers to recognize the complex web of rhetoric, culture, power, and discourse in responding to student writing.

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1. Introduction

Cultural difference has been a focus in second language research, particularly in teaching English to writers of other languages.¹ Among various aspects of cultural difference, rhetorical patterns of written texts have been investigated for more than 30 years since contrastive rhetoric research was initiated by Kaplan (1966). Sharing a similar assumption with the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis² on the relationship between language and culture, Kaplan’s earlier works explored a link between culturally specific logic or thought patterns and paragraph structures in English essays written by nonnative English-speaking students. Throughout these decades, contrastive rhetoric has investigated cultural differences in written discourse patterns or rhetorical conventions that might negatively affect writing in a second language (Connor, 1996). The hypotheses underlying the traditional approach to contrastive rhetoric are summarized as: (1) each language or culture has rhetorical conventions that are unique to itself; and (2) the rhetorical conventions of students’ L1 interfere with their ESL writing (Grabe & Kaplan 1989; Kaplan, 1966, 1972, 1988).

Since the initiation of the field, studies have defined rhetorical characteristics of selected genres of various languages as well as described their effect on ESL writing. For instance, in contrasting English and Japanese expository discourse patterns, English is typically described as linear, direct, deductive, and logical, and Japanese as inductive, indirect, and non-linear (e.g., Hinds, 1983a, 1983b, 1990). English is also described as writer responsible whereas many Asian languages, including Japanese, are described as reader responsible, suggesting that English writers assume the responsibility to make their statements clear and precise while Asian language writers often use indirect strategies, leaving interpretations up to the readers (Hinds, 1987). Empirical studies investigating text organization patterns of students’ writing or readers’ preference of rhetorical and other text features have posited specific rhetorical differences between English and Japanese and/or L1–L2 rhetorical transfer (e.g., Kobayashi, 1984; Kobayashi & Rinnert, 1996; Maynard, 1996; Rinnert & Kobayashi, 2001; see Connor, 1996 for a summary of studies on various languages including Arabic, Chinese, Korean, German, Finnish, Spanish, and Czech; see counter evidence and criticisms in the next section).

Although its initial impetus was linguistic analysis of written texts in college-level academic contexts, contrastive rhetoric has expanded its focus to the exploration of various genres, disciplines, and composing processes, as summarized by a pioneering monograph

¹Rhetorical differences related to teaching and learning second languages other than English have been investigated (e.g., Montañó-Harmon, 1991; see also Simpson, 2000). However, the majority of research has focused on teaching ESL/EFL.

²Whether or not the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis or Whorfian linguistic relativity is a major founding theory of Kaplan’s original idea about cultural thought patterns has been debated (see Matsuda, 2001; Ying, 2000, 2001). However, Kaplan himself mentions the influence of Sapir–Whorf hypothesis (Kaplan, 1972) and uses the term “the neo-Whorfian” to refer to the underlying assumption of contrastive rhetoric (Kaplan, 1988, p. 279; see also Kowal, 1998). Furthermore, there is a problem of terminology. Benjamin Whorf never referred to his principle of linguistic relativity as “hypothesis.” According to Kowal (1998), after his death Wierzbicka’s commentators began to refer to his principle as hypothesis and sought the empirical evidence to confirm or disconfirm it.

on contrastive rhetoric research by Connor (1996). Connor states that the field experienced a paradigm shift in the 1990s and that “(a) broader definition that considers cognitive and sociocultural variables of writing . . . has been substituted for a purely linguistic framework” (p. 18).

Despite its unique cross-cultural focus on writing and its well-meaning effort to facilitate second language learning, contrastive rhetoric has tended to construct static, homogeneous, and apolitical images of the rhetorical patterns of various written languages. It has also implicitly reinforced an image of the superiority of English rhetoric and a deterministic view of second language (particularly English) learners as individuals who inevitably transfer rhetorical patterns of their L1 in L2 writing. Furthermore, the binary images of rhetoric constructed by the field, i.e., English is linear, direct, and logical whereas other languages are circular, digressive, or non-logical, parallel colonial dichotomies between the colonizer and the colonized (Pennycook, 1998), suggesting the hidden political or ideological nature of the conventional knowledge created by contrastive rhetoric.

This paper unpacks such politics and ideologies and proposes alternative conceptual foundations for *critical contrastive rhetoric* that incorporate key concepts drawn from postmodernism, poststructuralism, postcolonialism, and critical pedagogy, which are already being integrated in the larger field of applied linguistics (e.g., Benesch, 2001; Canagarajah, 1999; Nelson, 1999; Norton, 2000; Pennycook, 1998, 2001). These alternative views would enrich the conceptual basis of contrastive rhetoric, which has tended to perpetuate the Othering of languages other than English while by implication legitimating the superiority of English and to view writing merely as a reflection of cultural thought patterns rather than a social practice involving human agency. As applied to practice, 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 and to reevaluate how these practices might reinforce cultural binaries and assimilation.

Although a comprehensive review of studies on rhetorical patterns in various languages is available through Connor (1996), a synthesis has not largely been available in two areas: (1) various arguments against the traditional approach to contrastive rhetoric and (2) philosophical bases for various pedagogical recommendations. Although an extensive summary of major controversies within contrastive rhetoric research has recently been offered by Casanave (2004), arguments that question traditional contrastive rhetoric are largely ignored in the publications that support mainstream assumptions. For example, an article by Connor (2002), which offers an overview of new directions in contrastive rhetoric, touches on critical perspectives but mentions only some of the many arguments that have been advanced questioning the conventional wisdom of contrastive rhetoric—arguments that in fact provide important insights. A critical understanding of pedagogical issues also provides an important theoretical direction for critical contrastive rhetoric. Thus, we will first review a variety of arguments and studies that raise critical views on traditional contrastive rhetoric, and then offer a critical analysis of pedagogical issues. We will then introduce theoretical foundations of critical contrastive rhetoric. The final section discusses possible future directions for pedagogy.

