Critical Perspectives on Contrastive Rhetoric: A Report From Iranians' EFL Reading Textbooks

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Abstract

The efficacy of genre-based approach to teaching writing has been regarded as an influential practice in L2 writing pedagogy (Hyland, 2007). However, there is still gap between actual structures found in reading materials recommended as textbooks and discourse patterns recommended for L2 writing in EFL contexts, the gap which would highlight the problems of genre and rhetorical patterns for teaching. The current study, therefore, is an attempt to explore the level of consistency between the rhetorical patterns found in reading textbooks and discourse pattern recommended for writing. For this purpose, a number of 22 essays selected from textbooks were analyzed to identify (1) the overall rhetorical structures, and (2) the location of main idea and opinion of writers. The results show that while some texts did not follow the three-part structure of introduction-body-conclusion, main idea was presented in the introductory parts of essays, illustrating a deductive rhetorical pattern recommended for English writing. Further research was suggested as well.
Key words: Contrastive rhetoric; Rhetorical organization; Genre instruction; University textbooks

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Introduction

Genre-approaches to teaching L2 writing are relatively newcomers to the field (Badger & While, 2000). However, since they have great influence on second language writing, there are strong tendencies to apply these approaches for EFL learners. The one predominant difference between this approach to other approaches of teaching writing (for instance process and product approaches (Bruce, 2008)) is the view towards writing as a social activity; therefore second language writers need to know how to function and participate effectively and efficiently in different social contexts (Hyland, 2003). In this approach, each group constructs discourses that suit its social practices, historical experiences, and interests (Canagarajah, 2002, p. 36).Excessive exposure and intense involvement to the targeted genre and discourse have been considered as the keys for language learners to grasp and understand the conventions of discourse and the properties of that genre (Warschauer, 2002). Through immersion in meaningful discourse in authentic texts, second language writers tend to become closer to what Freedman and Medway (1994, p.169) defines as necessary criterion for any effective writing instruction: "exposure to written discourse" and "immersion in the relevant contexts".

A great amount of attention has been paid toward the issue of possibilities of explicit teaching of genre and continuous exposure to rhetorical conventions of L2 writing in Iranian EFL context (for example see Zare-ee, 2009; Atai, 2010).However, little knowledge exists as to whether the structures of reading materials Iranian EFL learners deal with in university contexts reflect the rhetorical norms recommended for L2 writing. Also, very little is known about the rhetorical pattern of argumentative essays in these textbooks. Taking previous studies in the field as a starting point, the present study sets out to analyze the rhetorical patterns found in reading materials selected for university students majoring in English and to investigate whether these materials conform to the rhetorical patterns recommended for L2 writing.

Literature Review

Relevant CR research on argumentative writing

During last decades contrastive rhetoric has produced a vast majority of research in the field of text analysis. Those areas which form the focus of research in this respect include comparative study of the texts written by native and non-native speakers of English, which appears to be one of the earliest sources of research in contrastive rhetoric literature. The example studies are the ones conducted to compare the written product of non-native speakers of English in terms of rhetorical differences (for example see Ostler (1990); Mauranen (1993); Wu (2003); Pariña (2010); Soler-Monreal, Carbonell-Olivares & Gil-Salom (2011), investigating the role of rhetorical pattern transfer from L1 to L2 among non-native English learners (for example see Kabayashi (1984); Kubota (1998); Hirose (2003)), and at last but not least, exploring the influence of raising students' awareness of rhetorical differences between L1 and L2 writing task Liebman (1992) and more recently Petric (2005) (see Jun (2008) for a review of the research on second language writing).Putting the track of traditional contrastive rhetoric in the line of critical reconceptualization of cultural differences, Kubota and Lehner (2004) proposed "critical contrastive rhetoric" to the field of contrastive rhetoric to be such "an inquiry approach that incorporates postmodern, post-structuralist, and post-colonial critiques of culture and language in investigating the organization of written discourse in cross-cultural context (Kubota, 2010, p. 194)

In an inquiry about the critical aspects of cultural differences, which can be considered as a first attempt in this regard, Kubota and Shi (2005) investigate the rhetorical patterns of opinion texts published in mainland China and Japan which were commonly used in junior high schools. The study examines the types of writing instruction provided and the rhetorical structures of reading materials recommended in these schools. The researchers found that "these textbooks instruct students to follow a direct and linear pattern in opinion writing" (Kubota & Shi, 2005, p. 97). Following this study, Shi and Kubota (2007) examined the art textbooks used in middle schools in United States and Canada with the focus on the level of

consistency between rhetorical patterns recommended for school writing and the structure of reading materials selected for these classes. The analyses of textbooks identified the gap between these two patterns, suggesting the problem of language learners' exposure to the texts "written with structures other than the ones they are expected to produce" (Shi & Kubota, 2007, p. 196).

