

The Rhetorical Style of Writing in English by Yemeni EFL Writers

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Abstract

This research paper is an exploration of the rhetorical style of writing in English by Arab Yemeni writers. It aims to investigate the impact of Arab Yemeni's first language and culture rhetorical features on the writing of English. The sample included 5 editorial texts of Yemeni culture. The data were thoroughly analysed qualitatively according to Ansary and Babaii's (2005) framework in dividing the text into four main elements: run on headline, addressing the issue, initiating the argumentation and articulating the issue (conclusion). The results stated that Yemeni writers tend to use the through argumentative style. In other words, initiating the issue of argumentation and then supporting it.

Keywords: Rhetorical style, Contrastive rhetoric, Culture transfer, Language transfer

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1. Introduction

First language and culture have their direct impact on the writing of English as a second or foreign language. The comparison of rhetorical style concerning the English writing as a second language emerged in 1966. Kaplan (1966) explored the impact of first on the second language based on the analysis of different backgrounds' second language writers of English essays focusing on the text paragraph. The results came up with that "each language and each culture has a [text writing] order unique to itself and that part of the learning of a particular language is the mastery of its logical system" (Kaplan, 1966, p. 14).

Kaplan (1978, p. 69) stated that writing in English

to speakers of other languages might vary regarding the rhetorical structure of text widely with culturo-linguistic system. Abu Rass (2011, p. 206) claimed that the writer's behavior of English as a foreign or second language is influenced by their culture. He asserts that "the first culture saturates the L2 experience and influences its product as well". In addition, Mauranen (1993) assumed that "culture influences writing habits and cultural variations exist not only among highly different cultures but also the close ones" (qtd. in Abu Rass, 2011, p. 207).

This research paper tries to investigate the foreign Arab north Yemeni culture and first language influence on the rhetorical features of the style of writing in English.

2. Statement of the Problem

Arab Yemeni as EFL writers sometimes find some difficulties in producing a written text like English native speaker writers because of the influence of linguistic patterns and rhetorical tendencies of their first language and culture. As a result, they choose the simple way so as to get over this difficulty and saturate first language (L1) and culture transfer. Arab Yemeni writers belong to specific culture and have their L1 background as well, that is why they probably produce specific style of English writing. That is to say, cross-linguistic and cultural differences in writing on the rhetorical features of Arabic liable to be transferred to the English of EFL writers.

3. The Research Question

This research paper attempts to answer the following question:

How do the rhetorical features of Arab Yemeni culture and first language impact the style of writing in English?

4. An Overview

4.1 First Language and Writing in L2

The first language is comprised an integral part of the L2 writers eloquence because the L2 writers have gained a great deal and deep knowledge of their first language overtime growing up in life. Therefore, they transfer their informative experience during writing in L2. Language transfer is also known as (L1 interference, linguistic interference, or crossing meaning). Transfer can be explained as a reference to speakers or writers who are employing knowledge from their first language to the second/ foreign language learning. In other words, it is the application of linguistic features between first and second/ foreign language in the spoken or written repertoire.

Language transfer can be of two main types: positive and negative transfer. Positive transfer refers to the similar or identical aspect of items and structures of both languages. This leads to shape correct meaning which is satisfied to native speakers. Whereas, negative transfer takes place when speakers and writers apply aspects of items and structures that are not similar in both languages. This means that the more the similarity between the two languages the more positive transfer happens and vice-versa.

The investigation of the use of first Language during writing in L2 has been a great immense of research. Earlier studies have clearly shown that L2 writers of different level backgrounds use their L1 while writing in L2. The use of their L1 is differently varied to some extent. Such studies addressed a number of several varied objectives for so various reasons to achieve their research goals. For example, some studies made their focus on the use of L1 during writing in L2 (UZawa & Cumming 1989; Van Weijen, Vanden Bergh, Rijlaarsdam & Sanders, 2009). These studies explored the occurrences of a number of conceptual language activities as planning and

generating ideas. The findings indicated that participant writers used their L1 while writing in L2.

Transfer in L2 writing can be identified in the following strategies. A strategy of a learning tool and a means of conveying the meaning through communication while composing a written text. The composing strategy is the same in both L1 and L2, so writers apply their L1 in L2 writing. For example, writers who have actually planned, developed ideas and edited writing in their L1 can practice the same strategy during L2 writing. In regard to this, UZawa and Cumming (1989) conducted a study to get the difference of writing processes on Japanese and English for four intermediate learners who were Japanese as a foreign language and then they have been requested to write expository essays. The focus of the study was on how L2 writers use their L1 as a mood of planning and generating ideas while writing in their L2. The results explained that the participant writers asserted that they apply their English more often to plan and organize information in Japanese.

