JoAnne Liebman

CONTRASTIVE RHETORIC: STUDENTS AS ETHNOGRAPHERS

Recently, the interests of teachers of basic writing and of English as a second language (ESL) have converged: theorists in both fields are arguing that the role of a composition course is to teach students the academic language common in American universities. Drawing on contrastive rhetoric—the study of how rhetorical expectations and conventions differ among cultures—theorists such as Patricia Bizzell, David Bartholomae, Myra Kogen, and Alan Purves argue that success in college involves learning a second language: the language of American academia. Whether a student's first language is Japanese or nonacademic oral English, the problem is the same: the student "has to learn to speak our [academic] language, to speak as we do, to try on the peculiar ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing that define the discourse of our community" (Bartholomae 4).

In the two-fold interest of exploring contrastive rhetoric and of helping ESL and native English-speaking (NES) students become more conscious, proficient participants in academic discourse communities, I recently conducted an ethnographic project involv-

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ing the study of contrastive rhetoric in two freshman composition classes, one ESL and one NES. Following the lead of researchers such as Sondra Perl, Dixie Goswami, and Lee Odell, I designed the project as a classroom ethnography in which I was both teacher and researcher, participant and observer. And following the lead of researchers such as Vivian Zamel and Shirley Brice Heath, I engaged the students as participant-observers as well, so that they too became researchers. As ethnographic researchers, these students became observers of their own participation in the community; at the same time, through their research activities of reading, writing, talking, and listening, they became more active and proficient participants in that community. This student ethnography project served, therefore, a double function. To me as a teacher-researcher, the project provided informative data about how students from different cultures write and perceive writing; to the student-researchers, the project provided an opportunity to develop academic writing and research skills.

Design of the Project

This project was designed to investigate whether different communities have different rhetorics, and if so, how they differed. Thus, the project focused especially on some of the work done by Robert Kaplan (*Anatomy,* "Contrastive Rhetoric," "Revisited"), who first proposed his contrastive rhetoric hypothesis twenty years ago in the essay, "Cultural Thought Patterns in International Education." In that essay he argued that speakers of different languages organize written discourse differently, and he characterized these differences in the now-famous diagrams shown in Appendix A of this essay.

Although contrastive rhetoric is extremely interesting, much of the contrastive rhetoric research so far is disappointing because of its limited treatment of rhetoric: most contrastive rhetoricians focus exclusively on text structures, treating the rhetorics of different languages monolithically and narrowly (Koch; Hinds, "Contrastive Rhetoric," "Japanese Expository"). English rhetoric, for example, seems for contrastive rhetoricians mainly to consist of deductive organized paragraphs, each one beginning with a topic sentence (Hinds, "Contrastive Rhetoric" 121–124).

Recent research in contrastive rhetoric has expanded beyond text analysis as a research methodology to explore contrasts in writing and reading processes as well as contrasts in finished texts (Carrell; Hinds, "Reader vs. Writer"; Jones and Tetroe). Other researchers (Mohan and Lo; Liebman) have used surveys to attempt

to reveal more subtle writing differences among speakers of different languages, especially differences that stem from the rhetorical instruction that speakers receive in their native languages. But experimental research and surveys cannot reflect what actually occurs when ESL and NES students write and talk about writing in natural settings. A student ethnography project, however, can.

This project involved two "Composition II" courses. Composition II is the second course in the two-semester freshman composition sequence at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. Because the goal of this course is to help students develop the academic reading and writing skills they will need in their upper-level university classes, it is an especially appropriate course to employ a student ethnography approach. I believe, however, that such a project could certainly be applied to all levels; basic writing classes could provide a particularly suitable environment, especially because NES and ESL students often coexist in basic writing classes and because a supportive classroom community can help assure success for basic writers.

Because of this project's focus on cultural differences, one class consisted of NES students, one of ESL students. The two classes met two days a week in adjacent seventy-five minute periods. The NES class consisted of 18 students, 9 male and 9 female. The ESL class consisted of 11 Arabic speakers, all male, and 10 Oriental speakers, all female. The Oriental students were from Japan (3 students), Malaysia (2 students), Cambodia (2 students), Hong Kong (1 student), Laos (1 student), and Taiwan (1 student).

The same material was taught in both classes, and activities were designed to require students to interact and observe students from the other class. I taught the two classes myself, working as a participant-observer along with my students. In both classes, we took as our topic contrastive rhetoric, and we took as our data ourselves. That is, we researched ourselves, our own writing, how we expressed ourselves, and how we communicated with each other. Two major writing activities were involved:

1. Pen pal letters: students wrote letters three times a week all semester to an assigned pen pal in the other class. Each student used a notebook to write the letters, and every two weeks students exchanged notebooks with their pen pals.
2. A sequence of five formal assignments: student writing went through at least two drafts. The assignments led students, first, to consider their own experiences as members of "native" and "foreign" cultures, and then,

gradually, to research how different cultures communicate orally and in writing.

