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## **CULTURAL FACTOR IN LANGUAGES – RHETORICAL STRUCTURES ACROSS CULTURES**

### **КУЛТУРНИЯТ ФАКТОР В ЕЗИЦИТЕ – РЕТОРИЧНИ СТРУКТУРИ В РАЗЛИЧНИ КУЛТУРИ**

Академичната норма, говорима и писмена, е специфично културно построение. Повечето протоколи са аналитични по силата на това, което говорещият в психологически аспект влага в писмения дискурс. Следователно те са културно интроспективни и универсално неефикасни. Протоколът на целевия код (т.е. необходимите принципи и очаквания на реториката L2) би могъл да бъде постигнат посредством систематично и точно определено обучение в крос-културни форми на грамотност. Набляга се на систематичността, тъй като риториката често е преподавана (ако това въобще се случи) несистемно и неразбираемо. Накрая, от изключителна важност както за пишещия, така и за четящия е да не правят лингвистични оценки, когато преглеждат текст. Това е толкова естествена склонност, че малко от нас могат да устоят на този капан. Но за да се случи това е необходима съсредоточаване по-скоро върху формата, отколкото върху съдържанието, по-скоро върху обвивката, отколкото върху същността на текста. Но тъй като толкова много зависи от използването на правилния протокол в лингвистичния код, от време на време се случва доста добри текстове да бъдат отхвърляни от недобре информирани с характерния коментар, че писателят „не знае да пише”. Вероятно би било полезно да се замислим как нашият „агресивен” западен дискурс е възприеман от източния или всеки друг читател. Следователно, това ни кара нас, образуващите другите, да се държим възможно най-открито и неутрално, когато се заемем с трудна задача като целево ориентираната риторика. Интеркултурността може да се окаже също толкова ценна идея, върху която да се помисли.

**Ключови думи:** академичен протокол, крос-културен, целеви код, целево ориентирана риторика, интеркултурност.

#### Introduction

Both literacy and rhetoric are, by their very nature, culture specific institutions. Both are bound by the conventions and expectations of a particular speech community and a particular social code. Patterns of discourse have little universal value away from their immediate social systems. The acquisition of linguistic mechanism is one thing, putting these mechanisms to use with the intimate knowledge of an insider is

another? Thus in a very real sense, literacy and rhetoric are artificial constructs. They exist solely within the communal mind of a group of people and have merit solely because of collective procedure. Yet it is one of those human vagaries that academic protocol within a community is generally believed to be a universal truth, often without any comparative scrutiny whatsoever. In this paper I will discuss the nature of academic protocol, the linguistic conventions that define literacy in a speech community, and a procedure for teaching Anglo (i.e. English) rhetorical style.

Academic protocol can be taken to mean the rules and constraints that are operative on the written products of the educated circles of a linguistic fellowship. Targeted rhetoric is the practice whereby literacy in an L2 is systematically developed for the express purpose of efficacy amongst the members of an alien fellowship (the target community). In order to be perceived as efficacious in an acquired language, one must satisfy the demands and expectations of the L1 speakers in that community.

We might say that literacy is the ability to use one's L1 proficiency enough to be able to read and write reasonably sophisticated texts; and that rhetoric is the ability to manipulate the lexis and syntax and stylistic devices of a linguistic code in order to be optimally received in that code. We have observed that the concept (as the latter, by extension, rhetoric) is manifestly dependent upon its generating culture. Therefore, it follows that we must consider literacy only within the parameters of a specific cultural matrix.

It happens that Anglo literacy is broadly characterized by linearity. It is a feature that most Anglo speakers will recognize and implicitly adopt. One of many examples of linearity of text is the structural demand for a clear Introduction, Development, and Conclusion logically progressing from the top to the bottom of a document in a vertical manner.