ESL/EFL writers use also a strategy of simplifying the complexity of writing task in L2, particularly when learner writers plan and organize their ideas by imagining and thinking of their L1 speech. Van Weijen, et al. (2009) examined the writers' use of their first language (Dutch) during writing in their second language (English) by using a process of thinking a loud. Twenty students were required to write four argumentative essays in both Dutch and English languages. The analysis focused on the variation of L1 use between writers and tasks by identifying the occurrence of conceptual activities such as planning and generating ideas. Results indicated that participants used their L1 while writing in L2.

Another strategy is when L2 writers compensate for their deficiency in L2 background, especially when they would like to explain complex information. A study by Cumming (1989) was to compare cross-linguistic equivalents and explore the linguistic choices in L2 of about 23 France phone students. Results came to show that student writers could achieve their task by switching frequently between English and French.

The range of exploring the influence of L1 use on L2 writing graduated to throw the light on the effect of L2 proficiency on L1 use. Studies displayed contradictory results. On the one hand, some studies concluded that high L2 proficiency writers transferred more between their L1 and L2 than proficient writers (Van Weijn et. al., 2009; Wang, 2003). On the other hand, some other studies like (Sasaki, 2004) inferred those novices who were lower proficiency writers used their L1 far more the higher proficiency writers during their writing in L2.

5. Culture and Second Language Writing

From the framework of applied linguistics, culture is defined as shared knowledge that a group of people of a speech community “must know in order to act as they do, make the things the way they make, and interpret their experience in the distinctive way they do” (Holland, 1987, qtd. in Ansary & Babaii, 2009, p. 212). In other words, people who share the same language and culture can act with each other easily, whereas people within cultural variations may achieve restricted interaction.

The idea of cultural variations in rhetoric has been emerged in second language writing at first by the American linguist Kaplan (1966). In his study of 600 L2 students' essays from different language backgrounds. Kaplan found that students identified their writings in ways that were systematically different from each other and from English native speaker writers. Kaplan's (1966) was the beginning of huge corpus of contrastive rhetoric studies. Besides, Martin (1992) asserted that contrastive rhetoric study began to focus on the systematic way of organization in L1 and L2 rhetoric (qtd. in Wang, 2012, p. 637) and then it was going on to consider the whole text (Connor, 1996, p. 19).

Connor (1996, p. 5) defines contrastive rhetoric as ‘an area of research in second language acquisition that identifies problems in composition encountered by second language writers and by referring to the rhetorical strategies of the first language, attempts to explain them’. In other words, contrastive rhetoric analysis is interested in the rhetorical structure strategy of writing text that is written by writers from different cultural and social backgrounds.

According to Hyland (2003) there are some reasons denote the several ways for writing differently to form meaning in L2 among these reasons are cultural factors. These differences in writing need an understanding of cross-cultural features that can help in perceiving that writing difficulties come from student writers' first language and culture. Ostler, (1992) conducted a comparative study among four ESL texts written by different language groups i.e. (English, Arabic, Spanish and Japanese) and revealed rhetorical references. The results came to the conclusion that ESL learners write according to the patterns preferred in their first culture. Similarly, Connor (2002) assumed that recent approaches that used to explore contrastive rhetoric have explained that the differences in L2 writing derive from “multiple resources, including L1, national culture, L1 educational background, disciplinary culture” (qtd. in Abu Rass, 2011, p. 206). To put it another way, various cultures control their discourse differently and by using diverse strategies. This means that learners employ the strategies learned in their first language context when they write in their L2 and transfer from L1 to L2 happens. The transfer imposes itself and clearly looked in the writer's choice of rhetorical

strategies and content.

Transfer of writing is one area of contrastive rhetoric which hypothesizes that “each language and culture has unique rhetorical conventions and they ... Interfere with L2 writing” (Kubota, 1998, p. 69). Therefore, contrastive rhetoric “examines differences and similarities in ESL/ EFL writing across languages and cultures as well as across such different contexts as education and commerce”(Connor, 2002, p. 493).

According to Abu Rass (2011, p. 206), cultural transfer is likely to take place when non-native English writers write in it as a SL/FL, because their behavior is influenced by their first culture. Abu Rass (2011) conducted a study on cultural transfer by Arab Muslim learners writing in English. The study examined the writing of 18 teacher trainees at an Arab Language Teacher Training College. Results pointed to a strong cultural influence appearing on the teacher trainees' writing. Indications of the cultural differences were reflected in the use of repetition, synonyms and possessive pronouns. In Arabic, repeating is used for the sake of persuasion; synonyms are used to convey emphasis and possessive pronouns to express feelings and wishes.