Relevant English-Persian CR Studies

Comparative and contrastive analysis of the text written by Iranian EFL learners in different domains and discipline has been a fascinating area of inquiry for researchers working in contrastive rhetoric in this context. Different samples of genre had been selected and the rhetorical structures of them had been analyzed. In their meta-analysis of the studies of contrastive rhetoric in Iran, Jalili and Fallah (2010) categorized the contrastive rhetoric studies in this context as the studies with the focus on (1) contrastive analysis of linguistic and rhetorical patterns reflected in L1 and their respective L2 writing of language learners (see for example Jalilifar (2010) who investigated the generic organization of research articles introduction in both local and international journals, Zare-ee & Farvardin (2009) who attempted to determine possible quantitative differences between linguistic and rhetorical patterns found in L1 and L2 writing of a group of Iranian EFL learners, and Kuhi (2008) who analyzed the preface sections of 21 textbooks based on Swales' (1981) model), (2) discovering writing behaviors (see for example Abasi (2010) who, through conducting a teacher-researcher study, examined the perception of American learners of Persian regarding the rhetorical structure of two texts language learners attempted to summarize, (3) meta-discourse in applied linguistic (see for example Abdollahzadeh (2011) who focused on the application of interpersonal meta-discourse in applied linguistic articles written by two groups of Anglo-American and Iranian academic writers, Simin & Tavangar (2009) who tried to focus on the use of meta-discourse markers in the written product of Iranian EFL learners) and finally (4) the influence of EFL learners' rhetorical organization in English text comprehension (see for example Vahidi (2008) and Vahidi (1996) who investigated a relationship between knowledge of text integration and text comprehension and the role of

conjunctions in reading comprehension on academic/expository text, respectively).

While a considerable amount of research has been done on different aspects of Iranian students' writing, there has not been found one study that analyzes the rhetorical organization of texts selected for reading courses in university context to see if there is any consistency between the rhetorical structures of these textbooks and the ones recommended for L2 writing. The current study is an attempt to broaden our knowledge of the actual rhetorical organization found in reading textbooks selected for university students majoring in English and discourse patterns recommended for university writing.

Method

In order to examine the English rhetorical organization in the textbooks, the present study applied the type of method and analyses originally employed by Shi and Kubota (2007): investigating the (a) the overall rhetorical patterns of reading materials; (b) the location of opinion(s) and main idea(s) in expository or argumentative texts. The rationale behind focusing on this type of texts is that 'such essays tend to be more challenging for students than writing narratives, requiring explicit teaching ' (Shi & Kubota, 2007, p. 184). Following previous studies (for example see Khodabandeh et. al., 2013; Rashidi & Alimorad Dastkhezr, 2009, Moradian, 1999), there are variation in pattern organization of Iranian EFL writing swinging from deductive to quasi-inductive. Based on these findings, the researcher used tried to measure the level of consistency between patterns found in textbooks and the one which is instructed and recommended in EFL classrooms.

Textbooks

Consulting widely about the types of textbook used in university context with university professors, language teachers, university students and publishers, the researchers selected the textbooks which solely focus on the reading comprehension. For this purpose, a number of 22 essays chosen from seven textbooks taught as the course books in two major universities (State and Islamic Azad Universities) were considered as the source of analysis (see Appendix A for the list

of textbooks). In repeated reading of them, the essays were assigned into two major categories of persuasive/opinion and informational/ expository text types.
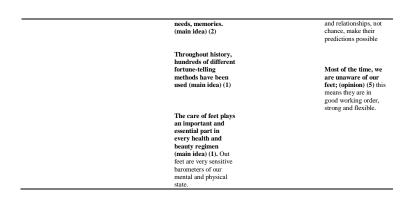
Analyses

As defined by Shi and Kubota (2007, p. 185), "main idea" and "opinion" are defined as "the most important message in the text" and "the author's point of view, belief, or bias" respectively. Based on these definitions, each of the researchers had a careful scrutiny over the essays independently and identified the overall structure and patterns and location of main idea and opinion in each textbook (see Table 1 for a summary of the findings).