2. Critical perspectives on contrastive rhetoric

With their intuitive appeal, conventional conceptualizations of contrastive rhetoric continue to appear in publications, reproducing a fixed view of cultural difference (e.g., Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2000; Dyer & Friederich, 2002; Fox, 1994; Grabe & Kaplan, 1996; Panetta, 2001). Kaplan's "doodles" in his seminal article continue to be used in teacher training workshops or in publications as a lucid illustration of cultural differences in intercultural communication even in EFL settings (e.g., Wada, 1999). However, contrastive rhetoric has witnessed a wide range of criticism that has raised important questions about the legitimacy of the conventional wisdom.

Some scholars have criticized contrastive rhetoric for its reductionist, deterministic, prescriptive, and essentialist orientation (Leki, 1997; Spack, 1997; Zamel, 1997). Their criticisms call for more attention to plurality, complexity, and hybridity of rhetorical patterns within one language as well as similarities among languages or cultures. Zamel (1997) critiques deterministic and the static views of the culture and students and calls for more attention to variability, complexity, and unpredictability. Spack (1997) elucidates the reality of multiple writer identities and proposes viewing students as individuals rather than members of a generalized cultural group. Leki (1997) argues that ignoring similarities leads to exoticizing the language and culture of ESL writers and dismissing the agency that writers bring to the act of writing.

The importance of context and the interplay between L2 writers' and L1 readers' knowledge in textual interpretation is addressed by McCagg (1996). In problematizing "reader responsibility" as a characteristic of Japanese expository prose (Hinds, 1987), McCagg reanalyzed the Japanese and English versions of newspaper column essays used by Hinds (1987) and suggested that, as long as the cultural and linguistic knowledge is mutually shared by the reader and the writer, Japanese texts generally require no more cognitive effort to comprehend than English texts do. In a similar vein, Donahue (1998) argued that the newspaper essays used by Hinds (1983a, 1983b) are written for an audience in Japan even in their translated version and thus readers in the US are confronted with unfamiliar foreign terms and contextual knowledge.

The contextual aspect of linguistic meanings and forms becomes significant in the global spread of English, as do the diverse language usages within a traditionally English-speaking country. Y. Kachru (1995, 1999) critiqued traditional contrastive rhetoric as reducing English rhetoric to normative patterns based mainly on style manuals and textbooks. Furthermore, from the point of view of World Englishes, Y. Kachru critiqued contrastive rhetoric's sole focus on the Inner Circle varieties of English as a point of reference and its failure to validate Outer Circle rhetorical varieties of English (i.e., English used in former British colonies). Furthermore, the tendency to define the expectations of "native speaker or reader" as the rhetorical "norm" reflects a prescriptive orientation that overlooks plurality within language groups and the blurred boundaries between them, which ironically contradicts Whorf's anti-essentialist plea for broadening perspectives of humankind through developing a deeper understanding of diverse cultures and languages (Kowal, 1998; see more details in a later section).

Y. Kachru's critique that traditional contrastive rhetoric tends to compare idealized English rhetoric with essentialized textual features of other languages raises the question of

what ought to be compared or contrasted. One problem that has been pointed out is that of comparing a contemporary English style with classical styles of other languages, thereby constructing an exoticized prototype of the rhetoric of the Other. This tendency fails to take into account the dynamic nature of language related to inter-linguistic/cultural influence. In Chinese, critics argue that the *ba gu wen* (eight-legged essay), which has been claimed to affect Chinese students' writing in English (Kaplan, 1972), exerts little influence on contemporary writing in Chinese, particularly after the May 4th Movement of the Chinese Literary Revolution in 1919 (Kirkpatrick, 1997; Mohan & Lo, 1985). Although Li (2002) points out a trace of the eight-legged essay seen in the writing that high school students practice, she contrasts it with university-level writing that focuses on logic, clarity, analysis, interpretation, and development of one's own ideas. Likewise, there is little evidence that the four-unit pattern, *qi-cheng-zhuan-he*, which Hinds (1990) identifies as culturally specific, influences contemporary expository writing in Chinese (Kirkpatrick, 1997). Bloch and Chi (1995) further argue that even classical Chinese rhetoric was never monolithic but invited varied views, some of which promoted logical argumentation and critical examination of the canon. The contemporary influence of English on Chinese academic writing is demonstrated in a study conducted by Shi (2002). Based on interview data, she claims that mainland Chinese TESOL professionals who were educated in the West tend to use Anglo-American conventions of academic writing in publishing their papers in both Chinese and English. These studies indicate that for contemporary Chinese students, Western ideas of what constitutes good writing are not alien.

Similarly in Japanese, the same four-unit style imported from Chinese (i.e., *ki-shô-ten-ketsu*) has differing definitions and many Japanese composition specialists recommend not using it for persuasive writing or academic writing in general (Kobayashi & Rinnert, 2002; Kubota, 1997). A historical overview reveals that the organization of contemporary Japanese academic texts is largely influenced by Western rhetoric (Kubota, 1997). In fact, the dynamic nature of rhetoric is reflected in recent studies that fail to support Japanese students' strong preference for inductive styles (Hirose, 2003; Kubota, 1998a, 1998b). Overall, Chinese and Japanese composition specialists generally agree that *qi-cheng-zhuan-he* or *ki-shô-ten-ketsu* applies to multiple forms of text organization and that the third element, *zhuan/ten*, does not function as digression or a "circular" move, as traditional contrastive rhetoric has defined, but as expansion or development of the preceding ideas (Cahill, 2003).