By the same token, Elachach (2015, p. 129) spotlighted cultural differences between two group writers of communities. The two groups were Arabic and English-speaking writers. She investigated the impact of such cultural barriers on EFL learners' writing as written texts and how culture saturated the way they are used to achieve essays. The results indicated that culturally bound differences related to some linguistic factors such as “...word pattern and grammar were responsible for difficulties in the learners' production of writing essays in English”.

6. The Rhetorical Style of Writing in Arabic

Since this research paper concerns itself with the rhetorical style of English writing by Arab Yemeni writers, it is worth to have a brief look of the rhetorical style of writing in Arabic regarding the pervious rhetorical studies. According to (Hinkle, 2002), the study of differences between Arabic and English in rhetorical style of writing was initiated by the interest of ESL or EFL writers interference in writing English prose concern with non-Western rhetorical traditions.

Accordingly, various contrastive rhetoric studies have distinguished Arabic argumentative discourse in comparison with English and identified rhetorical features that typify Arabic. Hatim (1990) claimed that Modern Standard Arabic prefers through-argumentative style of writing. The through argumentative style exposes the problem and then support the argumentation with more substantiation. Whereas, in English the more explicit style is counter-argumentation. The counter argumentative style starts with substantiating the problem to support the

argumentation and then ends up with a conclusion in interpreting daily events. By the same token, Abbadi (2006) investigated the linguistic argumentative strategies employed within the textual structure of through-argumentative and counter-argumentative style of writing in English and Arabic editorials. The analysis revealed that both editorial writings are not only different in textual structure but also in linguistic features with tendency of Arabic writers to use the through argumentative style of writing.

Drid (2014) examined the preferred style of initiating the argumentation in argumentative essays written by a group of advanced Arabic-speaking learner writers of English as a foreign language. The text structure of essays written by Master learner writers was analyzed and revealed that their writings were influenced by their native culture's writing features. The learner writers followed predominantly the Style of through-argumentation to construct their argumentation. It is possibly asserted that on cross-linguistic and cultural differences in writing on the rhetorical features of Arabic argumentation liable to be transferred to the English of EFL writers.

7. Methodology

7.1 Data Collection

In collecting data, there are 5 versions of the English editorial texts written by Arab Yemen writers to be examined. The editorial texts are randomly chosen from the editorials published in within the period from June to July 2018.

The editorial texts are analyzed qualitatively to explore the rhetorical features of writing style in the selected editorial texts by using the Ansary and Babii's (2005) taxonomy of dividing the editorial text into four main parts: run-on headlines, addressing the issues, argumentation and articulating the issues.

8. Data Analysis and Discussion

All editorial texts run- on headline, addressing the issues, initiating argumentation and articulating a position. For as titles, the number of words in editorial titles is about 5-10 words per title. Regarding the amount number of paragraphs, the average length is 6-9 paragraphs per editorial. The paragraphs are neither long nor short in the number of words. However, in addressing the issue, editorial texts try to make a sentence after the title to identify the issue that will be addressed such as in the following example from Yemen Observer, June 3, 2018. The headline is "Cholera 'Third Wave' Threatens Yemen". The issue that will be addressed is; "Anew outbreak of cholera can be expected in Yemen as a result of the rainy season that begins in mid-April, a study suggests".

Yemeni editorial writers trend to report the main argument in the first paragraph. Consider the following example of the first paragraph, headlined "Cholera Third

Wave' Threatens Yemeni", the editorialist exposes the problem of a new outbreak of cholera (Yemen Observer, June 3, 2018).

According to the study, which was published in the Lancet Global Health earliest this month if the predictions are correct, millions of people in the war-torn country will be infected with cholera in an epidemic wave expected to be large in scale than the previous two. In the follow-up style of the argument details, giving information, explaining, giving examples, Yemeni writers make more paragraphs and itemize details sufficiently. The following third paragraph of nine is taken as an example from (Yemen Observer, June 3, 2018):

The study identified the first wave of the epidemic as limited outbreak that between 28 Sep.2016 and 23 April 2017, after the rainy Season, a second wave emerged between 24 April and 2 July 2017, which brought a wider outbreak and a rise in the number of infections and deaths. This was followed by a fall in cases between July 3 and March 12 of this year. In the paragraph above, details explain the two waves of cholera mentioned earlier, and add details of the period of time of each and the possible reason behind that.

Regarding the editorials' conclusion, Yemeni writers put their opinions or suggestions clearly and directly. Consider the following example as a quotation of a consultant of vaccination campaign, (Yemen Observer June 3, 2018) "We have to start with the worst-affected areas to avoid any new server setbacks and plans should separate the response to cholera from other infections to avoid duplication in efforts across governorate".

