Rhetorical Patterns Found in the English Compositions of Japanese Students

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1. Introduction

Composition has been difined in a variety of ways, which include recurring phases such as thinking process, stylistic choice, grammatical correctness, rhetorical arrangement, and creativity. Central to writing are the classical rhetorical concerns of Invention (topic), Arrangement (organization) and Style (grammatical correctness and stylistic effectiveness).[1]

What is important here is that there are systematic differences in expository styles which are evidenced as a result of cultural or linguistic diversity. Robert Kaplan(1972) says that "rhetorical and stylistic preferences are culturally conditioned and vary from language to language."[2] According to Kaplan, in the writing of native English speeches, the flow of ideas can be characterized by a linear approach and a deductive development, while Oriental writing is characterized by a circular (indirect) approach and an inductive development. Kaplan's term "Oriental" refers to Chinese and Korean, but not to Japanese.

The purpose of this study is to explore the rhetorical patterns and the interference problems shown in English compositions by Japanese students. 66 English compositions written by Japanese students are examined.

II. Contrastive Rhetoric

Several writers have already stressed the importance of the area of contrastive rhetoric in spotting possible composition problems (Kaplan, 1966, Green 1967, Baskoff 1969, Bracy 1971, Buckingham 1979). The

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pioneering work on rhetorical patterns across cultures is Kaplan (1966), an article entitled 'Cultural thought patterns in intercultural education.' Based on a study of approximately 600 ESL compositions, Kaplan determined that there were significant differences between the construction of expository paragraphs among writers whose native languages are English, Semitic, Oriental, Romance, or Russian (Kaplan 1972).[3] These are presented in Figure 1.

Figure. 1

English   Semitic   Oriental   Romance   Russian
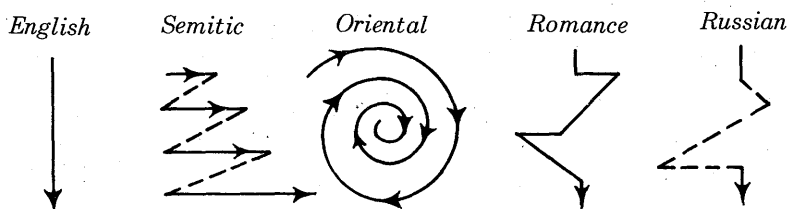
Differences were most noticeable in the pattern of logic which writers used in ordering ideas within paragraphs. According to Kaplan, these patterns arise from systematic differences in cultural modes of thinking, which are reflected in each culture's own rhetorical style.[4] He is properly cautious about the reality of these patterns.

However, Bander(1978) converts Kaplan's observations into proven statements. Bander says, "In following a direct line of development, an English paragraph is very different, for instance, from an Oriental paragraph, which tends to follow a circular line of development."[5] Condon and Yousef(1975) are more skeptical in their acceptance of Kaplan's diagrams as absolutes, but they state, "We might expect that if diagrams such as these are helpful they reflect not only the 'logics' of the areas identified but also something of the languages and cultural values as well."[6] With the perspective of fifteen years of hindsight, it is possible to present relatively strong criticisms of Kaplan's article. However, any such criticisms must be modified by a recognition that this article has

stood virtually alone in the literature on contrastive rhetoric.

Kaplan states the characteristics of the writing styles of native English speakers and Orientals as follows;

> The thought pattern which speakers and readers of English appear to expect as an integral part of their communication is a sequence that is dominantly linear in its development. An English expository paragraph usually begins with a topic statement, and then by a series of subdivisions of that topic statement, each supported by examples and illustrations, proceeds to develop that central idea and relate that idea to all the other ideas in the whole essay, and to employ that idea in its proper relationship with other ideas, to prove something, or perhaps to argue something.[7] (Oriental writing) may be said to be "turning and turning in a widening gyre." The circles or gyres turn around the subject and show it from a variety of tangential views, but the subject is never looked at directly. Things are developed in terms of what they are not, rather than in terms of what they are.[8]

He also states that in Oriental writing "the kind of logic considered so significant in Western analytic writing is eliminated."[9]

There is another study which has attempted to investigate Japanese rhetorical patterns conducted by Achiba and Kuromiya(1983). The data show that the Japanese rhetorical pattern has both linear and circular approaches. However, the subjects of their study were adult intermediate and advanced Japanese students of English as a second language enrolled in the intensive English programs at the language schools of some American universities. At the time of this study, they were receiving intensive English instruction in the United States. It is true that they were influenced by American culture and they were learning English writing style through feedback by teachers. Therefore, it is difficult to assume that Japanese students at the language schools of some American universities as subjects are really representative native speakers of Japanese.