Another problem with regard to comparison is the issue of genre. Hinds (1983a, 1987, 1990), for example, conducted text analyses of sample essays that appeared in a Japanese newspaper column as typical expository writing exhibiting *ki-shô-ten-ketsu*, reader-responsibility, or delayed introduction of purpose. However, as Donahue (1998) and Kubota (1997) have pointed out, this column may not be a typical example of expository prose because of its specific format (e.g., lack of title) and its purpose to entertain readers with the writer's perspectives on a news event which assumes specific background knowledge. The distinct nature of these essays makes Hinds' claim for cultural difference highly questionable.

Several data-based studies that carefully contrasted published texts in two languages revealed some similar features as well as differences. In Chinese, Taylor and Chen (1991) found that the introduction of academic papers in English and Chinese published in China

shared similar rhetorical moves with English papers published in English-speaking countries, although the Chinese-based papers tended to summarize literature less frequently than did English papers, which the authors attributed to the Chinese reluctance to expose others' work as a source of shortcoming. Investigating the method of citation in published English and Chinese articles, Bloch and Chi (1995) found that Chinese authors do use citations with varied functions, including critical ones, as English authors do, although they use them less frequently than English authors. In Arabic, Sa'adeddin (1989) argued that while there are extemporaneously developed *aural* texts marked by orality, there are premeditatively developed *visual* texts used for scholarly writing which are quite similar to English academic texts. These authors conclude that scholarly writing in these languages generally shares similar characteristics with that in English.

While many of the above studies analyzed published texts written by experienced writers, traditional contrastive rhetoric, with its pedagogical interest in ESL writing, has often analyzed L2 English texts to explore the cultural influence of the writers' L1. However, such investigation tends to ignore the multiple factors that contribute to the process and product of L2 writing, such as L1 writing expertise, developmental aspects of L2 proficiency, and individual writers' agency reflected in their intentions and preferences. Research has found that the quality of L2 texts is linked to L1 writing ability as well as L2 proficiency (e.g., Cumming, 1989; Kubota, 1998b; Sasaki & Hirose, 1996). Besides the developmental aspect of students' general writing ability, Mohan and Lo (1985) pointed out a link between a lack of coherence in ESL texts and writers' unfamiliarity with the topic and an instructional focus on sentence-level accuracy. Furthermore, the between-group comparison often employed to investigate L1–L2 transfer (i.e., comparing L1 and L2 texts in the aggregate) may not reveal actual transfer at the individual level. A within-subject design would shed more light on whether individual writers actually use the same rhetorical patterns in L1 and L2 and what kind of individual perceptions and intentions influence the rhetorical decision (Kubota, 1998b). These critiques indicate that unique features of L2 writing are related to multiple factors and cannot be reduced solely to cultural influence.

The criticisms reviewed thus far focus on human agency and reject ahistorical, fixed, and simplistic definitions of cultural rhetoric, calling attention to multiple factors that may affect the structures and interpretations of L2 texts or texts in various languages. As shown later, many of these criticisms can be theorized in alternative ways in critical contrastive rhetoric.

3. Pedagogical issues in contrastive rhetoric

The study of contrastive rhetoric began in the 1960s in response to the practical needs of American colleges and universities facing an increased number of international and immigrant students who needed to acquire the discourse conventions of English academic writing. In mentioning this pedagogical demand, Kaplan (1988) states that the audio-lingual method, which was popular at that time, focused exclusively on oral language and sentence grammar and thus failed to address challenges in extensive reading and writing at the text level.

Contrastive rhetoric researchers proposed various teaching techniques for helping students raise their awareness of English rhetorical conventions and develop their skills

to use them. The following techniques were suggested by researchers: rearranging scrambled paragraphs and filling out an outline following given topic sentences (Kaplan, 1966, 1972); imitating models, doing controlled exercises, filling in missing sentences, and composing by following an outline (Kaplan, 1967); making students aware of the following factors in writing: cultural difference in composing conventions, culturally specific assumptions about audience, “world knowledge” (culturally constrained subject knowledge), “technical knowledge” (knowledge acquired through other academic activities), and the idea that writing is a social phenomenon that requires more than control of syntactic and lexical items (Kaplan, 1988); identifying topic structures in authentic texts and narrowing down a topic to match the writer’s world knowledge (Grabe & Kaplan 1989); explaining chronological and logical sequences, making “point outlines,” and examining formats for various academic assignments (Reid, 1984); and paying attention to the lexical and morphological structures of edited texts and discussing rhetorical differences between English academic prose and students’ L1 (Reid, 1989). Pedagogical suggestions resulting from an empirical study on the native-speaking reader’s expectations of the second sentence following a topic sentence (Reid, 1996) include discussing the second sentence functions, developing the skills to predict an appropriate second sentence, and identifying the problems of inappropriate second sentences.

Overall, researchers supporting contrastive rhetoric hypotheses recommend making rhetorical differences explicit, raising students’ awareness of such differences, and acculturating students through language exercises with concrete models that meet audience expectations. With an assumption of clear cultural differences in rhetorical conventions, these pedagogical suggestions tend to be prescriptive. The explicit teaching of clearly defined written forms of language is also promoted on various fronts; e.g., a conservative movement of back-to-basics, a genre-based approach to literacy in Australia, resistance to Whole Language and process writing approaches from African American and Native American perspectives, and Freirean critical literacy. It is important to understand the politics of explicit language teaching, or any other pedagogy, that contains varied purposes and motivation for strategically achieving a certain educational or political aim.

