

Scholarly Overview: Non-Native Speakers of English

Introduction

- Who is an ESL student?
 - Varieties: non-native speakers (international students, first-generation immigrants), English-dominant bilinguals (Generation 1.5.), non-standard dialect speakers
- How is an ESL composition course different from a mainstream one?
- Language acquisition vs. language learning (Usually the term *language acquisition* describes the natural process of acquiring a language (usually L1) by a child within any given language community. *Language learning*, however, refers to the process of thoughtful and deliberate memorization of vocabulary, grammar and usage (usually L2/L3/L4...).
- **Krashen's Theory** (Clark 365)

"... second language *acquisition* is a natural unconscious process very similar to first language acquisition. Babies, after all, do not study grammar books or dictionaries, but acquire language naturally from the surrounding linguistic environment. Language learning, on the other hand, involves the conscious study of grammatical rules, vocabulary lists, practice exercises, memorized dialogues, and other such strategies. "

While Krashen argues that adult learners may as well acquire a foreign language, there are opinions that "conscious learning cannot turn into acquisition" (Ellis 264).
- Mistakes vs. errors in ESL classrooms
 - Mistakes: are related to the student's competence. So, he or she is not able to figure out and correct his or her mistakes.
 - Error: are related to the student's performance. So, he/she is able to figure out and correct his/her errors.
 - What to correct and how
 - "At the lower levels of proficiency, it's thought that as students are exposed to more of L2 and acquire more of it, many of the errors they produce will naturally disappear." (Leki, 1992)
 - "When a learner has made an error, the most efficient way to teach him the correct form is not by simply giving it to him, but by letting him discover it and test different hypotheses." (Carroll, 1955)

"Composition Studies and ESL Writing" (Matsuda)

- Writing instructors must be sensitive to the needs of ESL writers, who compared with native speakers have different writing styles, abilities, and backgrounds
- Unfortunately, ESL instruction and composition studies have been divided into separate disciplines to the detriment of ESL students, who "just like their native-speaker counterparts, continue to be affected by the institutional practices within composition studies because of their continued presence in composition classes" (775)
- "The creation of a professional organization that devoted itself entirely to ESL issues and the decline of interest in those issues among composition specialists led to the separation of writing issues into first-language and second-language components" (787)

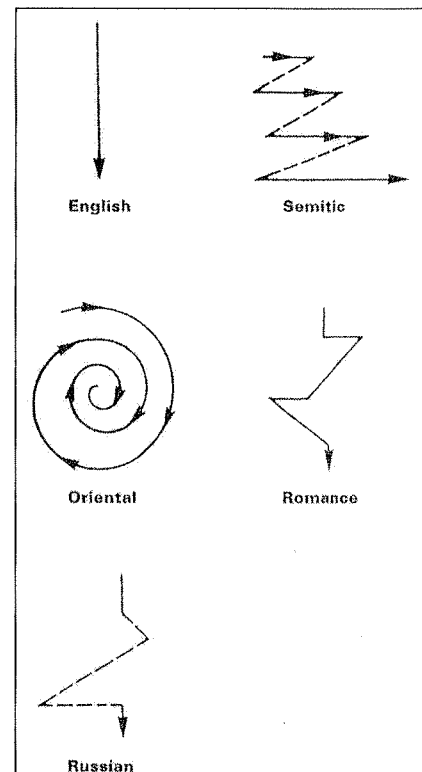
"Writing Behaviors" (Leki, Chapter 6)

- International students have a global awareness that is different and possibly more acute than that of American students; their writing may often seem "sophisticated, innovative, and interesting" (63) as a result
- ESL writing often has certain characteristic features that may identify the writer's national origin
- Certain types of writing (e.g., personal essays) and topics may be difficult for international students due to lack of experience or inappropriateness
- Use of dictionaries and libraries is not necessarily consistent across languages and cultures

Contrastive Rhetoric: An Introduction

Background and Origins:

- Developed in 1966 by Robert Kaplan; has three main assumptions:
 - Speech and writing are cultural phenomena
 - Each language has a set of writing conventions unique to it
 - Linguistic and rhetorical conventions of a first language interfere with writing in a second language (Jiang & Chenggang, 12)
- Influenced by the *Sapir-Whorf hypothesis*: language influences and controls an individual's cognition and perception, so it prevents true L2 fluency
- English rhetoric is hence influenced by Greek and Roman thinkers, following a linear pattern that is direct and straightforward
 - For some, this has led to the belief that English is inherently more logical than (and hence superior to) other languages
- Kaplan's research, while highly influential, received a lot of criticism due to its ethnocentricity and overgeneralization



Robert B. Kaplan, "Cultural Thought Patterns in Intercultural Education," *Language Learning* 16:15.

Questions a composition teacher should ask himself and his ESL students (Clark 371, from *Non-Native Speakers of English* by Edlund):

1. What's the student's native language?
2. What other languages does the student speak?
3. Is the student able to read and write in his or her native languages?
4. How much does the student read in English?
5. How much does the student read in his or her native languages?
6. Is English the student's most comfortable language of literacy?
7. What language(s) does the student speak at home?
8. Is the student an "international" student? (Is the student returning home on completion of study?)

9. If the student is an immigrant, how long has he been in this country?
10. Why did the student come to this country?
11. How does the student feel about being here?
12. Where was the student educated, and what was the language of instruction?
13. What is the student's major? What are the student's career goals?

Second Language Writing Instruction (Clark, 2003, pp.402-408):

1. Epistemological Issues
2. Function of Writing
3. Writing Topics
4. Knowledge Storage
5. Writing from Reading
6. Audience Awareness
7. Textual Issues
8. Plagiarism (Memorization, Imitation, Quotation)
9. Students' Right to Their Own Language

ESL Writing Peculiarities

- Every ESL student, unless he/she knows the American-English rhetoric conventions, is likely to:
 - Be sure his/her writing is very good (because it has always been so in L1)
 - Be reluctant to revise and make corrections suggested by the teacher
 - Translate from his/her L1 as he/she writes (using both, their L1 grammar structures and vocabulary)
 - Employ his/her L1 writing techniques and strategies (style)
 - Have difficulty with word choice

Leki, Chapter 8:

- Contrastive rhetoric may be misconstrued as a reflection of a culture's *innate thought processes* rather than a socially constructed phenomenon
- However, familiarity with contrastive rhetoric studies can "help writing teachers understand the difficulties ESL students may have with writing and perhaps the origin of those difficulties" (92)
- Such understanding can help instructors "teach the expectations of the English audience to L2 writers and thereby...help them increase the perceived quality of their texts" (103)

East Asian Rhetoric

- Hinds further developed Kaplan's contrastive rhetoric theory by suggesting that East Asian rhetoric (especially Japanese) is inductive, as opposed to the linear, deductive pattern in English writing
- Often characterized by indirect style that is suggestive rather than emphatic; more a reader-responsible style than a writer-responsible style

- Chinese rhetoric: "moving from the surface to the core" (Leki 96); lets the reader make connections to the main idea without divulging it directly
- Japanese rhetoric: "specific to general pattern...relating the text information to the writer's own experience" (Leki 98); text should be aesthetically pleasing

Hirose: "Comparing L1 and L2 Organization Patterns in the Argumentative Writing of Japanese EFL Students"

- Japanese writing is "bottom-heavy" in the sense of sentence, paragraph, and the whole text" (182)
- Traditionally uses the *ki-shô-ten-ketsu* pattern (topic, development of topic, transitional statements, and conclusion), originally intended to appeal to the reader's emotions
- For Japanese ESL students, however, texts are typically organized inductively in L1 but, upon reflection, reorganized in a deductive pattern in L2

Matalene: "Contrastive Rhetoric: An American Writing Teacher in China"