III. Data and Analysis

The subjects of my study were students of a Speech Class in this college. These students had received at least six years of formal English instruction in Japan. However, the main part of that instruction was focused on grammar, while English writing had been for the most part neglected.

The data base consisted of 66 English compositions written by these subjects. Of these, 6 were discarded because they contained too many syntactic problems. Only those compositions which could be classified as expository prose were analyzed. My study is based on the analysis and categorization of 60 compositions according to the five different rhetorical patterns found in the compositions by Achiba and Kuroyama (1983). The five organizational patterns are defined as follows:[10]

Category 1: Compositions showing the characteristics of English expository writing; that is, linear development in which each subtopic is united to the main topic in a proper way. (Kaplan's category)

Category 2: Compositions showing a linear development in the beginning, but with weak endings; that is, topic sentences with very little substantiation.

Category 3: Compositions showing no explicit topic sentences; or if there are any, they are preceded by superfluous introductory remarks.

Category 4: Compositions showing characteristics of Oriental writing; a circular (indirect) approach and inductive development. (Kaplan's category)

Category 5: Compositions which are tantamount to unrelated collections, of sentences; the sentences may be grammatically correct, but the overall effect is one of confusion.

1. Analysis of Organization

Table 1 : Percentage for each category of rhetorical patterns found in the Japanese students' English compositions.

Category 1	↓	6 %
Category 2		27 %
Category 3		22 %
Category 4		32 %
Category 5		13 %

Table 1 indicates the percentage for each category of rhetorical patterns found in the 60 English compositions written by the Japanese students. It is interesting to note that the highest percentage is found for the circular (or indirect) approach (32%). According to Kaplan, a circular approach marks Oriental writing, which is lacking in logic, unity and coherence.[11] Such a development in a modern English paragraph would strike the English reader as awkward, unnecessarily indirect and evasive. Mary Lee Field says that the paragraphs (written by Japanese students) lacked details, they usually ended with vaguely emotional or sentimental statements, they never included strong arguements or clear evidence to support an issue.[12]

On the other hand, for the Japanese reader, long sentences with much modification and many relative clauses identify the mature writer; moreover, making a point directly is both discourteous of the writer and embarrassing for the reader.[13] According to Kindaichi(1978), (the Japanese) dislikes the sentence that ends so distinctly, for it looks stiff, formal, and brusque-or, in modern terms, dry.[14]

In consequence, it is difficult for non-Japanese readers to grasp the main idea. One of the reasons for this is due to the characeristics of the Japanese. Kindaich states as follows:

When one writes a long Japanese sentence, the predicate verb comes far behind the subject, which appears in the beginning. The many tiny clauses in between give listeners and readers a

difficult time understanding the principal idea.[15]

Category 2, in which there is a topic sentence but very little substantiation may be in evidence as a result of the Japanese tendency to avoid terse, perspicuous endinds; that is, they expect the reader to infer the conclusion. According to Takemata(1976), "the (Japanese) conclusion need not be decisive (*danteiteki*). All it needs to do is to indicate a doubt or ask a question."[16] The writer expects the reader to "read between lines" and to infer what has not been stated.

It differs from an English language conclusion in significant ways. McGrimmon(1976) states that the (English) conclusion can emphasize the main points in summary; it can draw a conclusion based on information presented in the preceding paragraphs, or it can evaluate what has been presented.[17]

Category 3, which shows the third lowest percentage, has no explicit topic sentence or, if there is one, it is preceded by an unnecessary introductory remark. This kind of essay always start with something indirect. The following two paragraphs are introductory part of a student's composition on "My Character".

> My hair is long to reach my shoulder. My eyes are not same size, the right one is bigger than the left one. My nose and lips are ordinary. My face is round just like the moon, because I am not thin.

> My strong points of my character are cheerful and friendly
> . . . .

Here, the student states the topic in the second paragraph instead of in the first. In the first paragraph she gives physical information. It is to be noted that this long indirect beginning reflects the influence of *Ki*, an opening part of the traditional Japanese organizational syle termed *Ki-Shoo-Ten-Ketsu*. Takamata(1976) defines this style as follows:[18]

A	*Ki*	(起)	First, begin one's argument
B	*Shoo*	(承)	Next, develop that
C	*Ten*	(転)	At the point where this development is finished, turn the idea to a subtheme where there is a connection, but not directory connected association (to the major theme)
D	*Ketsu*	(結)	last, bring all of this together and reach a conclusion.