Assignment 1: Write about a personal experience in which you were a "foreigner."

Assignment 2: Summarize "Cultural Thought Patterns in Inter-Cultural Education," by Robert Kaplan.

Assignment 3: Support or critique Kaplan's theory, using at least two texts—of whatever sort—to support the hypothesis. "Texts" can include your own past papers, papers from other students in the class, published writing in English or in another language, letters you or other students have received from other people, translations into English of writing written in other languages, etc.

Assignment 4: Research an aspect of intercultural communication, using some aspect of either Peter Farb's *Word Play* or Edward Hall's *Silent Language* as theoretical framework. Employ some sort of non-textual data-gathering technique (for example, an experiment, an observation, or a survey).

Assignment 5: Interview someone from a different culture to find out about some aspect of that culture you didn't understand before.

The course was designed to meet two educational objectives common to ESL classes—and frequently used in basic writing classes. First, the course was arranged developmentally, sequenced to encourage students to move from expressive to transactional writing (Britton et al.) and from dualist to relativist cultural perspectives (Perry; Hays). Second, the course was arranged to teach students the language of academia: reading, writing, and research.

Besides meeting these educational objectives, the course also met the research objective of providing ethnographic data about contrastive rhetoric. I observed myself and I observed my students, who in turn observed themselves observing their rhetorical contrasts. This examination from different perspectives provided the necessary "triangulation" that must occur in any ethnography. Such triangulation is one way to gain validity in descriptive, nonquantitative studies. To achieve triangulation, ethnographers often consider three perspectives: the culture itself, the natives' self-perceptions of that culture, and the researcher's perceptions of his or her impact on that culture (Kantor, Kirby, and Goetz). Each perspective functions to control the other perspectives and to explore them, so that the description that emerges is both in-depth—or "thick"—and without subjectivity.

By studying not only contrastive rhetoric, but also the context in which it was being studied, I hoped to expand Kaplan's original perceptions about cultural differences. In addition, I hoped to offer a critique of his original methodology, a methodology I believe to be limited because of the absence of triangulation: in his early work, Kaplan mainly considered only his own intuitions about the cultures he examined. Although many of these intuitions have proved to be quite accurate, they are subject to expansion and evaluation, as I learned when I asked my students to become researchers.

My discussion here centers on the students' third paper, the one in which students were most involved in the study of contrastive rhetoric. In this assignment, students either agreed or disagreed with Kaplan's hypothesis in "Cultural Thought Patterns in Inter-Cultural Education" and supported their contention by using at least two "texts." Students were ingenious in finding texts to use as resources. Some students worked deductively, developing their own hypotheses about Kaplan and then looking for texts to support their hypotheses. Most students worked inductively, however, locating texts and then trying to determine what these texts showed them about contrastive rhetoric.

What my students said in these essays about contrastive rhetoric is certainly not conclusive; indeed, with such a small sample, the results can at best be tentative. After all, "the ethnographer's task . . . is not to 'prove' anything, as much as it is to *understand* it" (Freeman, et al. 11). But what my students say is quite suggestive, for as "native" participant-observers, they offered many sophisticated insights not only about contrastive rhetoric but also about the difficulties of studying it. These insights supplement the understanding of contrastive rhetoric available from studying how texts are organized.

What the Students Said: Concurrence with Kaplan

When the students agreed with Kaplan (for example, see Sample 1 in Appendix B of this essay), they went beyond simply noticing that Kaplan was correct to talk about the relationship of this text structure to the culture at large. The Japanese students, for example, noticed the relationship of indirect structures to attitudes about politeness that have been taught: "[the Japanese] prefer to be modest and polite, what we call an old-fashioned way" (Junko Tanaka, Japan). All three Japanese students in the class emphasized that indirection was *taught,* not inherent in the language: as Yoko Tago points out, "Our generation has been trained to be able to appreciate

our own feelings and an author's intention of writing indirectly" [see Sample 1 in Appendix B for Yoko's full text].