Explicit teaching of the forms of standard language as seen in the back-to-basics movement or traditional pedagogy that has a transmission and assimilationist orientation reflects the functional view of literacy. This approach views literacy as consisting of merely basic writing and decoding skills that can be taught in a hierarchical manner from simple to complex (Weaver, 1994). Language is decomposed into parts and each part is taught explicitly through drills and exercises (Cummins, 2001). By contrast, pedagogy favored by Delpit (1988, 1995) reacts against Whole Language (including process approaches to writing), which she argues fails to provide African American and Native American students with the linguistic tools necessary for success in the dominant society. Explicit teaching from this point of view seeks to uncover the structural forms of dominant language so that minority learners can access social and cultural power. The aim is not assimilation but rather empowerment of the disadvantaged. The Australian genre approach demonstrates a somewhat similar view to Delpit’s in that it is a movement against liberal humanistic approaches to literacy and is concerned with the social success of disadvantaged students. Although the genre approach has undergone a shift in focus, one original goal described by Cope and Kalantzis (1993) was to empower students, particularly those

marginalized, by explicitly teaching the linguistic structures of socially, economically, politically, and culturally influential genres. The genre approach, however, has become transmission-oriented when implemented in the classroom and is criticized for treating genres and linguistic forms as the status quo rather than critiquing them as well as the unequal social relations that foster them (Luke, 1996). This tendency, according to Luke, perpetuates the privileged status of what is defined as the genre of power and renders this approach similar to a functional approach to teaching literacy.

By contrast, a Freirean approach to literacy advocates acquisition and appropriation of the dominant language to reclaim marginalized voices, history, and culture (Freire & Macedo, 1987). Aiming for social transformation through providing literacy education to the oppressed, a Freirean perspective regards teaching the dominant forms of language as an important tool for this transformative project. Comparing Freirean critical literacy with a genre-based approach, Luke (1996) argues that while critical literacy envisions a revolutionary transformation of society, the genre approach stresses the social mobility of individuals. Thus, critical literacy situates literacy in a larger cultural and political arena and enables teachers and learners to become agents of social change by raising their critical awareness of how power privileges or oppresses different groups of people and how the oppressed can appropriate the dominant language for empowerment. Nonetheless, as Luke (1996) argues, critical literacy as well as a genre approach tends to totalize power in its assumption that acquiring literacy directly leads to possessing power whereas in fact power or cultural capital (Bourdieu, Passeron, & Martin, 1994) is contingent upon cultural, ideological, and economic conditions. Thus, for instance, access to power may be hindered by a lack of economic resources to obtain education in the first place or by institutionalized racism.

These observations indicate that explicit teaching is strategically promoted to serve a certain purpose or ideology. While the explicit teaching promoted by Delpit, the genre approach, and Freirean critical pedagogy aim for varied types of empowerment, traditional contrastive rhetoric does not share such a political vision but prescribes instead an assimilationist stance similar to the back-to-basics approach. It is largely concerned with acculturating students into dominant discourse conventions without significantly problematizing the ideology of literacy or power inequity. What underlies such thinking is an uncritical view of the premise that education serves as a primary agent in transmitting cultural, linguistic, and rhetorical norms. This view is expressed by Alan Purves, who edited a book on contrastive rhetoric in the late 1980s (Purves, 1988). Purves, in citing the work by Kádár-Fülop (1988), mentioned that the two major purposes of literacy education are developing skills to communicate with people in a given community, thus diminishing distance between members, and developing language and cultural loyalty (Purves, 1988; Purves & Purves, 1986). According to Purves, another major goal, i.e., developing an individual mode of expression and interpretation, is usually reserved only for cultural producers and is not often achieved even in the US. Such a transmission-oriented view along with a static view of cultural difference supports the argument that the main goal of teaching writing is acculturating writers so that they become faithful members of a community that has a presumed set of linguistic and rhetorical conventions (Purves, 1986; Purves & Purves, 1986). Acculturating L2 writers through the development of functional skills but not competencies in creativity and individuality echoes Kaplan's remark in his

seminal work that the aim for teaching ESL writing is to provide a model within which students can operate in US academic settings and that teaching creativity and imagination is beyond the realm of ESL instruction (Kaplan, 1966).

With regard to culture, whereas the genre approach and critical literacy view it as a site of struggle implicated in relations of power, traditional contrastive rhetoric assumes the existence of a set of fixed cultural conventions as the norm that is preferred in specific settings yet that differs from culture to culture. Traditional contrastive rhetoric is not concerned with the question of how power works to devalue or marginalize a certain language use that is different from a preferred norm; instead, it assumes the existence of rhetorical conventions as the status quo. In referring to the academic conventions in the US, Purves (1986) indeed stated, “I happen to believe that it is useless to try to do away with them or to substitute other conventions” (p. 50). Together with the assimilationist ideal, this normative view of culture and language leads to viewing rhetorical strategies used by ESL writers as “violating,” “deviant,” or “anomalous,” as seen in the writings of Kaplan (1966, 2001) and Reid (1996).

In traditional contrastive rhetoric, it is often claimed that cultural difference does not imply that the culture conveyed through English (e.g., that of the US) is superior to others. For instance, Purves (1986) states, “As conventions, those that the United States espouses are no better or worse than those espoused in other cultures” (p. 50). This is a well-meaning statement that reflects egalitarianism and liberal humanism. The contemporary liberal humanistic discourse is indeed often built upon such a principle that supports equality and meritocracy. In discussing different approaches to multiculturalism, Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997) argue that the most popular form of multiculturalism is “pluralist” orientation. This orientation is based upon the “separate-but-equal” principle and stresses “difference,” as seen in the celebration of ethnic cultures to the point that difference is exoticized. However, the authors argue that this approach fails to problematize racial hierarchy and a Eurocentric norm, thus legitimating the status quo. In pluralist multiculturalism, the concept of difference is valorized but always from the position of a Eurocentric norm—or a dominant English norm in the case of contrastive rhetoric—which constructs the non-Western norm as lesser, deviant, and pathological yet interesting and exotic.

In sum, pedagogical recommendations made by traditional contrastive rhetoric focus on awareness raising and explicit teaching of the rhetorical norm with prescriptive exercises. The call for explicit teaching resembles the Australian genre approach and Freirean critical literacy. However, while these other approaches demonstrate a critical awareness of power and a political commitment to empower the marginalized, traditional contrastive rhetoric legitimates the norm as a given, into which the marginalized are to be acculturated. Despite good intentions, such an approach, together with cultural determinism, tends to reinforce a cultural deficit view in which certain groups are seen as innately deficient because of their cultural and linguistic background.