The editorial issued on June 7, 2018 includes also the four elements. It can be analyzed as follow: its headline is "Tehran Plays the Yemeni Card" and the addressing issue is Tehran exploits the Huthis to sustain its nuclear negotiation. It started initiating its argument with referring to the Iranian exploitation of the card of its proxy in Yemen to play with it for its favour:

Tehran enhances Huthis as its proxy and seize the opportunity to play the Yemeni card in its negotiation with European Union (UN). But, it is not clear whether Tehran is sacrificing its Allie's to keep the Iran's nuclear deal or negotiation are to give more time to Huthis to reverse setbacks.

(Yemen Observer, June 7, 2018)

The editorialist supports the argument by giving information about the condition of Tehran and Washington after the latter's abrogation of the Iran nuclear agreement. Meanwhile, the European Union plays the role of intervening to salvage the deal after Washington's demand from Tehran to curtail its nuclear and ballistic missile activities, its military presence in the Middle East and its involvement in the war in Yemen. With reference to the conclusion, the editorialist articulates the issue directly and expresses his opinion clearly to write "Tehran announced its willingness to engage in talks with the European Union

about Yemen but Yemen negotiation must be separated from the fate of Iran nuclear deal”(Yemen Observer, June 7, 2018).

In the editorial issued on July 24, 2018 under the headline “Killing Yemen with Hanger: Is Yemen’s War Ending”? It is addressing the issue of the catastrophic situation and possibility of ending the war in Yemen and it puts the following argument:

Yemen is one of the third world countries and the poorest in the Middle East area. It has been slipping into a war since 2014 after Huthis expansion. The war destroyed infrastructure and economy became a proxy battleground for regional powers.

(Yemen Observer, July 24, 2018)

The above argument is supported by giving information about Huthi rebels and sects in north and south Yemen. In addition to mentioning statistic quantities of destroyed facilities, casualties, wounded, dead people of Cholera and the huge number of families who are at the risk of starvation. At the end, the editorialist concludes the essay in a direct mode and finalizes it with “hopefully, people look forward to end the war and emerge the peace”.

The editorial issued on July 26, 2018 addresses the issue of difficult optimism for a better future and the growth of well-educated generation in Yemen that titled “Can We Be Optimistic about the Future of Yemen”?, it initiates the main argument in the first paragraph and reports; “Maintaining optimism for a better future became more difficult as the conflict continues. Famine, epidemic, the underground economy growth and the displacement of a few million have become the primary focus”(Yemeni Observer, July 26, 2018). This argument is enhanced by mentioning the reasons as corruption and bureaucracy of all the governmental institutions despite of the huge source of income of oil and gas. And it comes up with a conclusion very simply and clearly articulating it as; a hope of the growth of well-educated generation in Yemen is difficult in the presence due to corruption and mismanagement. Now, famine, epidemic, the underground economy growth and displacement have become the main focus.

Similarly, the editorial issued on July 29, 2018 under the headline “Yemeni Riyal Decreases to Its Lowest Price Against Hard Currencies” is addressing the decline of Yemeni Riyal against dollar and Saudi Riyal. It argues the discussed problem as:

The exchange rate of the United State dollar reached 520 riyals in Aden and 510 in Sana’a, whilst it was 215 before the war in 2015. This rapid rise of hard currencies against Yemeni riyal is attributed to the failure of the central bank to manage the monetary policy.

(Yemen Observer, July 29, 2018)

Further information enhances the above argument by explaining the reasons behind that. The central bank set the dollar sold for importers of goods at lower amount,

whereas it was a higher in the black market. This difference led traders to buy dollar from the black market to cover their import bills. In concluding the issue, the editorialist gave his solution clearly “the solution requires more donor support, resuming hydrocarbon exports and rationalizing imports”.

9. Conclusion

To sum up, the headline of editorial includes 5-10 words, whereas paragraphs are not long. In addressing the issue, editorialist makes a full sentence or more under the headline. The rhetorical style of writing the editorial text of Yemeni writers imposes the following features. In initiating the argumentation of the issue, it tends to initiate the argument standpoint in the first paragraph and supports it by giving information in more details and then comes up with a conclusion that mostly be done clearly and directly. That is, it follows the through argumentative style of writing. This can be attributed to the linguistic variations of Arabic language and rhetorical tendencies of culture. To put it clearer, the linguistic patterns and rhetorical conventions of the L1 writers (Arabic) interfere with that of English.

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الأسلوب البلاغي في الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية بواسطة الكاتب الأجنبي- الكاتب اليمني أنموذجًا.

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الملخص

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الكلمات المفتاحية: الأسلوب البلاغي، التقابل البلاغي، النقل اللغوي، النقل الثقافي.

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