In the *Ki-Sho-Ten-Ketsu* organization, the topic of the initial unit is not the author's main topic. It is simply a subtopic that will lead into the main topic of the essay. The unit is called *Ki.* The second unit called *Shoo* develops the initial topic, setting the stage for the third unit, where the main topic is finally introduced and developed. The third unit is called *Ten.* Then the last unit called *Ketsu* brings together all these three units. Most of Japanese learned this organization pattern at school. John Hinds(1983) says that the third point *Ten*, is the development in a theme, which English language compositions do not have, and it is the intrusion of an unexpected element into otherwise normal progression of ideas.[19]

Category 5, which shows the second lowest percentage, has neither topic sentence, body nor conclusion. Sentences are unrelated to each other. This could be due to a lack of English competence and/or writing ability.

2. Interference Problems

There are several kinds of errors in English which Japanese students often make: 1) interlingual (i. e., mother-tongue) errors; and 2) intralingual errors, which are usually the result of misinterpretation and of syntact overgeneralization of English grammar rules. While most errors committed are intralingual errors, it is the interlingual errors which most hamper communication. The study deals with interlingual problems. Interlingual errors are the interference arising from an unconscious attempt to transfer to English certain native Japanese structures. The following examples are passages from students English compositions.

1)　Didactic Remark

At the end of the English compositions by Japanese students, a kind of didactic remark such as "should", "ought to", "must", "have to" are often seen.　The following example is entitled "My Parents".

> I am thankful to my parents that sent me to this college.
> When I was a child, I often got ill and troubled my family.　Also I was selfish. I think I *must* do what they hope.　I *must* help them. I *must* practice cooking.

2)　Frequent Use of "as you know"

"*As you know* 'is commonly used at the beginning of the compositions. Fox example, a student's composition entitled "My Hometown" starts with the sentence, "*As you know,* we can see the marine blue sea.　"For the writer, it is not important whether or not the audience knows we can see the marine blue sea.　She uses "as you know" just to avoid an abrupt beginning.　In Japanese writings and speeches in front of an audience, this use of "as you know" is very common.[20]

3)　Frequent Use of "I think" and Misplacement of "I think" Judgmental Clause

Frequent use of "I think" in students' compositions may be a problem of interference.　The following example is a passage from a student's English composition on "Learning English".

> *I think* there is a weakness in speaking English.　But *I think* that I will have to overcome it.

In the above example, use of "I think" twice in a row sounds awkward; but when it is translated into Japanese it sounds natural.

The following example is a misplacement of "I think" judgmental clause.

> All members of our family are cheerful, *I think.*
> I don't want to have an auto accident, *I think.*

In English, placing the expression *I think* at the end of a sentence, in apposition as shown in example, has the effect of weakening the validity of the whole prediction. It implies that the speaker has grave doubts about the assertion which he has just made.[21]

However, in Japanese, of course, placing *to omoimasu* at the end of the sentence is the correct grammatical thing to do.

4) Unidiomatic Reversal of Negative Clause

I thought she could *not* live by herself.
I think it is *not* good to play around.

In the above sentences there is nothing that is really incorrect, from a grammatical point of view, but they are, nevertherless, very strange-sounding to the native speaker of English. There is so because of a reversal of the nagation clause.

In English, native speakers of English usually prefer to negate the varb of the main clause (in this case, *think*), thus allowing the subordinate clause to express a positive or affirmative, rather than a negative, prediction.[22] Thus the sentence "I didn't think she could live by herself" is preferable to the sentence "I thought she could not live by herself." Similarly, the sentence "I don't think it is good to play around" is preferable to the sentence "I think it is not good to play around."

In Japanese, on the other hand, the situation is just opposite. Stylistically, it would be preferable in Japanese to say, "*Yokunai to omoimasu*' than to say "*Yoi to omoimasen.*

5) Use of "because" and "although" as Subordinated Conjunction and "when" as an Indefinite Relative Adverb

I examined all 66 compositions to find out whether adverbial clauses introduced by these words come before or after the main clause. I found that 100% of adverbial clauses introduced by "although", 65% of those introduced by "when" and 12% of those introduced by "because" came

before the main clause. The study showed that Japanese students appear to employ adverbial clauses including "although" and "when" more frequently before the main clauses that after. The reason for it is probably that in Japanese, the subordinate clauses including "because" can be placed either before or after the main clause.[23] It is very interesting to note, however, that 62% of the usage of "because" is in independent sentences as defined, often incorrectly, by the students:

> One year has passed since I entered college. At first, I was very shocked. *Because* the place of the college is in the country.

In the above example, the student uses a period instead of a comma and she starts an independent sentence with "because". Although this isn't correct in English, it is perfectly all right in Japanese.

IV. Conclusion

I have attempted to explore the rhetorical patterns found in compositions by Japanese students and also the problems of interference from the Japanese language. The present study found that 32% of the Japanese students' English compositions are characterized by a circular (indirect) approach. The results of this study support Robert Kaplan's(1972) finding that writing by Orientals is characerized by a circular (indirect) approach.