It is true that the majority of Western nations which are not Anglo in origin, e.g. France, Germany, Russia and Spain, to list only a few, are patently less linear in their academic writing styles. These cultures exhibit a high tolerance for the circuitousness, digressions, and parenthetical sub-structures that academic protocol in English so rigorously denies. It seems then, that linearity is not so much a feature of the Western world as a feature of the Anglo world, a point which needs to be stressed frequently in the L2 classroom.

When teaching targeted rhetoric, one must make clear that one is teaching the conventions of a nominated L2 community (e.g. English), which may or may not be intrinsically valuable. Rhetorical conventions differ widely and each is as licit and effective in its own environment as the other.

In Japanese literacy, for example, it is assumed that the reader is able to interpret the "white" or "empty" spaces between the lines (that which is unsaid), so that author and reader enter into a kind of collusion. If both parties understand the parameters of this protocol (i.e., that implicit messages are more important than explicit ones), then this rhetorical style is quite potent. Furthermore, it must be said

that, due to the pervasiveness of Anglo writing in the Western hemisphere (in government, in the media, in academia, in legal documentation, in scientific and medical journals, in computing literature, etc.) rhetorical style which features linearity may be held in false preference to a host of other, equally legitimate academic protocols.

### **Literacy cross – culturally**

If we consider literacy dispassionately then, it soon becomes clear that we must be ever-vigilant against preconceived conviction and prejudice when it comes to matters of academic protocol. Kaplan (Kaplan 1966), in a controversial and much-quoted paper, graphically depicted various modes of discourse structure according to what he believed was the exhibited pattern of textual development.

The “Romance” diagram for the Romanic (i.e. Latin) structures of, for example, France, Italy, Rumania and Spain is not so different to the ones drawn for Russia and Germany. All three diagrams are hardly linear, suggesting that weaving, wavering, ambivalence, and lack of clear progression are unremarkable patterns of discourse organization in these nations. This is especially noteworthy in that it contradicts any pre-existent notions that “Europeans” are of a single “textual” frame of mind. And it is an excellent counter argument to the claim that “linear” is the superior or preferred style for academic writing.

In the “Oriental” rhetorical mode the writer avoids a direct delineation of thesis (i.e. statement of topic) in the opening sections of text. The thesis may be mentioned towards the middle of the text, towards the end, or indeed perhaps never clearly at all. It is left to the reader to assemble the main thrust of the argument, based upon the clues in the text. Kaplan (Kaplan 1966) calls such a style an “approach” by indirection”.

Discourse development follows a pattern of “turning and turning in a widening gyre”. The loops revolve around the topic and view it from a variety of positions, but never address it directly. “Things are developed in terms of what they are not, rather than in terms of what they are” (Kaplan 1966). Loveday (Loveday 1982) refers to this type discourse as the “dot-type” presentation of one item after the other, in a highly anecdotal or episodic manner, without ever actually stating a conclusion. And Fliegel (Fliegel 1987) refers to it as “emblematic mode”, which presents a variety of generic outcomes rather than a single chosen position.

The overriding principle for all of these discourse structures is that **the reader must extrapolate** a position from seemingly unrelated facts or situations. But the obscure textual clues may in fact be very obviously related to members sharing the same L1 code. This is perhaps a correlate of the goal of the discourse. Leki (Leki 1991) notes that rhetoric in the Asiatic tradition has an historical purpose on announcing truth rather than proving it, so that the speaker/writer arranges the propositions of the announcement in such a way that references to a communal, traditional wisdom invite easy and harmonious agreement.

Rhetoric in the Western tradition, quite conversely, has an object of convincing peers of speaker/writer ability to reason and to marshal evidence. In summary, the “Oriental” mode of text development is differential, anecdotal, and circuitous, one which seeks to address an issue by describing the surrounding terrain. It emphasizes group collectivity, the elicitation of consent, and the avoidance of direct conflict (Fliegel 1987). For East Asian students procedural steps found useful when introducing the academic protocol for Anglo literacy are the following:

A) General Skills

1. Formatting: proper presentation format
2. Structure: linearity vs. circuitry
3. Signalling: use of semantic markers

B) Pointed skills

4. Style: representative text development
5. Chronological (points arranged according to their temporal sequence)
6. Aerial (points arranged according to a categorical area)
7. Ranking (points arranged according to their order of importance)
8. Comparison and contrast (points arranged according to their similarities and dissimilarities)
9. Cause and effect (points arranged according to a causal relationship between x and y)
10. Discussion (points arranged according to a combinative utilization of 5 and 9)

Syntax- syntactic strategies

1. Tense and aspect
2. Modality
3. Voice
4. Relative clauses
5. Reference
6. Protocol

KJERSTI RONGEN BREIVEGA, TRINE DAHL AND KJERSTI FLIITTUM (2002) have presented in their article “**Traces of self and others in research articles – a comparative pilot study of English, French and Norwegian research articles in medicine, economics and linguistics**“ the main goals and research questions of the KIAP – CULTURAL IDENTITY IN ACADEMIC PROSE project, as well as their very preliminary findings based on a small pilot study of 18 texts. With that pilot study as their basis, in addition to related research in the field of academic discourse, they hope to be able to carry out a large-scale study with the intention of shedding some light on different cultural identities in academic prose.

The main emphasis of the analysis will be on the *individuals* (i.e. the writer(s) and other researchers) 'behind' the research activity and their specific attitudes, opinions and values, as realised by specific linguistic expressions. The general aim of the project is to study which aspects of scientific activity are most important for what we may call *cultural identity* in academic writing. Whether such identities are primarily national or discipline-specific is discussed.

The project involves research articles from three disciplines – medicine, economics and linguistics – and three languages – English, French and Norwegian. The central questions are related to authorial presence and stance, to the manifestation of other researchers' voices and to the authors' promotion of their own research. This article takes a linguistic approach, and the pilot study focuses on the use of the following categories: first person pronouns, metatextual comments, explicit and implicit references and lexical items. The pilot study comprises 18 research articles; in the large-scale study the corpus will consist of about 500 articles. In the pilot study presented here the main finding is that the proposed categories seem to be well suited to the purposes of the large-scale study. The data also allow some preliminary hypotheses about 'non-expressive medical researchers', 'shy economists' and 'polemic linguists' to be formulated. Some of the hypotheses which they would like to further investigate can be formulated as follows:

- Medical researchers are non-expressive writers who do not let other researchers be heard in their texts.
- Economists are shy writers who avoid promoting themselves by means of personal pronouns in connection with stating personal opinions.
- Linguists are polemic writers who involve several other researchers in the text, often to refute their points of view.

The results which have been obtained so far do not indicate any clear language differences, possibly apart from the very low frequency of first person singular pronouns in French. This will of course be investigated further in the large-scale study. However, even at this point it seems that their initial hypothesis (Fluitum 2001c) – that cultural identity is more likely to be related to discipline than to language – will find support in their material.

To conclude, we would like to emphasise the *linguistic* approach undertaken in KIAP. This they hope will be a fruitful contribution to a research field where previous research has been predominantly conducted along diachronic, pedagogical, literary and rhetorical lines (cf. Bazerman 1988; Swales 1990; Hertzberg 1995; Ventola & Mauranen 1996; Flyum 1996). The aim of the project is two-fold: they want to present *quantitatively valid results* with regard to the frequency of use and distribution of different categories, and they want to present results based on the *qualitative study* of selected categories, such as the use and context of first person pronouns, metacommentary, various types of explicit and implicit reference, various lexical items and modality constructions.

Eva Thue Vold (Vold 2006) researched epistemic modality markers in research articles cross-linguistically and cross-disciplinary. Her research pinpointed hedging strategies across languages, namely English, French and Norwegian, and disciplines linguistics and medicine. The author came up with findings that Norwegian and English speaking researchers use significantly more epistemic modality markers –hedges than their French speaking colleagues. Her findings may have implications for the teaching of academic writing as well as for cross-cultural understanding between academics. The results indicate that uncertainty marker is more frequent in English and Norwegian research articles than in French ones.

