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A descriptive study on differences in L1 and L2 academic writing

Wang Yingli

Foreign Languages Department, Hebei United University, Xin Hua West Road 46, Tangshan 063000, Hebei Province, P. R. China. E-mail: carol.wang.yl@gmail.com. Tel: (+86)13613150858.

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Since the first contrastive rhetoric study by Kaplan in 1966, many studies have been produced, and over several decades of development, there have been many contributions gained from previous contrastive rhetoric studies. Some researchers summarized and made critiques about certain studies. Stapleton (2002) claims the differences between academic writing in an L1 and an L2 are often misrepresented and overstated. The study disagrees with Stapleton. The study believes that there are differences between academic writing in L1 and L2. Results of many studies support my argument that there do exist differences between academic writing in L1 and L2 in various aspects and they are not overstated. The study will categorize the differences in three major parts as following: differences in the level of lexicon, differences in the level of sentence, and differences in the level of passage. Besides, one point worth's further consideration, that is, languages is dynamic and they will change with many factors such as time, cross-cultural communication, etc. The dynamic development of language could push contrastive rhetoric studies to go further and wider and then help people understand each other better in the cross-cultural communication.

Key words: Contrastive rhetoric studies, differences between academic writing, English and Chinese.

INTRODUCTION

Robert B. Kaplan's study on the differences in discourse structures in different languages in 1966 is the beginning of the huge corpus of contrastive rhetoric studies. Then because of the development of text linguistics and discourse analysis during the 1980s (Enkvist, 1987; Leki, 1991; Matsuda, 1997), contrastive rhetoric study began to focus on the systematic study of the organization in L1 and L2 rhetoric (Martin, 1992; Matsuda, 1997) and to "consider whole texts as dynamic entities" (Connor, 1996: 19). Later Connor (1996: 5) redefines contrastive rhetoric as "an area of research in second language acquisition that identifies problems in composition encountered by second language writers and, by referring to the rhetorical strategies of the first language, attempts to explain them". Throughout the four decades, many contributions have been made from previous contrastive rhetoric studies in various fields such as in ESL (English Second Language) education translation, and genre-specific writing (Connor, 1996; Noor, 2001).

Among those research and studies, one statement drew my attention particularly. Stapleton claims in his

paper that the difference between academic writing in an L1 and L2 are often misrepresented and overstated. In his paper, Stapleton (2002) demonstrates that except for the minor difference in genre, structure and the development of the article, there are lots of resemblances in academic writing between L1 and L2. Although Stapleton's study was persuasive enough to some audience, in my point of view he neglects the great diversity in academic writing between L1 and L2. This study disagrees with Stapleton's point of view. In this study's opinion, the differences in academic writing between L1 and L2 are not misrepresented and overstated. There are many kinds of differences existing in L1 and L2 academic writing.

This study will categorize the differences in three major parts as following: differences in the level of lexicon, differences in the level of sentence, and differences in the level of passage. At the level of lexicon, the differences in the choice of word will be mentioned. Then at the level of sentence, the differences in choosing the sentence subject will be discussed.

Finally, at the level of passage, differences in the choice of writing topic, in the voice, in the organization, in the reader's and writer's responsibility, in the attitude toward quotation, and in the attitude on good writing will be elaborated.

MAIN DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ACADEMIC WRITING IN L1 AND L2

Differences in the level of lexicon

There are some differences in the choice of word. English speaking students use more nominalizations. Kachru (1983) compares Hindi and English, and finds that more pronouns are used in narratives in English than in Hindi (Noor, 2001: 260). English language speakers prefer simple words.

Therefore, they would like to use nominalizations and pronouns to express meaning simply. It is different from Chinese writing.

Chinese speaking writers tend to use more verbs. Here is an example between English and Chinese:

Before China's **entry** into WTO, there were **fears** that China would have to make too much concession (English expression. Two nouns are highlighted)

在中国**加入**世界贸易组织之前,

人们**担心**中国要做出过多的让步。(The corresponding Chinese expression. The two highlighted English nouns are translated into two Chinese verbs).