One of the Japanese students used the paper to consider her own reactions to Kaplan and how they changed as a result of doing research:

> My first idea [when reading Kaplan] about linguistics was that a person that doesn't speak a language can never understand the structure of that language. However, as I've done my research I understand that my idea about the language was wrong. Although I've been speaking Japanese more than twenty years, I had never noticed that Japanese was such an indirect language until I researched it by myself. (Kazumi Mase, Japan)

Kazumi told me during a rough-draft conference (which I recorded afterward in my notes) that when she first read Kaplan's article she was angry because she thought he was criticizing Japanese writing. As she reflected, however, she realized that "since I started learning my language in elementary school, I've been guessing the answer from the given clues." This, she told me, made her depressed and frustrated. The more she thought about it, the more she realized, too, that the difference between Japanese and English rhetoric may cause communication conflicts. Thus, as she explained in her paper, "English speakers may conclude that Japanese is so indirect that they never reach the point, while Japanese people think that English is too simple that they explains about only one thing over and over."

Many Arabic students also agreed with Kaplan about his assessment of their rhetoric: "By looking carefully at my own writing in English when I first learned to write in English, I found that I linked most of my ideas coordinately" (Maher Albaiat, Saudi Arabia). One Arabic student pointed out that the parallel structure in Arabic was a result of the Islamic religion:

> It is a fact that repetition and parallelism in the Arabic language is influenced by Quran. Quran to Arabs is not just one form of human speech among others, but a vehicle to reach God. The verses in the Quaran are repeated again and again to emphasize. Being Muslims, the Arabs adapted the path of Quran and applyed its repetition structure in all of their writings. . . . The religious leaders belive that any attempt to apply other styles of writing other than Quran, will make people forget their religion sence Quran will not be the

major source for their writing. (Khalid Altowaijri, Saudi Arabia)

What the Students Said: Objections to Kaplan

About half the ESL students disagreed with Kaplan in some way; slightly over two-thirds of the NES students disagreed (see Samples 2 and 3 in Appendix B). Most of these students agreed in general with Kaplan, but they felt he had made rather hasty generalizations based on limited data. They thought the situation was more complicated than Kaplan suggested. The students—both NES and ESL—started by feeling somewhat defensive about Kaplan and his descriptions of their cultures' rhetorics; fueled by their resentment at an outsider making judgments about their cultures, they were able to state many legitimate objections to Kaplan's methods and argument.

Several pointed out, for example, that Kaplan ignored the different purposes and genres of writing, treating all writing as the same in each language group:

> In [some] situations, indirection is unnecessary. The usage of indirect does exist in poems or some essays. However, Chinese writing can be very direct when dealing in newspaper articles or interviews. (Theresa Tsai, Taiwan)

Many students pointed out that Kaplan ignored writing's dynamic nature, that far from remaining stable artifacts for study, written texts change as writers mature, as writers are taught, and as writers revise. One Arabic student, for example, pointed out that the rhetoric of student writers may be much different from the rhetoric of professional writers:

> It is more appropriate to analyze the writings of the professionals instead of students in order to judge a language . . . . The reason that [an Arabic student writer writing in English] might go in a zig-zag way is because he maybe does not know enough English to go straight or he either does not understand it fully. (Abdullah Al-Ahmadi, Saudi Arabia)

Several NES students made similar points, especially after looking at other freshman papers:

> Although this linear form of writing is taught and accepted in the English society, it does not always occur, especially in the writing of students. The art of writing takes some people years to learn and some never learn correctly. . . . We

> [Americans] are taught to write in a linear form; it is not something we are born with. (Pam Stover, USA)

Many students agreed that linearity and directness were valued in English prose, but they did not believe this structure reflected English speakers' thought: "The English paragraph is direct because we have been taught to write directly beginning in elementary school," wrote the American Sydney Wood. And, explains the Laotian Khanida Pradaxay: "Not all Americans write the way Kaplan explains. But the English textbook writers do."

Not only does writing change as students mature and are instructed; it also changes as people revise:

> True, we do expect . . . directness when reading such formal writings as articles in newspapers and magazines, but these articles are not a reflection of native English-speaking thought patterns. These articles have been carefully constructed and put into a form that can be presented to the public, and a less formal example of writing is needed to observe our thought patterns. (Billy Hartnedy, USA)

As the writer of Sample 3 in Appendix B points out, Kaplan's research methodology did not consider writing as a process: "I feel that Kaplan should study rough drafts because the thinking process is changed when a rough draft is changed to an orderly piece of writing" (Alicia Parker, USA).