These findings are corroborated by other reported findings from the KIAP (Cultural Identity in Academic Prose) project on higher frequency of linguistic phenomena such as first person pronouns (Fluittum 2003a), textual metadiscourse (Dahl 2003, 2004) negation and concessive markers (Fluittum 2005a,c) and bibliographical references (Fluittum 2003b), suggesting that English and Norwegian speaking authors are more polemic and manifest themselves in their own texts than French speaking authors (Fluittum et al. in preparation).

Why should English speaking and Norwegian speaking researchers be more humble and polite and express themselves with more caution than their French speaking colleagues?

Sliger-Meyer et al. (Sliger-Meyer 2003) have found that French scientists tend to be more critical and more authoritarian than Anglo-Saxon scientists. „French scientists are much more prescriptive, authoritative and categorial than their English speaking colleagues“ (Sliger-Meyer 2003: 232). These cultural differences may explain how Sionis (Sionis 1997: 211) explains an international journal’s rejection of an article written in English by a group of French academics by referring to the authors’ “exaggerated self-confidence“.

Agnes Pisanski Peterlin (Peterlin 2005) made a contrastive analysis focusing on the differences in the use of two selected metatext categories, previews and reviews, in English and Slovene research articles. The analysis was based on the hypothesis that the use of selected metatext categories is more restricted in Slovene academic writing than in English academic writing. 32 research articles from the fields of mathematics and archaeology were analysed according to a set of criteria established in advance, and the quantitative results of the analysis were further examined statistically. The results show that the number of occurrences of the selected metatext categories in the sample of English research articles is larger than in the sample of Slovene articles, although the difference in the use of the selected metatext categories is smaller between the two languages than between the two disciplines.

The results of the study show that there is a certain degree of difference between English and Slovene writing conventions as far as writer-responsibility is concerned: the Slovene authors whose texts were examined used fewer previews and reviews than the English authors. Since the previews and reviews are text

organizing metatext categories and therefore tend to make the text easier to read, the results of the study suggest that there is less emphasis on writer-responsibility in the Slovene texts than in the English texts.

Academic writing is not formally taught to postgraduate students at Slovene universities; most of them gain knowledge of this by reading RS's from their fields, by studying abroad or from their own mistakes – that is from the comments of their supervisors, co-authors, reviewers or language editors. Thus offering EAP courses to postgraduate students could make acquiring academic writing skills easier and more efficient.

When comparing preferences in the use of metadiscourse (Blagojevič 2001) we can say that the English authors use more metadiscourse elements in comparison to Serbian authors, English authors use more interpersonal metadiscourse markers, they express more their epistemic doubts, they tend more often to explicitly mark their presence in the paper, they comment more often on the propositional content. On the other hand, Serbian authors prefer using textual metadiscourse, they tend to elaborate and paraphrase propositional content and try to find more adequate language, they are more open in their assertions on propositional content, they tend to hide their presence in the text and do not attempt to comment directly on the text or to directly address the reader in the form of questions.

Both English and Serbian authors use more markers of textual connection for logical and temporal-special relations and both are cautious with the use of topic emphasizing markers. Serbian authors when writing in English tend to use more textual connection markers for the announcement of propositional elements, markers of the authors' comments and markers of the authors' hedging from the reliability of the propositional content.

In the conclusion we should point out our commitments to the bilingual academic literacy and to the knowledge of other cultures' academic protocols and conventions so that we can discern the essence behind the curtains of different writing styles, conventions and practices. The more we know about the diversity the easier it will be to accept it and to cope with it. Another important area to investigate when considering academic writing and varied rhetorical patterns are professional academic literacy brokers and their influence on the construction of knowledge. Intercultural issues are never to be forgotten when written mode of language is considered. After all the 2000 Policy Statement of the International Association of Universities, presented at a UNESCO World Conference in Higher Education, recommended that “all internationalization programs... promote intercultural competence and a culture of peace among global citizens.”

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