4. Theoretical foundations of critical contrastive rhetoric

The criticisms of traditional contrastive rhetoric and a critical evaluation of pedagogy presented in the previous sections suggest that critical perspectives on cross-cultural

writing offer alternative conceptualizations for contrastive rhetoric. This section describes the theoretical foundations of what we propose as a critical contrastive rhetoric. Critical contrastive rhetoric has intellectual affiliation with critical applied linguistics. As delineated by Pennycook (2001), critical applied linguistics aims to problematize as well as politicize the common understanding of second language learning/acquisition constructed by research and instructional practices in such domains as language, text, pedagogy, and cultural difference. Its political aim is to create oppositional language against racism, sexism, homophobia, and other forms of injustice. Critical approaches to language and culture can have a theoretical affiliation with post-foundational critical thought (i.e., poststructuralist, postcolonial, and postmodern critique) and critical pedagogy, which are all closely related theoretical constructs.

4.1. From Whorfian linguistic relativity to poststructuralist multiplicity

The Whorfian concept of linguistic relativity, which is assumed to constitute a theoretical foundation for traditional contrastive rhetoric, can be contrasted with a poststructuralist approach to critical contrastive rhetoric in interesting ways. The linguistic relativity principle supported by Benjamin Whorf, who is particularly known for his work on Hopi language in the 1930s and early 1940s, is typically understood as the idea that language shapes or influences people's thought or worldview. It is important to note that Whorf, who has often been criticized as promoting linguistic determinism, was actually concerned about the extent to which linguists and the general public were conditioned by narrow Eurocentric ways of viewing other cultures and also was quite critical about what he called "Standard Average European (SAE)" languages and thought. According to Whorf (1956):

Western culture has made, through language, a provisional analysis of reality and, without correctives, holds resolutely to that analysis as final. The only correctives lie in all those other tongues which by aeons of independent evolution have arrived at different, but equally logical, provisional analysis. (p. 244)

As Schultz (1990) and Kowal (1998) point out, Whorf in fact celebrated the plurality of languages and multilingual consciousness, promoting a philosophy paralleling the Bakhtinian. However, the subsequent popularity of Chomskyan generative linguistics undermined the Whorfian principle. Generative linguistics underscored linguistic universals and innateness and de-emphasized cultural aspects of language and thought, framing Whorf as a proponent of linguistic determinism. Thus, Kaplan's apparent appropriation of the so-called Sapir–Whorf hypothesis needs to be understood within the tension between one reading of Whorf as a deterministic proponent of "language shapes thought" and another reading that views Whorf as a vocal critic of Western ethnocentrism and a defender of the multiplicity of languages and cultures.

Various arguments against traditional contrastive rhetoric indicate that its philosophical base is inconsistent with Whorf's critical view of SAE languages and thought. Rather, its conceptual foundation is congruent with an assimilationist ideology and determinism that legitimates the SAE norms as neutral and stable while Othering the rhetoric of non-SAE languages as monolithic and static categories. Although traditional contrastive rhetoric and

Whorfian linguistic relativity share their interest in culturally specific thought patterns in various languages, they differ in that, while Whorf places Hopi in a heroic role that serves to “correct” the superiority of SAE languages and Eurocentric thinking, the contrastive rhetoric represented by Kaplan’s view keeps standard English in its place of authority and positions second language student writers as needing correction. Kowal (1998) states, “Whereas Whorf places his minority subjects in the role of educator-hero, Kaplan puts the ‘native reader’—and the English teacher, by proxy—in the position of authority, and of power” (p. 136).

Poststructuralist views in critical contrastive rhetoric echo a Whorfian linguistic relativity that emphasizes linguistic and cultural pluralism and reject a fixed understanding of language, culture, and subjectivities (our sense of ourselves) as well as the existence of transcendent Eurocentric truths. Yet critical contrastive rhetoric from a poststructuralist view takes Whorf’s pluralist ideal further by locating it within concepts of power and discourse.

In the Whorf–Kaplan contrast mentioned above, power is endowed to either the minority subjects or the teacher. Poststructuralism, by contrast, views power not as a certain strength individuals are endowed with but as manifested in a multiplicity of force relationships (Foucault, 1990). Power is transmitted and exercised, rather than always imposed in a top–down fashion, producing particular knowledge and discourses (i.e., uses of language unified by common assumptions), while it is always resisted from multiple points (Foucault, 1980, 1990). This view identifies language, culture, and subjectivities as existing in dynamic sites of political struggle in which they are produced and transformed by competing discourses (Weedon, 1987, 1999). Rather than viewing particular knowledge about language, rhetoric, and culture as neutral, objective, and apolitical, poststructuralist views presume that many concepts and truth-claims (including rhetorical and cultural difference) are constructed in discourses. Poststructuralist perspectives allow us to explore how cultural differences in rhetoric and an implicit assumption of the superiority of English are constructed within the discourse of traditional contrastive rhetoric research. It is important to note that this view does not deny the existence of cultural difference; rather, it conceptualizes perceived cultural difference or claims about cultural difference as discursively constructed, rather than reflecting objective truths, to serve particular political and ideological purposes. As such, the focus of inquiry goes beyond the question of what differences exist and toward questions such as: *How have we come to believe that a certain cultural difference is true?*, *What political purposes have motivated the construction of particular beliefs about cultural difference?*, and *What alternative understandings of cultural difference, or counter-discourses, are available to transform our taken-for-granted knowledge?*

A Whorfian discourse of linguistic relativity can be viewed as a counter-discourse that challenges the superiority of SAE languages and worldview by validating yet romanticizing the exotic Other. Poststructuralist notions, such as the discursive construction of knowledge, multiple subjectivities, and relations of power, further encourage politicization of cultural differences and individual writers’ multiple and shifting perspectives and ways of engaging in writing. They help teachers and student writers explore how perceptions of cultural differences in written language are produced and perpetuated in a larger arena of politics and local/global relations of power, how writers appropriate or resist discourses

and power, and how writers negotiate their subjectivities in L1 and L2 writing (cf. Ivanic, 1998).