Some of these objections are summarized in the following discussion from an imaginative paper in which a student reported on an experiment he designed to contrast a speaker's oral version of an event with a written version of the same event:

> This use of circular indirectness and the use of digressions in . . . oral communication make it clear that the patterns Kaplan assigns to various cultures are certainly not rigid. . . . Somewhere between the thought process, manifest as unprepared oral communication, and written English there comes a translation step. It is during this step that we apparently revise our thoughts from their normal arrangement into a form closely resembling the standard English that we were all taught in school. (Doug McCarty, USA)

Doug realized what Kaplan himself ("Cultural Thought Patterns Revisited") has subsequently realized as he has become influenced by the work of Walter Ong—that not only are some cultures more oral than others, but that literacy transforms thought.

Another objection raised to Kaplan's argument was that Kaplan

lacked a diachronic perspective: "Kaplan says that English is . . . logical and straight to the point. . . . This hasn't always been so. [It has only become true] in more recent times when English became a more standardized language" (Brent Sawrie, USA).

Finally, several students pointed out that there is not a necessary equivalency between a language and a nationality, since many cultures have several different languages or dialects, and since many languages—English, for example—are spoken in radically different countries: "My research of letters from friends who are natives of Great Britain found that their thought patterns and paragraph structures are not dominantly linear in development" (Skip Green, USA).

What the Students Revealed

In an ethnographic project such as this one, the data include not only what the students said about contrastive rhetoric, but what they revealed through their own rhetoric. A look at the student samples in Appendix B, which are representative of the student papers as a whole, reveals that the paragraph and discourse structures of the students do not reflect cultural differences, and so these papers cannot be used as evidence of the contrasting rhetorics of these students' cultures. This absence of differences does not prove there are no differences in these cultures' rhetorics; it simply suggests that finished texts written in English may not provide good evidence for studying such differences. In fact, it substantiates the objections the students themselves raised regarding Kaplan's original methodology. All of these papers are final drafts, revisions of earlier drafts that students shared with me and with other students in order to get feedback. And all of the students have participated in class activities designed to teach them and give them opportunity to practice organizing academic writing. Class activities focused especially on writing introductions that summarized the background (in this case Kaplan's work), identified an issue or problem, and then proposed an expanded or alternative hypothesis. In almost all cases, students were able to produce papers that followed this NES academic structure. This finding does not mean that they would have done so naturally, without the instruction; it simply means that student papers of this sort are not very good evidence of rhetorical contrasts.

Although the papers' organizations do not reflect cultural differences, the ways the students approached the assignments—their attitudes and purposes—did differ somewhat depending on the students' cultures. The NES students, as mentioned previously,

tended to be the most argumentative about Kaplan: over two-thirds chose to disagree in their papers. The Arabs were also argumentative. Many, in fact, became rather defensive, feeling that Kaplan was criticizing their mode of writing. Interestingly, several Arabic students told me in person that they did not agree with Kaplan, but that they chose in their papers to agree with him because they thought that would be easier. I suspect, too, that they may have chosen to agree with Kaplan because they thought *I* agreed with Kaplan, and they wanted to please me.

The Japanese students were more reflective and less argumentative in their papers, tending to explore the reasons for the relationship between rhetoric and culture rather than simply to argue a position. Although they, along with the Malaysians and Cambodians, did well on the assignment, all three Oriental groups preferred and did better on the first assignment in the course, a more personal writing task. Few of the Arabs, on the other hand, did well or enjoyed the first assignment as much as this later assignment.

These generalizations about different nationalities should be considered very cautiously, since the sample of students from each country was extremely small, and since the differences may be as much due to gender as to nationality. As mentioned earlier, all of the Arabs were male, while all the other students—Japanese, Malaysian, Cambodian, and Chinese—were female.

The Teacher-Researcher as Participant

A final element in my triangulation of data requires that I examine my own participation in this project. I was a constant participant in the evolution of these students' papers, if not in the evolution of their thoughts on the topic. I made the original assignment and defined certain constraints on that assignment. I focused the students' attention on certain features of academic writing. I led discussions and designed class activities on the topic, hoping to encourage exploration of the issues. I modeled the thinking processes involved in hypothesis-testing by making and supporting my own research hypotheses. I brought in examples of how published academic researchers had approached this topic. I required students to turn in first drafts, which they shared in group conferences; in these conferences students worked to clarify their hypotheses and methodologies and analyses.

Inevitably, my own biases crept in. I tried not to tell students what I thought about Kaplan, and when I modeled examples I tried to make it clear that these did not necessarily reflect my own

perspective. I also tried to make clear that my evaluation of their papers would not depend on whether they agreed with me. But it is clear that my own perspective *did* creep in, for so many of the papers do reflect my opinion. Probably, as I helped the students clarify and revise their rough drafts, I nudged them in directions like my own. This is especially true in the NES class. Perhaps in that class, because I was less worried about students being offended by the possibility of rhetorical contrasts, I was less guarded about my perspective and more directive in conferences. And it is also clear that some students did not believe me when I said I would not grade them on whether they agreed with me but on whether they developed and supported a hypothesis. So they tried to figure out what I thought and then wrote it. This may have especially been true in the ESL class and among the less proficient writers in both classes.