Differences in the level of sentence

Many differences exist in the choosing sentence subject. In academic argument essays, Chinese speakers often use people as the subject in the sentences. They like to involve the role of people in the description of activities. Chinese believe people play a very important and active role in the process of knowing and reforming the outside world (He Shanfen, 2002: 474).

In English academic argument essays, in order to show what they are saying is the objective fact, English speaking people prefer to use passive tense in the sentences of which the subjects are objects. Ostler's (1988) study shows that English speaking students use more passives in their essays (Noor, 2001: 257). This point is also supported by Pan (1997) and He Shanfen (2002), respectively.

In Pan's (1997) book, he provides some text examples and explains why Chinese speakers like to use people as subjects in sentences. Here is an example:

1. The Second World War brought him rapid battle promotion.

2. 他在第二次世界大战中屡建战功, 晋升很快。(He got rapid battle promotion during the Second World War).

When talking about the great benefit the Second World War has brought to him in his career, an English speaking person may prefer the first type of expression by using a noun phrase to be the subject of the sentence. While, a Chinese person may choose the second type of expression, because Chinese people often use people as the subject in the sentences. Another example:

English speaking people may write: Fear rooted him to the ground. But Chinese people use the sentence: 他吓得呆若木鸡。to express the same meaning and they use 他 (he) to be the subject of the sentence. More similar examples:

1. What happened to you? (English people's expression)
你怎么了? (The corresponding Chinese expression with a pronoun 你 as the subject)
2. The problem of population control has to be recognized and approached in a world environmental context (English expression).
人们必须联系世界环境去认识和研究人口控制问题。(The corresponding Chinese expression with a general term of people 人们 as the subject).
3. Some things have been said here tonight that ought not to have been spoken. (English expression)
今晚有人在此讲了些不该讲的话。(The corresponding Chinese expression with a general term of somebody 有人 as the subject).

Differences in level of passage

Differences in the choice of writing topic

The choice of writing topic is influenced by cultural background and social conditions. Choice of writing topic is one factor which reflects individual's cultural background and social context. The social and cultural background influences choice of topic in writing.

For example, in Chinese writing, people will discuss their personal beliefs because they consider them to be common and public topics. While in English writing, people seldom discuss around the topics of personal beliefs because in English speaking cultures, issues like beliefs are personal and it is not suitable to be discussed publicly.

This is an example of cultural influence on choosing writing topics. There is another example of social conditions influencing topic choice. In western society, most people advocate laws and would like to discuss issues

from the perspective of law. But in Chinese society, people prefer moralization so they would like to discuss it from the perspective of morals. Therefore, Noor (2001: 265) suggests social conditions constrain the choice of topic.

Differences in voice

Matsuda (2001) defines the notion of voice which refers to all the language characteristics shown from writing. The voice is social and cultural influenced. It is changing as time goes on (Stapleton, 2002: 178). As Elbow (1981) describes, voice is individual's written reflection of culture (Stapleton, 2002: 178).

When writing academic articles, English writers establish their claim early and directly in their articles and like expressing showing their own "voice", and show their "authorial presence" (Hyland, as cited in Stapleton, 2002: 178) and "authorial identity" (Hirvela and Belcher; Ivanic and Camps; Tang and John, as cited in Stapleton, 2002: 178) in their academic writing such as expository prose and argumentation genre. In contrast, Chinese writers seldom use voice, authorial presences and authorial identity and they bring forward the claim much later in the article and more indirectly. Shen (1989) and Stapleton (2002: 179) explores the reasons why Chinese writers experience difficulty using their own voice, by, for example using the pronoun "I".

Differences in organization

As Kaplan (1972) says that "each language and each culture has a paragraph order unique to itself" (Mohan and Lo, 1985: 517). There are some differences in academic writing between different languages in organization aspect.