Table1
Overall structure and presentation of main idea and opinion in the textbooks

Study type	Title (number of para.)	Introduction para.	Body para.	Conclusion para.
Persuasive/ Opinion	1. The cost of education (7)	**Students all over the world have to work for their education (main idea) (1)**. A college education in the United States is expensive.	Money difficulties of college students and how to find answers to these problems? **Some people believe that students value their education more if they work for it (opinion) (6)**	Students must sometimes ask themselves whether the cost of education is worth (of) it. **In most cases, the effects make a better life (restatement of the opinion) (7)**
	2.Communication (6)	Devices spreading ideas and events quickly all over the world	Communication: past and present. The avoidance of misunderstanding in modern communication.	Misunderstanding as a result of the increase in rapid or fast communication can cause serious problems. **Better cross-cultural communication is necessary for peace in the world. As the world grows smaller, people must learn to talk to each other better, not just faster (opinion) (6)**
	3.The growing deserts and how to stop them (6)	Deserts are growing. **Scientists are trying to understand the reasons for "desertification" (main idea) (1)**	Discussing important reasons for desertification	The answers to the desert problems are not easy ones for the people of the arid places to understand.
	4. Why learn English? (14)	**Learning to speak English may be the best thing you can do to improve your life (opinion) (1)** **You can do all the things you like if you read and speak English well (main idea) (1)**	The advantages of learning English	English is easy to learn. English is everywhere. You can learn and use your English at the same time
	5.Ionized water (7)	After all, tap water does not taste very good, and people	The reasons why we should use ionized water	

Topic	Main idea	Description	Opinion / Conclusion
6. Good readers use reading strategies (8)	think they will get a little health improvement by having water filters. **If you really want to put the very best water into your body, you may need ionized water (main idea) (1)**	Discussion about six strategies	**Water ionizers can change your entire life! (opinion) (7)**
7. Good reasons to use an English-English dictionary (10)	A few years ego, educational researchers discovered **six key strategies that good readers use during their reading activity (main idea) (1).** You can learn more about these six strategies.	Reasons for using monolingual dictionaries	These strategies are often taught one by one, but they must be combined ↵ .. in the readers' mind. **These strategies help readers to understand the text and get meaning by using their own general knowledge…. (opinion) (8)**
8. Computer Security (16)	Using a monolingual dictionary can be hard work↵ .**there are many good reasons why your teacher might want to train you in using an English-English dictionary (main idea) (1)**	Techniques to protect computers/ what do hackers do?	This is what a good monolingual learners' dictionary can do (no explicit conclusion)
9. Aging (19)	**Computer security refers to techniques developed to safeguard information and information systems stored on computers (main idea) (1)**	Examples of aging in different species/ changes taking place in the human body as it age/ aging myths	The development of advanced security techniques continues to diminish such threats, though concurrent refinements in the methods of computer crime pose ongoing hazards.
10. Depression (28)	**Aging means irreversible biological changes that occur in all living things with the passage of time, eventually resulting in death (main idea) (1)**	Forms of depression/ symptoms of depression/ psychological theories of depression	**Recognition of positive aspects of aging can help older people to lead fulfilling years as active members of society (opinion) (19)**
11. Intelligence (19)	**Depression in psychology means mental illness in which a person experiences a deep, unshakable sadness and diminished interest in nearly all activities (main idea) (1).**	Definitions of intelligence/ the history of intelligence tests	Continued research examining the multidimensional nature of depression is needed to advance our understanding of depression in general and to inform the development of the next generation of depression measures.
12.Domestic violence (22)	**Intelligence is a term usually referring to a general mental capacity to reason, solve problems, think abstractly, learn and understand new material and profit from past experience (main idea) (1)**	Forms of abuse between intimate partners/	**Properly used, intelligence tests can provide valuable diagnostic information about intellectual ability that might otherwise be overlooked or ignored. (opinion) (19)**
13. The world of virtual reality (13)		The virtual reality programs/ **In one way, you can say that VR makes dreams come true because you become immersed in an imaginary world that you can see, hear and to some extent feel (restatement of the**	Whereas 30 years ago spouse abuse occurred behind closed doors and was largely considered a private matter, **today it is widely recognized as an important, dangerous and harmful social problem (opinion) (22)**
14. The story on food additives (10)	**Domestic violence refers to physically or emotionally harmful acts between husbands and wives in intimate relationships (main idea) (1)**		