Not only did my bias perhaps change some of these students, but their biases changed me. I started the project with a negative view toward contrastive rhetoric; in fact, I had recently finished writing a critique of the theory (Liebman). But as a result of my students' work, my own perspective on contrastive rhetoric has changed and enlarged. Though I realize that contrastive rhetoric, especially its research methodology with its focus on textual organization, has limitations (and I am now much more aware than before of some of these limitations, thanks to my students), I also can see its potential as a powerful and informative concept. When students discussed the differences between communication in the United States and their native countries, the students revealed some fascinating differences in attitude and approach. As a result of this research, I believe there probably are cultural differences in rhetoric; however, we need to devise new research methodologies to describe them, and we need in our descriptions to consider all aspects of rhetoric, not just a text's finished organization. Especially, we need to consider how writing purposes and processes might differ across cultures.

Benefits of Student Ethnographies

In terms of research, the major benefit of this student ethnography project is that it allowed me to expand my view of contrastive rhetoric and consider some of its methodological problems and issues. In addition, the project suggests ideas for more narrowly focused or quantitative research studies that might avoid some methodological problems. More controlled research for example, might include studies comparing the rough drafts of NES

and ESL writing students, or exploring the cultural differences in attitudes toward readers and writers.

Educationally, the project was also highly beneficial. Perhaps most important, it provided an opportunity for the students to write in a meaningful and interesting context. They were engaged in the topic, and they felt they were doing important work. I told them outright that I needed their help in studying this material and that I would be citing them as references. In short, students were being enfranchised into the academic community. Of course, a few of them were a bit intimidated by this—how could they, as mere freshmen, make a contribution?—but most were honored and worked hard at their writing. Instead of simply performing tasks to get a grade from the teacher-as-examiner (Britton), they were learning to make rhetorical choices in a way never asked of them by the typical "research paper" assignment.

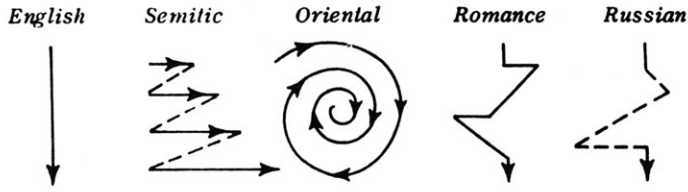
It may be surprising that in this research course, students did not write library research papers. In fact, I asked students to avoid the library completely. Past experience has convinced me that working on library research with beginning college students leads at best to long "data-and-quotation-dumps" and at worst to plagiarism, both intentional and unintentional. The student ethnography project I describe in this essay permitted instead a focus on the complex thinking and writing skills involved in any sort of research. Because of the sequencing of assignments, the students were able to work in more detail on research skills. In order to be ethnographers, students had to read, write, and connect those activities. They had to summarize, paraphrase, and quote. They had to practice a variety of research methodologies. They had to incorporate sources and test hypotheses. Of course, their own research projects were limited because of their small sample sizes, but their reasoning about this research was authentic and frequently sophisticated.

Obviously, because the students were researching contrastive rhetoric, they had an opportunity not only to practice rhetoric but to study it. One value of using contrastive rhetoric as the subject of a student ethnography was that it led to an awareness of the rhetorical choices available in English or any language. Many students also became increasingly aware of the choices available in writing processes, especially as they noticed the differences between rough drafts and revisions. Because students, therefore, were writing about writing, they were practicing and developing their metacognitive skills (Bracewell).

One cognitive skill the project allowed students practice in was that of considering other perspectives, of decentering, especially cultural decentering. For many of the American students, this

course provided their first opportunity to become less insular culturally and to interact with non-American students. And for many of the ESL students, this course provided a welcome context for them to meet and talk with Americans. Not only did students from both classes learn to write, then, but they learned a great deal about other cultures. Perhaps most importantly, they learned a great deal about the value of curing one's cultural myopia.

Appendix A



Robert Kaplan's Diagrams from "Cultural Thought Patterns in Intercultural Education." Language Learning 16.1 (1966): 15

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Appendix B

Sample Student Papers

PAPER 1: JAPANESE LANGUAGE [Uses Poetry as Data]

According to Kaplan's research, I learned that foreign students in the United States writings are different from Americans' because of different languages they use and different cultures they have been in. This fact allows them to have a different point of view of logic and a sequence of thought of writing; therefore, they develop paragraphs differently. Kaplan says that Orientals' writing is approached by indirection, which means the subject is focussed from a variety of views, and it is never shown directly, which makes Americans think it is awkward and unnecessarily indirect.