Linear and curvy: There is huge diversity in paragraph organization between L1 and L2 academic writing. In 1966, Kaplan suggested that western people especially English speakers "use a predominantly linear paragraph organization in expository texts" (Kaplan, as cited in Noor 2001, p.256). Clyne (1980, 1981, 1983) studies essay writing and makes a conclusion that German writing is in a less linear way than English (Noor, 2001: 260).

In contrast, other languages show a different, non-linear organization of paragraphs in expository prose. Arabic speaking students have elaborate introductions but less consistent conclusions. Japanese students put more details in the latter parts and these details often have less relation with the topics (Noor, 2001: 257).

Shen (1989) claims English writing is straight linear style but Chinese writing is different. In Chinese writing, students would like to start with the explanation of conditions. After clearing the surroundings, the Chinese students get to the real target (Stapleton, 2002: 181). Therefore, the Chinese approach is 'turning and turning in

a widening gyre" (Kaplan, 1966 in Noor 2001: 256). In other words, Chinese people obviously produce writing in a curvy way. Here is an example:

One of Shichuan's finest spots is Huanglong, which lies in Songpan County just beneath Xuebao, the main peak of the Minshan Mountain. Its lush green forests, filled with fragrant flowers, bubbling streams and songbirds, are rich in historical interest as well as natural beauty.

English writing is straight linear style with the key information coming at the very beginning of the paragraph.

在四川，有一处美妙的去处。它背倚岷山主峰雪宝顶，树木苍翠，花香袭人，鸟声婉转，流水潺潺，名胜古迹荟萃。它就是松潘县的黄龙。

The corresponding Chinese writing with key information coming after mentioning the surroundings.

Deductive and inductive: Kaplan explained that "an expository discourse in English begin with a topic statement, which was followed by subdivisions supported by examples and illustrations that central idea was developed to prove or argue the subject in question, relating the central idea to all the other ideas in the whole essay" (Kaplan, 1966 cited in Noor, 2001: 256)". In reference to Kaplan's (1966) seminal paper on contrastive rhetoric, Shen (1989) claimed that contrary to the "straight line Western approach" (Shen, 1989: 463 in Stapleton, 2002: 180) of composition, Chinese writing follows the Confucian style of first starting the conditions of composition: how, why, and when the piece is being composed. All of this will serve as a proper foundation on which to build a house". (Stapleton, 2002: 180). In other words, Chinese academic writing is inductive and English writing is deductive (Stapleton, 2002: 180). Hinds (1990) suggested the same idea. Hinds did research on expository writing in Japanese, Chinese, Korean and Thai. He claimed that Oriental writers used the inductive approach. English speaking people prefer deductive writing (Noor, 2001: 261).

In Chinese writing, students would like to start with the explanation of conditions. After clearing the surroundings, the Chinese students get to the real target. As a Chinese, the same feeling will be applied; before talking about the real target, some words would be used to explain why, how and when this work began. By using the analysis and critique of other studies, this study's claim was shown indirectly as seen in the article. This is the reason why some English-speaking people have difficulty in finding the clear claim within an academic article written by a Chinese writer. Here is an example:

Differences in reader's and writer's responsibility

It is considered that there is a great diversity of reader

and writer responsibility in academic writing. By giving examples from Japanese texts and anecdotes of conversations between Americans and Japanese, Hinds (1987) suggests that "English use a writer responsible rhetoric, Japanese use a reader responsible rhetoric" (Hinds, 1987 In: Noor, 2001: 263). That is to say, in English academic writing it is the writer's responsibility to make the article easy to read. Furthermore, in the process of writing, the writer should be aware of the audience, which can link to Johns' (1993) viewpoint. In contrast, In Japanese writing, it is the reader's responsibility to understand the author's intention for writing the article. Hinds (1990) said that the two kinds of rhetoric fulfill different expectations of the reader.