It is evident that the patterns for composition which Japanese students unconsciously imitate, when writing in English, are shaped by their own cultures; likewise, the patterns for English composition have been shaped by a long rhetorical tradition. That is, a student's writing style is clearly affected by the interference of the stylistic and cultural literary expression patterns of his native languages."[24] Therefore, teachers of English must always watch for ways in which they may still be held in the "grip of unconscious culture."[25] Then they must themselves be aware of these differences, and he must make these differences overtly apparent to their students. In short, contrastive rhetoric must be taught in the same

sense that contrastive grammar is presently taught.[26]   It is also necessary to bring the student to a grasp of idea and structure in units larger than the sentence.

In the interference problems, the present sample obviously does not contain all of the errors discovered in the compositions, but it is hoped that those presented and discussed herein are representative, and that their having been highlighted will ultimately be of use to teaching. Further studies should be done on interlanguage errors.

Notes

1.   Sandra Mckay, "Communicative Writing," *TESOL Quarterly*, Vol. 13, No. 1, March, 1979, p. 73

2.   Robert Kaplan, "Composition at the advanced ESL level: A Teacher's guide to connected paragraph construction for advanced-level foreigh students," *The English Record*, 1971, 21. p. 53-64

3.   *Robert Kaplan, The Anatomy of rhetoric: Prolegomena to a functional theory of rhetoric.* Language and the Teacher: A series in Applied Linguistics, 8. (Philadelphia, PA: Center for Curriculum Development, Inc. 1972)

4.   Cristin Carpenter and Judy Hunter, "Functional Exercises: Improving Overall Coherence in ESL Writing," *TESOL Quarterly* Vol. 15, No. 4. December 1981, p. 426

5.   Robert G. Bander, *American English Rhetoric: A Writing Program in English as a Second Language* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1978), p. 3

6.   John C. Condon, *An Introduction to Intercultural Communication* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1975), p. 243-4

7.   *Robert Kaplan*, "Cultural thought patterns in intercultural education," *Language Learning*, 1966, 16, p. 4-5

8.   Ibid., p. 10

9.   *Robert Kaplan*, "Composition at the advanced ESL Level: A teacher's guide to connected paragraph construction for advanced-level foreign students," *The English Record*, 1971, 21, p. 53-64

10.   Machiko Achiba and Yasuaki Kuromiya, "Rhetorical Patterns Extant in the English Compositions of Japanese Students," *JALT Journal* Vol. 5, October, 1983, p. 3-4

11.   *Robert Kaplan*, "Composition at the advanced ESL· Level: A teacher's guide to connected paragraph construction for advanced-level foreign students'" *The English Record*, 1971, 21, p. 53-64

12.   Mary Lee Field, "Teaching Writing in Japan," *JALT Journal*, Vol. 2, 1980, p. 91

13.   Joy M. Reid, "ESL Composition: The Linear Product of American Thought," *College Composition* and *Communication* Vol. 35, No. 4, December 1984,

p. 449

14. Haruhiko Kindaichi, *The* Japanese *Language*, trans. U. Hirano (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle, 1978), p. 212

15. Ibid., p. 222

16. Kazuo Takemata, *Genkoo Shippitsu Nyuumon:* An Introduction to Writing manuscripts, (Tokyo: Natsumesha, 1976), p. 26-7

17. James McGriman, *Writing with a Purpose* (New York: Houghton-Mifflin, 1976) p. 106-7

18. Kazuo Takemata, Genkoo Shippitsu Nyuumon: An Introduction to Writiing Manuscripts, trans. John Hinds, "Contrastive rhetoric: Japanese and English," *Text*, 3(2), 1983, p. 188

19. John Hinds, "Contrastive rhetoric: Japanese and English," *Text*, 3(2), 1983, p. 188

20. Machiko Achiba and Yasuaki Kuromiya, "Rhetorical Patterns Extant in the English Compositions of Japanese Students," *JALT Journal*, Vol. 5, October, 1983, p. 10

21. William H. Bryant, "Typical Errors in English Made By Japanese ELS Students," *JALT Journal*, Vol. 6, May, 1984, p. 12

22. Ibid., p. 11

23. Machiko Achiba and Yasuaki Kuromiya, "Rhetorical Patterns Extant in the English Compositions of Japanese Students," *JALT Journal*, Vol. 5. October, 1983, p. 11

24. Edward T. Erazmus, *Teaching English as a Second Language.* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), p. 26

25. Edward Hall, *Beyond Culture.* (Garden City, N. Y: Anchor Books, 1977), p. 240

26. Robert Kaplan, "Cultural thought patterns in intercultural education," *Language* Learning, 1966, 16. p. 14

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