I agree with this theory Kaplan made about Japanese in a way. Because I believe that language is a part of the culture behavior of people. But still, there are two faces in Japanese culture. One is the culture which, I think, proves Kaplan's theory that indirectness is part of Japanese culture. Another is the Japanese modernized and industrialized recent culture which also proves Kaplan's theory that culture effects people's attitudes toward language.

The first culture is a tradition. Ever since Japanese ancients found their language, it has been taught to Japanese as a media of exchanging ideas and imaginative thought and feelings of human beings. Taking after this tradition of using our language, our generation has been trained to be able to appreciate our own feelings and an author's intention of writings indirectly. We naturally became able to associate with people using indirect language and enjoy appreciating indirect language.

For instance, this is one short sentence that was written by Basho Matuso, which I found in a Japanese book: "A frog jumped into a old pond, and I heard the sound of water."

I would think that this sentence itself doesn't make sense at all to Americans, but this is the most appreciable and the most beautiful sentence to me, and I think that most Japanese would be very impressed by the way this sentence was written. The author, Basho, is saying that he heard a sound of water since a frog jumped into a pond. I would guess that this pond was about more than 500 years old, covered by duckweed and moss, but water is clear and clean, and it had been hidden in a place where no one pay attention. When Basho was traveling in Japan walking (there weren't any cars or any transportation when it was written), he found the exact scene that is

written in this sentence, and he had been impressed by the silence and the quiet that he could even hear the sound of jumping frogs. The atmosphere I imagine from this sentence, I would think that this was written in a such a quiet—so quiet level that we won't be able to encounter—on one day of early fall, humidity and chilly morning. The atmosphere doesn't seem happy . . . maybe he was traveling alone. I can think of Basho's intention of being very sensitive about observing nature. And more than anything else, I envy his encountering and being able to tell us that it was so quiet that he could hear the sound of jumping frog.

Another example was written by Shiki Matusoko: "The wisteria blossoms that are put in a vase are too short to reach the floor."

The way this sentence is written is also indirect but enjoyable for us Japanese. Shiki isn't the only author who has been known as one of the most sensitive authors, but also known as a man who spent most of his life sick in bed. Therefore, I would imagine that the intention of this sentence is the sick person's sensitiveness and sorrow. Who would care if the wisteria in a vase were too short to reach the floor? Shiki was too sick to get up and only thing he could do was think about the objects which reflect on his eyes. Once people get sick and have to stay in bed for a while, we notice a lot of things we have never thought about and realize how important the health is.

We Japanese respect and tend to keep our purpose of traditional writing style, indirection. We try to achieve what we call, "guessing skill," writing as indirect as we can and read a great amount of indirect writings. The way we were taught how to achieve this purpose for Japanese linguistics could be disadvantage arising from learning and developing English paragraph as a second language, but it is result of historic tradition, which, I think, is the major influence in the indirection of writing . . . .

by Yoko Tago, Japan

PAPER 2: MY HYPOTHESIS [Uses Own Papers from Other Courses as Data]

Robert B. Kaplan, in his article, "Cultural Thought Patterns in Inter-Cultural Education," says that some Orientals tend to use an indirection in their writings. Different perspectives are used to clear the idea but without realizing it, the description doesn't focus on the idea as clearly as expected.

I agree with this idea when the Orientals write about a fiction story and about an experience because they use their imagination in

writing these papers. Nevertheless, I believe that the Orientals do not write indirectly in writing about the facts, such as a history, an instruction, and a description of an object. I will show this by looking at some papers I have already written for other composition classes.

Orientals are known as people who are well-mannered and polite. The old generations held this tradition from a long time ago and passed it on to the new generations up until now. The most obvious countries that I can see exercising this tradition are Japan and Malaysia. They communicate to each other as nice as possible by avoiding using the rude ways. Being raised in this mannerful world, Orientals are sensitive to the direct sayings. Thus, they will not tell something is wrong directly to another person because they don't want to hurt anybody's feeling. This tendency does affect their ways of thinking and expectedly their writings. This may also explain why the Oriental write indirectly in writing about experiences and fiction stories.

My first paper ["Moving From High School to College] fall under this circumstances. The sentences are indirectly developed in focussing the main idea. This composition was written by me and it hasn't been polished yet.