Informational/ expository			main idea) (7)	
			Safe and unsafe additives	The uses of VR are endless. **Through VR we are truly entering a brave, new world (opinion) (13)**
	15. Cultural survival, INC. (6)	**Virtual reality is a new technology that allows you to look at, listen to, and move around a computer world every bit as fantastic as your wildest imaginings (main idea) (2)**		
	16. The history of money (5)	They make food more flavored and easier to prepare; **However, additives are nothing new, and neither is the controversy surrounding them (main idea) (2)**	The problems primitive cultures have to live in a technological world	It's good to know that no single food additive pose a sever danger to the entire population. **But it is also our responsibility to read labels and be aware of what we're putting into our bodies, and to learn how to eat safe and healthy food for long and healthy lives (opinion) (10).**
	17. When did bank originate (6)			
	18. History of banking in Iran (24)	Some of small cultural groups have never had any communication outside of their small geographical areas. When they do contact the outside world, their lives usually change. **Learning how to change without losing the best of their own cultures is a problem for them (main idea) (1)**	People used a lot of unusual things to but what they needed	No explicit conclusion
	19. How did the custom of kissing start? (6)		Nevertheless, banking is as old as history.	
			Before the advent of the Achaemenid dynasty, banking operation had been carried out by temples	All these facts make the history of money a fascinating study
	20. What causes our dreams (6)	Today out currency is a mixture of coins and paper money. **But it wasn't always that way (main idea) (1)**	Kissing in different parts of the world	No explicit conclusion
		Today your bank performs so many services that you might forget that it really has only two main purposes (main idea) (1)		No explicit conclusion
	21. Fortune telling (6)	**Before a bank in its present form was established in Iran, banking operations had been carried out in traditional form (main idea) (1)**	But something on the outside may influence what we dream. **So the content of your dreams comes from something that affects you while you are sleeping. (restatement of the main idea) (3)**	**Today, of course, we regard the kiss as an expression of love and tenderness (restatement of the main idea) (6).** But there are still many parts in the world where the kiss is part of formal ceremonies and is intended to convey respect and homage.
	22.The barometer of well-being (5)	**We know the kiss as a form of expressing affection (main idea) (1).** But long before it became like this, it was the custom in many parts of the world to use the kiss as an expression of homage.	One of the most famous methods involves gazing into a crystal ball. **Many methods of fortune-telling seem to depend entirely on chance (opinion) (1)**	We can express or feel what we really want to. So we do this in a dream and thus provide an outlet for our wishes, and they may be wishes we didn't even know we had!
		Let us begin by saying what does not cause our dreams. **All our dreams have something to do with our emotions, fears, longings, wishes,**	Foot discomfort	However, many fortune-tellers claim that mysterious causes

	needs, memories. (main idea) (2)	and relationships, not chance, make their predictions possible
	Throughout history, hundreds of different fortune-telling methods have been used (main idea) (1)	**Most of the time, we are unaware of our feet; (opinion) (5)** this means they are in good working order, strong and flexible.
	The care of feet plays an important and essential part in every health and beauty regimen (main idea) (1). Out feet are very sensitive barometers of our mental and physical state.	

Adopted from Shi & Kubota, 2007

Note: In this table, main idea and opinion are shown in bold. The numbers in parenthesis after the title of essays, show the number of paragraphs in the essays. Numbers of paragraphs where the main idea and opinion are located are mentioned in the parenthesis after them.

Results

Overall rhetorical organization

The overall rhetorical pattern identified in textbooks is introduction, body, conclusion, except for texts number 15, 17, 18, which no specific conclusion was identified in them. The reason why some texts do not follow the rhetorical patterns recommended for English writing can be the fact that Iranian EFL learners do not receive explicit and enough instruction of English writing, as supported by several studies (see Khatib & Moradian, 2012). The other samples, however, follow the standard five-paragraph-theme model by putting an introductory paragraph, either single or two single sentence, at the beginning of the essays which is then followed by some middle paragraphs whose role is to support the thesis then develop the topic sentence, and is ended by a concluding paragraphs which (re)state the main idea or writer's opinion (Nunnally, 1991). The following is an example of essay structure from *"Why Not Enjoy Reading?"*(Unit 5, what causes our dreams?)