- Memorization is the central process of Chinese education, allowing writers to utilize "a vast number of proverbs, maxims, and pieces of folklore" (792)
- The "primary function of rhetoric is to preserve the general harmony and to promote social cohesion" (795)
- Traditionally uses the Confucian *ba gu* ("eight-legged essay") pattern

Arabic Rhetoric

A. What does an Arabic paragraph look like?

- "Arabic rhetoric requires coordination, parallelism, and balancing of ideas." (Ostler, 1987; Yorkey, 1977; Kaplan, 1966)
- "Arabic rhetoric encourages the ability to find another way to say the same thing." (Leki, ESL writers)

B. Writing Difficulties of Arab Students

1. The main reasons for these difficulties

- L1 interference
- literal translation

2. The main areas of these difficulties

- "Prepositions might be the most common difficulty for ESL (Arab) students." http://www.freeforessays.com/show_essay/54216.html (e.g.: *in my way to school, *speak by a loud voice, and *I've a meeting in Monday in 10:30)
- "The differences in word order between the two languages are a very important factor in these difficulties." http://www.freeforessays.com/show_essay/54216.html
- "Agreement is one of the common difficulties with Arab ESL students...As a result, agreement errors occur commonly in the English writings of Arab students." http://www.freeforessays.com/show_essay/54216.html (e.g., *These students are smart)
- Spelling (e.g., *enof instead of enough and *sychology instead of Psychology)

Slavic/Russian Rhetoric

1. Russian cultural form of rhetoric and its arguing style resemble a zigzag pattern.
2. Tend to be very digressive, because digression is a merit in their L1 rhetoric.
3. Usually are very confident of their knowledge and abilities due to high TOEFL results.
4. Not used to seeing writing as an ongoing, collaborative process, because "at many universities overseas teachers are more concerned with the final product of students' writing" (Magdalena Lewandowska)
5. Write "intuitively" (Magdalena Lewandowska)
6. "... the way we are taught composition in the English departments in our native countries reflects the way writing is perceived in our cultures." (Magdalena Lewandowska)
7. "writing is more reader-responsible, i.e. it is the reader who is supposed to make connections in the text... The more responsibility the reader has to understand the text, the less explicit instruction in writing is required." (Magdalena Lewandowska)
8. Are not taught to state their point in the essay
9. Pay more attention to the content and less to the structure
10. Often complain in their writing (This comes from the cultural peculiarities; Russians love to complain about everything. They are almost never happy with what they have and it is often reflected in one way or another in their oral communication and writing.)

Further Issues on Contrastive Rhetoric

Yajun and Chenggang: "World Englishes and Contrastive Rhetoric"

- World Englishes ("WEs") arise from both global spread of English and the various issues (linguistic, sociocultural, pedagogical, ethical, ideological) it creates
- A gap exists between study of WEs and contrastive rhetoric (CR) due to lack of communication between the two fields; WEs focus on the sentence level while CR examines the rhetoric itself
- CR is now considering the variations within WEs, such as "American, British, other 'native' Englishes...as well as non-native varieties" (15) and even translated English

Atkinson: "Contrasting Rhetorics/Contrasting Cultures: Why Contrastive Rhetoric Needs a Better Conceptualization of Culture"

- Before we can "compare or contrast rhetorics and genres *across* cultures and languages...[we need to have] good baseline descriptions of those rhetorics themselves *within* cultures and languages (278)
- CR, in examining writing, learning and using second/additional languages, and culture, is much too vast; we need to understand culture better first

Leki: "Cross-Talk: ESL Issues and Contrastive Rhetoric" (in *Writing in Multicultural Settings*)

- CR "cannot show us the thought patterns of another culture," since thought patterns "are made in response to social, political, and rhetorical contexts and histories" (236)
- ESL writing classes are often contrived; "it makes more sense for us to look at writing tasks [ESL students] are familiar with, for example, writing in their disciplines" (237)

- Overall, CR findings "suffer from being overgeneralized, overinterpreted, and oversimplified" (238)

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