All through the paper, the end of every paragraph seem to focus on the same thing, that is, being independent. But I had never mentioned the word "independent" until the last paragraph. And still I don't clarify enough the word. The word 'freedom' in the last paragraph may be clarifying a little about this. It shows that in the previous time, I didn't have the chance to do anything on my own but now I do.

For example, the fifth paragraph says:

> I was happy when I was told that attendance is not a big deal. If I skip a class, I'll miss the lecture but there's no such thing as a physical punishment. But of course I'll be punished in other ways, such as failing the exam. When I was in the high school, I'll be beaten or something else when I skipped class more than 3 days. Talking about these physical punishment, it is true that in the high school, the rules are very strict because it wants us to learn to obey the rules at a young age. I had to wear a uniform to school. Expensive jewelry are also banned to avoid the student from being a criminal victim. But now, I can wear whatever I want because I can take care of myself.

This paragraph tells us about how the rules are different between a university and a high school in Malaysia. I could skip the classes everyday and wear any expensive jewelry, but I have to think what

is good or bad for me. What I was trying to say was that I can make my own decision now because I am an independent lady. But the sentences above never said this very directly.

As I mentioned before, there are times when the Oriental turn out to be direct in their writings. Those are when they write a historical, an instructive, or a descriptive composition. I described about my mother in the following short essay:

> She is small and short, even shorter than me. She is about 4 feet and 6 inches. Her skin is fair and her eyes are small because of her Chinese ancestry. She has many moles, one on her nose, one on the left side of her lips, some on her hidden body. Her soft, straight and long hair is showing her soft heart, her sincerity, and her honesty. She is 37 years old but her beauty is still there.

In this short essay, I used an inductive, linear-developed paragraph. I described her physical appearance with some detail ideas, such as her height, her eyes and her skin. Lastly, I came out with the general idea that she was beautiful even when she was 37 years old. The description before the general idea was used to support the general idea.

A "How To" composition is a kind of instruction in doing something. As we all know, an instruction must be direct, or else people will not fully understand to follow what is being told in the composition. In this case, the writer won't use his or her imagination by swirling around, but he or she directly think about the main point. The next paper ["How to Find an Apartment"] is a paper showing the using of direct words in an instruction. This is an instruction of how to look for an apartment.

Almost all of the paragraphs were using the deductive order. For example, below is the first paragraph:

> Looking for an apartment is not a simple process. It needs a lot of careful thinking and considering all the aspects, which involve the facilities, whether it is furnished or not, and other conveniences, especially if you plan to live in the apartment for a long period. Sometimes, you will not be satisfied with the surrounding or the payment, after you have lived there for only one or two months. As a result, you have to find another apartment which will make you comfortable or satisfy. To avoid from having such problems, you should follow these good steps before making any decision in choosing an apartment.

The first sentence was the main idea. It told us that it is not easy to

find an apartment. Then the following sentences described about the requirements and the problems that we have to deal with before looking for an apartment, that make the process difficult.

I think it is clear enough for us to follow the directions easily because the wordings are so direct. We can follow it step by step without being stuck by any confusing directions because every paragraph contained a step and was supported by the methods to do them.

The last paper ["The Gulf of Sidra"] is dealing with a historical composition. Let's look at it whether it's directly or indirectly described.

Some paragraphs used the deductive order and some paragraphs used the inductive order. But anyhow, they did state the main ideas and strengthen the ideas by the descriptions and the illustration. For instance, the following is the third paragraph:

> The USA showed up as a hero opposing Kaddafi's action by crossing the 'line of death.' "The purpose is to exert the USA's right to conduct naval and air exercises in every part of the globe," said Secretary of State George Shultz in April 7, 1986 *Newsweek* article "Kaddafi's Crusade" (pg. 24). As a result, as the USA expected, the Libyans attacked them and they attacked the Libyans in response. At the end, some Libyans were killed but the exact number was not able to be determined.

The paragraph started with the crossing of the 'line of death' by the USA. Then the second sentence told about the purpose of the action. After that, it mentioned about the response from each other's actions and lastly, it concluded that some Libyans were killed.

After analyzing the papers, it seems to me that the Oriental have the inclination in following the genre of writing in writing a composition. In literature such as fiction stories, experiences and plays, they tend to develop their ideas indirectly. The reason probably is that they use their imagination, which is affected by their culture and way of thinking. On the other hand, the Oriental use the directly developed ideas in the ordinary compositions such as articles in the newspapers that usually tell about the incidents that happen in the history, describe an object and instruct an activity because they know what the readers expect in searching for information.

by Sabariah Othman, Malaysia

PAPER 3: CULTURE OR INDIVIDUAL PERSONALITY? [Uses American Diary Entries and Letters as Data]

In the article, "Cultural Thought Patterns in Inter-Cultural Education," Kaplan discusses the different types of cultural writing styles. He states that people of a certain culture will have the same writing style, which differs from other cultures' style of writing due to rhetoric, which is a way of thinking. Kaplan feels that native English writers write in a direct manner. He also feels that Arabic writings mainly contain parallelism, Oriental writings are indirect, and Romance writings are direct but show digression.