Clyne (1980,1981,1983, as cited in Noor,2001:263) also brings forward similar claims for English and German. Clyne thinks that the writer should afford the burden to make their articles easy to read in English-speaking countries. While in German-speaking countries, "the reader has to make the extra effort to understand the text" (Clyne, 1987 in Noor, 2001: 263). In the German tradition of academic writing, the author would like to provide more knowledge and theory beside the main point for the reader. The German way of writing is "not designed to be easy to read" (Clyne, 1987, In: Noor, 2001: 263). That is to say, German writing is to give readers stimulus to think instead of telling them directly. Therefore, German writing is not easy to read and it needs readers to make more effort.

Hinds (1987) compares classic Chinese and modern Chinese with Japanese and English (Noor, 2001: 262). Classic Chinese is more like Japanese. The language marks in texts can be absent or less and the transition sentences are less so that readers have to be active to understand the writing. English is writer-responsible rhetoric. Modern Chinese is more like English. The discourse needs to be directly presented to readers and try to persuade readers to believe what the writer says.

Differences in the attitude toward quotation

Differences in academic writing also lie in the attitudes toward quotation. Chinese writers are fond of using quotations and allusions because love, their history and literature of past ages. In 1950 to 1970, Chinese writers liked to quote chairman Mao's words to make their claims become more persuasive. In modern Chinese writing, people also like using quotations. They may use proverbs such as "A lazy youth, a lousy age" from Kongzi, the founder of Confucianism to persuade the youth who do not work hard. English writers do not use this approach, and Anglo-American English rhetoric does not consider quotations from authorities as a proper way of expressing ideas. The English people tend to express their claims directly by using voice, such as I. What is worth mentioning is that when English writers cite some person's

viewpoint to support their own claim, they find some evidence to explain why it is worth quoting, and show how the quotations helps express the author's claim.

Differences in the attitudes on good writing

Different culture made the standard of good writing widely divergent. It can result in the diversity in academic writings. The different criteria on good writing were listed between Chinese and American composition teachers. In the view of Chinese composition teachers a good article should not only bring forward valuable but also to disseminate the morality of society. Chinese writer consider disseminating morality in their article as part of their duties. But in English composition teachers have no right to deal with issues of morality. In China, when students are learning about how to write an academic article imitating other's work is acceptable. But in America it is forbidden. A good writing should show the author's "unique voice" or particular viewpoint. It is worth mentioning that expressing personal emotion is a good sign in Chinese writing. It can show the author's enthusiasm in the certain academic writing and helps readers to understand or feel the author's claim deeply.

For English writing, bringing too much emotion in writing is not good. American or English writers think that emotion should not appear too much in academic writing. Emotion is not an essential part of writing. Expressing personal emotion too much in academic writing can mislead the readers. That is to say, readers can not easily grasp the writer's claim beside too many emotions.

Conclusion

Since the first contrastive rhetoric study by Kaplan in 1966, many studies have been produced, and over several decades of development, there have been many contributions gained from previous contrastive rhetoric studies.

However, there are still some limitations and weak points in this area. So some researchers summarized and made critiques about certain studies. Stapleton (2002) claims the differences between academic writing in an L1 and an L2 are often misrepresented and overstated. This study disagrees with Stapleton. This study believes that there are differences between academic writing in L1 and L2, and they are not overstated.

Results of many studies support the study's argument that there do exist differences between academic writing in L1 and L2 in various aspects and they are not overstated. However, in order to get more evidence for my point of view and make the statement more powerful, more contrastive rhetoric studies are needed. Besides, one point should be further considered, that is, languages is dynamic and they will change with many factors such

as time, cross-cultural communication, etc. So the differences between academic writing in L1 and L2 also can change. The dynamic point of view could push contrastive rhetoric studies to go further and wider and then help people understand each other better in cross-cultural communication.

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