4.2. *From colonial discourse to postcolonial critique*

The emphasis on cultural difference and an implicit assumption of the superiority of English rhetoric as seen in traditional contrastive rhetoric tend to reinforce the Othering and cultural essentialism embedded in colonialism. Colonialism draws a binary distinction between the logical superior Self and the illogical backward Other, legitimating unequal power relations (Mohanty, 1988; Pennycook, 1998; Said, 1978; Willinsky, 1998). The initiation of contrastive rhetoric in the 1960s is indeed related to the neocolonial expansion of American economic and political power that attracted a great number of international and immigrant English learners. As observed earlier, contrastive rhetoric has produced and reinforced essentialized images of cultures and rhetoric of the Self and the Other, constructing a rigid boundary between them.

Within colonialism, language policy may impose the colonizer's language on the colonized or promote the local languages instead of the colonizer's, yet both serve the colonial mission of imposing Western knowledge on the colonial workforce (Pennycook, 1998). An underlying assumption of conventional contrastive rhetoric parallels the former—assimilationist—approach and reflects a way of thinking akin to the cultural deficit theory as seen in the argument made by Kaplan (1988) that ESL students lack competence in discourse-level writing in English because of cultural differences, even though they may be competent speakers of the language (cf. Kutz, Groden, & Zamel, 1993; Rose, 1989).

Underlying the emphasis on cultural difference is an undertone of a deficit theory which assumes a hierarchy in cognitive abilities according to racial difference (cf. Herrnstein & Murray, 1994; Jensen, 1969). Creating racial categorization and hierarchies of power remains a significant aspect of colonial legacies worldwide. It has been pointed out, however, that the contemporary color-blind discourse has replaced the term “race” with “culture,” shifting the discussion of “racial difference” to a more acceptable discourse of “cultural difference” (see May, 1999). Thus, although it can be said that traditional contrastive rhetoric was developed with the good intention of associating ESL students' writing in English with their cultural or cognitive *styles* rather than their cognitive *ability* (Purves, 1988), its depiction of a static cultural binary between the Self and the Other constitutes a colonialist construct of culture. It is necessary to locate individual researchers' good intentions in a larger ideological context and understand how knowledge created by research legitimates and reinforces asymmetrical relations of power. As Pennycook (1998) argues, although individual intentions may exculpate the researcher as an agent of colonialism, “it is more useful to attempt to understand the cultural constructs rather than individual intentions of colonialism” (p. 43). Critical contrastive rhetoric recognizes the connection between cultural difference and racial difference as well as the problem of essentializing the Self and the Other in the discourses of colonialism. Thus, it requires teachers to reflect critically on how classroom dialogue that underscores cultural difference in rhetoric (Reid, 1989), for instance, could perpetuate Othering, cultural stereotyping, and unequal relations of power.

Another aspect of the assimilationist approach that echoes the colonial imposition of the colonizer's language is the accentuation of English manifested in the English-Only approach to teaching and research. It is worth noting that at a political level, the English-Only movement in the United States is not unrelated to racial politics. It has been pointed out that there are some connections between US English, an organization lobbying to make English the official language of the United States, and some funding organizations with an anti-immigration stance or a research mission in eugenics as a means of racial improvement (Crawford, 2000; Jordán, 2001). In teaching and research, an obsession with English has tended to avert teachers' and researchers' attention from second language writers' writing ability and experience in their native language. An English-Only approach is particularly limiting in an ESL classroom where groups of students often share the same language background and could otherwise engage in a deeper dialogue in their L1 about their positionings in relation to L1 and L2 writing based on their shared and individual experiences. In an EFL classroom, such reflexive engagement becomes more transparently possible and desirable.

While postcolonial critique problematizes the assimilationist discourse of the colonizers, it also raises the question of how the colonized internalize this discourse and form their subjugated identities. In the process of subjugation, language plays an important role. Fanon (1967) argues, for instance, that the colonial conception of the Creole language as inferior to French is internalized in the colonized subject, compelling them to speak the language of power and condemning their native language. In contrastive rhetoric, it has been pointed out that some ESL student writers believe that English is more logical or advanced than their native language. Moreover, the rhetorical patterns employed by Japanese writers and recommended by writing specialists in Japan increasingly model after English (Hirose, 2003; Kubota, 1992, 2002a). Critical examination of the connection between cross-cultural writing and discourses of colonialism can elucidate how linguistic and cultural relations of power influence not only language change as seen in shifts in preferred rhetorical structures for certain genres but also bilingual writers' identities as writers and their perceptions of L1 and L2 rhetoric.

4.3. *From modernism to postmodernism*

The research orientation of traditional contrastive rhetoric is by and large influenced by modernist positivism that posits the embodiment of cultural differences across languages as a universal scientific truth. Postmodernism, by contrast, calls such a quest into question. Modernist relativity that assumes fixed opposing categories or cultural binaries as seen in the conventional approach to contrastive rhetoric is contrasted by postmodern relativity, or *situated knowledge* (Haraway, 1988), that regards all knowledge and actions as partial and situated in ever-shifting particularities. Postmodernism also focuses on plurality of meaning and the hybrid, diasporic, and dynamic nature of language and culture, thereby working against various forms of essentialism. The critique of traditional contrastive rhetoric from a perspective of World Englishes (Kachru, 1995, 1999) exemplifies the postmodern significance of diaspora and multiplicity. For example, Chinese diaspora poses a problem for assuming the existence of a single cultural rhetorical system or thought pattern in Chinese (Kowal, 1998). The diasporic nature of rhetoric as well as the evolution of rhetoric in

relation to cross-cultural influences (cf. Kirkpatrick, 1997; Kubota, 1997; Mohan & Lo, 1985; Shi, 2002) indicates the significance of rhetorical hybridity which encourages an investigation of how the rhetoric of a particular language transforms itself through internal and external forces.