I feel that Kaplan is wrong in the fact that native English writers write directly. Many of the essays Kaplan read were written under the direction of an instructor, which does not show original thought patterns produced by the native English writer. My hypothesis is that native English writers differ among themselves in their writing styles because of rhetoric. I have found three pieces of impromptu writings to support my hypothesis. None of these pieces of writing show the characteristics of direct English writing according to Kaplan.

My first example is a journal entry from Debi, who is a native English writer:

> Here I am sitting, thinking of a friend who may not be living tomorrow. He might take his life tonight. I can picture that; the embalment after pints of his precious blood drains from his body because of a quick flick of a razor. They would fill his pale, stone body with a transparent liquid. I can see now as I gaze over his soulless body, at his funeral, wishing I could have made him understand that he has friends to live for, now he will never talk to me, never skate with me, never see me flush when I trip over my skates or see me laugh when he says something funny and now as I stand over him with my heart aching, he can not see the tears fall from my eyes. He'll never see me again. As they shut the lid to his casket, I realize I'll never see him again either.

This piece of writing resembles a Romance style of writing, which portrays digression. Digression is the act of turning aside from the main subject. Debi introduces the reader to a situation, then states the topic in the second sentence. It seems to me she wanders off the subject but jumps back to the main point throughout the entry. Therefore, this piece of writing is not directly written as Kaplan expected.

My second example is a journal from Michelle, who is also a native English writer:

> It was just Alicia, Tanya, and me. We did everything together; we even got our haircut by the same hairdresser. My love for them grew just as much as theirs did for me. We were the

three stooges sharing a year of great highs. We had been acquaintances before our Senior year in high school. But at the start of our Senior year we found that our likes and dislikes were very similar. That month produced a great friendship that we thought would last forever. I remember directing the whole marching band while Tanya and Alicia stood side by side on the football field. While we were in the stands I was able to sit by them when I wasn't directing. Gossipping was a major part of our friendship. We talked about guy problems at lunch. My problem was with my boyfriend, Tanya's problem was with her fiance, and Alicia's problem was with her dating game. We came to the conclusion that all guys were jerks. There was no one else involved in our group. We figured we were comfortable with each other and we even tried bringing another person in but they would never work out. We had lots of fun but it all had to end when graduation came; we all had different things to do. Alicia stayed home to go to college and work, Tanya got married and held down two jobs, and I had to come here to Batesville for college. I talked with Alicia a few weeks ago, and we told each other how much we missed our little group.

This piece of writing portrays an Oriental style of writing. Kaplan explains that Oriental people write indirectly where the subject is viewed many ways but never directly. Michelle's entry barely touched on the main point (friendship group). She explains what revolved around the group, touching the main point once or twice. This example supports my hypothesis opposing Kaplan's.

My final example is a letter from Leata, also a native English writer:

Dear Alicia,

As you know by now, we came by.

I hate the way you wrapped presents for me, but I loved everything.

I have read about six of Piers Anthony's books. I can't wait to read this one! I love the Hershey's kisses; they're my favorite kind of candy. At home I'm always doing crosswords, so guess what I'll be doing now.

I hope you have a fantastic Christmas. We didn't go to school all this week.

Carla and Ronnie are visiting. Nancy, Ronnie's 14-year old daughter, and I are having fun.

Tell Jimbo I said "Hi."

Leata

I compared her letter to the Arabic style of writing and I saw similarities. The Arabic style of writing includes parallelism, which is single sentences forming a paragraph, more like a list of corresponding statements. Leata's main point is her Christmas vacation (though it is not stated). She has composed a list of sentences. Notice how she has two parts to one sub-topic, such as "I love the Hershey's kisses, that's my favorite kind of candy." This piece of writing shows parallelism because it contains sets of sentences with corresponding statements within the sets. Therefore, Leata does write in the Arabic style, which disagrees with Kaplan's statements.

In conclusion, a rough draft shows the native English writers' thought patterns without an instructor's interference. I feel that Kaplan should study rough drafts because the thinking process is changed when a rough draft is compared to an orderly piece of writing. My three examples show that not every native English speaker writes directly. They write differently because they all have a different way of thinking.

by Alicia Parker, USA

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