Introduction

Let us begin by saying what does not cause our dream. Our dreams do not come from another world. *All our dreams have something to*

do with our emotions, fears, logging's, wishes, needs, memories (main idea)ₐ

Body
-starting with clarifying the main idea by giving some examples
- So the "content" of your dream comes from something that affects you while you are sleeping (restatement of the problem)
-providing an example of a story of an experiment
- discussing about the job a psychoanalyst has

Conclusion
During dream ₐ. . we can express or feel what we really want to. So we do this in a dream and thus provide an outlet for our wishes, and they may be wishes we didn't even know we had *Location of main idea and opinion*

Each of the sample texts analyzed contain either main idea or opinion, or both of them; the characteristic specialized for persuasive writing (Kubota, 1992).We were able to identify seven patterns of the 22 texts analyzed, as shown in Table 2 below:

Table2
Location of main idea and opinion in the text samples

Pattern	Text No & title	Introduction with single Or two single para.	Body para.	Conclusion para.
1	1) The cost of education	Main idea		Opinion
2	2)Communication			
3	3) The growing deserts and how to stop them	Main idea		
	4) Why learn English?			
	7) Good reasons to use an English-English dictionary			
	8) Computer Security			
	10) Depression			
	15) Cultural survival, INC.			
	16) The history of money			
	17) When did bank originate			
	18) History of banking in Iran			
4	5) Ionized water	Main idea		
	6) Good readers use reading strategies			
	9) Aging			
	11) Intelligence			
	12) Domestic violence			
	14) The story on food additives			

	22) The barometer of well-being			
	13) The world of virtual reality			
5	19) How did the custom of kissing start? 20) What causes our dreams?	Main idea	Restatement of main idea	Opinion
6	Fortune telling 21) The barometer of well-being	Main idea		Restatement of main idea
		Main idea	Restatement of main idea Opinion	
7		Main idea		

As illustrated in Table 2, all main idea sentences are stated in introduction paragraphs, except for pattern 2 in which there is no main idea and opinion sentence is located in conclusion paragraph. These texts are categorized into following patterns: pattern 1 (text 1) main idea in introduction, opinion in body and restatement of opinion in conclusion; pattern 3 (texts 3,4,7,8, 10,15,16,17,18) main idea in introduction; pattern 4 (texts 5,6,9,11,12,14,22) main idea in introduction and opinion in conclusion paragraphs; pattern 5 (text 13) main idea in introduction, restatement of main idea in body and opinion in conclusion paragraphs; pattern 6 (text 19, 20) main idea in introduction, restatement of main idea either in body or conclusion paragraphs and pattern 7 (text 21) main idea in introduction and opinion in body paragraph. These six patterns show that almost all of the texts selected for reading comprehension course in universities follow the prescriptive English rhetoric recommended for writing; that is presentation of main idea in introduction paragraphs (Shi & Kubota, 2007; Kubota, 1998).

Discussion and suggestion for further research

To answer our research questions on the overall rhetorical structures of textbooks used in universities in Iran and to see if they reflect the rhetorical norms recommended for English writing, we analyzed a number of sample texts used in university classrooms.

Though various overall patterns were identified in the sample texts, almost all of them follow typical pattern for English argumentative

writing rule; that is main idea is explicitly stated in the introduction paragraphs of essays (Shi & Kubota, 2007).Besides that, the samples show the three part structures of introduction-body-conclusion for compositions in English, except for some of the texts which had no concluding paragraph. This result is in line with what Khatib and Moradian (2012) found as common problem in Persian persuasive writing that is lack of instruction programs in teaching writing in the education system of Iran.

It is notable that, quite contrary to what Shi and Kubota (2007) found in their analyses of Canadian and English textbooks, there is not any distinguishable gap between the pattern recommended as model for English writing and what Iranian EFL learners encounter in their reading English textbooks. Deductive type organization, which is a common feature of rhetorical pattern in English and Persian composition (Rashidi & Alomorad Dastkhezr, 2012) was revealed in our analyses of textbooks. Iranian EFL learners do not receive any specific instruction on English writing and this is the reason that they show a preference for deductive pattern and three part structures in their compositions.

The findings of this study contribute to the understanding of textbooks' rhetorical patterns specifically the location of main idea and opinion in the argumentative essays. Further studies, however, can be done in this domain. As an example, it would be very fruitful to identify the rhetorical structures of the editorial written by Iranian Journalist, with the purpose to see whether rhetorical patterns promoted by explicit instruction in university context is used in these real world writing tasks.

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Appendix: Textbooks used

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