The shifting and hybrid nature of language and rhetoric is particularly significant in an age of globalization which creates both global homogenization of language and culture, as seen in the spread of English and American culture worldwide, and heterogenization of culture, as found in the rise of nationalism and fundamentalism in various parts of the world. Such larger politics is diffused via popular media and education and is likely to shift linguistic and cultural forms as well as people's perspectives about them. The diasporic and hybrid nature of language and rhetoric has an effect at the individual level as well. In learning ESL/EFL, individual learners are exposed to and bring with them multiple forms of language and rhetoric, with the result that their writing performances and views of writing are unlikely to be permanently static. Postmodern inquiries of contrastive rhetoric incorporate these perspectives that counter an essentialist and fixed understanding of rhetoric and culture.

It is important to note, however, that the notion of hybridity is not without problems. As May (1999) summarizes, one limitation is in conceptualizing hybridity as a blend of two or more cultures, each of which is perceived as a cohesive whole based on an essentialist definition of culture. It is necessary to bear in mind that postmodern exploration of culture and rhetoric always involves limits, quandaries, and contradictions, forcing us to conceptualize a politics of cultural difference in situated ways.

5. From assimilationist teaching to counter-hegemonic pedagogies

Critical contrastive rhetoric challenges deficit, assimilationist, and essentialist orientations in teaching, responding to, and assessing ESL and EFL writing. In this pursuit, critical literacy provides useful insights in that it advocates the critical reading of texts as well as of the worldview behind texts and encourages appropriation of dominant linguistic forms for liberation and empowerment (Canagarajah, 1999; Freire & Macedo, 1987). Likewise, critical contrastive rhetoric reevaluates taken-for-granted cultural differences and instructional practices that legitimate these differences. It encourages students to reflect critically on how their subjectivities regarding L1 and L2 rhetoric are formed and transformed. It explores how they can both resist assimilation and appropriate the rhetoric of power to enable oppositional voices. Importantly, critical contrastive rhetoric calls into question traditionally assumed rhetorical norms and explores rhetorical possibilities. As in critical literacy, critical contrastive rhetoric does not prescribe pedagogical approaches. Rather, with self-reflexivity, it develops among teachers and students an educational and philosophical vision to enable counter-hegemonic appropriation of rhetoric as well as pluralization of rhetorical norms.

A pedagogy of critical contrastive rhetoric, thus, is located within the broader domain of a critical pedagogy that is grounded in issues of *structure* and *agency* in which both *macro* (classroom-external) and *micro* (classroom-internal) issues of power contextualize and shape teaching/learning: *what* is taught/learned, *why* it is taught/learned, *how* it is taught/

learned, *who* decides, etc. (Pennycook, 2001). It is not a neutral undertaking. In Freirian terms, a pedagogy of critical contrastive rhetoric makes explicit the ways in which languages, like people, are Othered and thus essentialized and valued/devalued. Through the problematization of deterministic, reductionist understandings of language and culture (Zamel, 1997), students critically identify and analyze contradictions they perceive across the macro–micro spectrum regarding language and its politics.

An appropriate starting point for classroom work is for individual students to think about, discuss, and write about how they perceive the ways in which they write—or not—in their first languages and critically bring their perceptions to bear on the work of composing texts in another language (here, English) as a second language. For example, an individual student might believe she was taught to write a certain way in her first language and another way in English and that singular “way” for each language is what she considers to be correct. Another student, however, may not have such a strong position—or may not have written much at all in his first language—and the “contrastive” notion of rhetoric is not an issue for him. Both of these positions represent student thinking that, in turn, becomes problematized within the writing class when students ask and respond to fundamental questions: *How do languages become positioned in the world?*, *How do language users, in turn, become positioned by language?*, *Who benefits by particular positionings of languages?*, etc. Ultimately, sorting out such understandings of what writing entails, what it “looks” like (*Who decides this?*), and how it gets done (again, *Who decides and why?*) is a discursively constructed process and cannot be supplanted, manipulated, or controlled simply by a teacher’s belief that “English writing is linear and yours is not.”

Central in such an exploration is the self-validation of a student’s first language and culture, a process through which students begin with the belief that their own languages are not merely valid, but systematic and useful (cf. Lehner, 2002; Quintero, 2002). English is a language that is added to the ways with words students bring to the classroom rather than a linguistic system meant to supplant their familiar discourses. A significant goal of an English writing course (ESL or EFL) is the addition of new and different ways of writing rather than the subtraction of ways a teacher might find inappropriate or lacking. In students’ exploration and appropriation of L2 writing, bilingualism and multiple literacies are regarded as pluses rather than minuses to be avoided or subtracted from their repertoires of literacies. In fact, depending on the context and purpose of a particular writing assignment, students might also be invited to write in their first languages (Bean et al., 2003). Again, in exploring additive ways of learning to write in a new language, it is necessary to problematize traditional approaches to contrastive rhetoric that tend to presume rigid rhetorical distinctions across languages and exoticize languages of students, drawing on Pennycook’s (2001) description of TESOL as Teaching English to Students of Othered Languages (*Who is being Othered and by whom?*).

Fundamental to any pedagogy of critical contrastive rhetoric is the positioning of agency in the analysis, appropriation, and critique of rhetoric. In traditional pedagogical approaches to contrastive rhetoric, agency resides completely within the instructor—or the researchers who have already determined for teachers and students alike that English is linear, etc., and that other languages are not. Such deterministic beliefs become foundational sites of inquiry for students in an English writing class in which they explore, based upon their previous writing experiences in their first languages, how different two

languages and approaches to written rhetoric might be—and why. In a pedagogy of critical contrastive rhetoric, questions emerge for students: *How can I add English writing to my existing literacies?*, *Do I want to add English writing to these?*, *What do I intend to achieve with such an addition?*, etc. It is also important for teachers not to position English writing as fixed or monolithic, let alone “better than.” We are calling for a pedagogy of difference in which presumed rhetorical distinctions are naturally located among competing ideologies and exploited by students—a pedagogy that consistently roots out and critiques the ideology that is both linguistic and rhetorical (Benson, 1997) so that resistance to Othering may be strengthened (Canagarajah, 1999).

As English continues to be seen as an “international” language *par excellence* (McKay, 2002) on the one hand, the localization of World Englishes (B.B. Kachru, 1986, 1997) has generated a variety of rhetorical practices on the other. Thus, it becomes increasingly vital for students to critique the positioning of English through problematizing: *Whose language is English?*, *What English am I using?*, *When and why do I use it?*, *Is it a language I perceive a need for within my present or future life?*, etc. If a university student in Japan, for example, is studying English for the purpose of communicating over time with users of English in Hong Kong or Korea, is an Inner Circle “American” or “British” approach to rhetoric appropriate and necessary? For a student learning to write English in an ESL class in the US who wishes to correspond in some way with English writers in India or Jamaica, what sort of rhetorical strategies and organizing of one’s writing is suitable? Preferred? Thus, on the one hand, questions like *How would you write about this in your first language and in English?* and *How is English positioned in the world (in this institution, in this class)?* may be considered more generative of transformative pedagogies than questions like *How can you write this in better English?* or *How would you write this so that an American professor (high school teacher, employer, etc.) would accept it?* On the other hand, realizing that writing instructors are often restricted institutionally in what they can (should) teach (and why, e.g., preparation for a standardized exam), the latter questions may further generate questions such as: *What does “better English” mean to you?*, *Who decides what is “better”?*, *Why would an American professor (high school teacher, employer, etc.) accept some writing and not other writing?* In sum, a pedagogy of critical contrastive rhetoric complicates any simple answers to these questions by consistently problematizing English and writing to begin with. Importantly, we are talking about counter-assimilationist practices within and across classrooms.

The questions listed above position a pedagogy of critical contrastive rhetoric at the nexus of the macro and the micro. They inevitably point to the power issues overlooked by traditional work in contrastive rhetoric that seeks assimilation and adherence to a perceived monolithic, hegemonic English written rhetoric. Particularly in academic settings, the privileged rhetorics of the institution can be appropriated strategically to develop counter-hegemonic positionalities. A pedagogy of critical contrastive rhetoric is not a neatly planned, comfortable enterprise in which static rhetorics are simply taught/learned and utilized at will. Furthermore, a pedagogy of critical contrastive rhetoric calls for the initiation of broad educational initiatives among teachers, whether of writing or of subjects that require writing, so that their expectations are situated within the multiple realities of a myriad of students writing in English for numerous purposes and for whom writing may or may not have particular meaning (Lehner, 2001).

Finally, it is important to point out that a pedagogy of critical contrastive rhetoric is self-reflexive (Walsh, 1991). In aiming for praxis with and among students, critical teachers consistently question what they do and critique the means by which they teach students. At the same time that critical contrastive rhetoric is neither hegemonic nor monolithic, it is also not static. Therefore, there is a need for consistent and constant reevaluation of purpose and methodology. In this regard, teachers ask themselves: *What am I doing?*, *Where is it leading?*, *What do I intend to achieve?*, *Where might I be better informed?*, etc. In other words, those teachers engaged in pedagogies of critical contrastive rhetoric critique themselves. Thus, when responding to student writing, the teachers question whether they are encouraging students to challenge essentialist, normative, cultural knowledge and to seek rhetorical pluralism or whether they are imposing yet another hegemonic knowledge.

6. Conclusion

Culture has become a contested area of inquiry in post-foundational critical thought which has been influencing other areas of applied linguistics. It is a concept that needs to be complicated, particularly in contemporary society where cultural views of the Self and the Other play increasingly significant roles in global politics. A fixed view of cultural difference that legitimates an invisible norm of the rhetoric of power in an idealized and apolitical way while debasing others does not help to cultivate a profound understanding of how culture is implicated in ever-shifting power relations, constructing and transforming the ways we engage in communication. Contrastive rhetoric's unique focus on culture in written communication can be broadened significantly by incorporating such concepts as power, discourse, and subjectivities. It is thus necessary to establish a framework that allows non-essentialist understandings of culture and rhetoric, appropriation of the rhetoric of power for resisting domination, and new rhetorical possibilities. By politicizing cultural difference in rhetoric, critical contrastive rhetoric can create new space for divergent ways of understanding writers and texts in cross-cultural contexts.

Finally, as mentioned at the end of the previous section, critical self-reflexivity needs to be an important component of critical contrastive rhetoric. While critical contrastive rhetoric questions mainstream knowledge, it needs to take a critical stance to itself, as critical applied linguistics does (Pennycook, 2001). For instance, it is necessary to critically reflect the fact that a post-foundational critique, which is used to problematize discursive construction of the images of Asian cultures and languages, is in itself founded on Eurocentric intellectual traditions. In other words, the mainstream postmodern and poststructuralist critique of discursive construction of the Other may not come from the subjugated Others themselves. This does not mean that such a critique is inappropriate for scrutinizing the images constructed for non-Western cultures; rather, it could be appropriated to explore alternative understandings of culture and rhetoric (cf. Kubota, 2002b). It is necessary for critical contrastive rhetoric to acknowledge its limits, while continuing to seek with engaged ethics diverse and dynamic epistemologies about culture and rhetoric.

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