A Contrastive Rhetorical Analysis of Factual Texts in English and Arabic

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Abstract
This paper aims to investigate the well-established notion of contrastive rhetoric which highlights a connection between culture and writing conventions across languages within the context of a factual text type, the least expected to reflect a cultural influence. The paper provides comparative evidence from culturally neutral informative newspaper reports written in English and Arabic. A textual analysis approach is used to determine the linguistic and rhetorical choices made by English and Arab writers on the basis of cultural preferences in English and Arabic writing styles. The analysis reveals that factual texts in English and Arabic display cross-cultural variations. The results provide a strong support for the contrastive rhetoric hypothesis. There is an evidential effect of culture across different writing genres including factual text types. The paper discusses the pedagogical implications which these results have for the current practices of teaching L2 writing.

Keywords: Contrastive rhetoric, factual texts, English, Arabic, teaching L2 writing

Introduction
There is no doubt that not all world languages display similar linguistic features. Differences in linguistic features among different languages are believed to be apparent in the preferences for specific rhetorical aspects from one language to another. Arabic, for instance, shows a preference for the use of long sentences that are linked with coordinating conjunctions (Ostler, 1987; Kaplan, 1967), while English favours subordination as a sign of a full-fledged and effective writing (Kaplan, 1967; Oshima & Houge, 1991). Likewise, Arabic is typically characterized by a high degree of repetition (Shoubly, 1951; Johnstone, 1991) which is not usually present in English. In addition, differences between Arabic and English texts manifest in the degree of implicitness or explicitness of the message conveyed by the writer. For example, there is a general tendency in English writers to be responsible for a direct and clear message (Hind, 1987). Unlike English, Arabic allows for another kind of responsibility in which the readers are responsible to understand the writer’s message no matter how implicit or unclear the message is (Mohamed, 1993, as cited in Mohamed & Omar, 2000, p. 50). Interpretations for these differences between Arabic and English writing styles can be derived from contrastive rhetoric hypothesis (Kaplan, 1966). According to Kaplan (1966), the cultural background affects the way people approach writing. This cultural effect is reflected in the linguistic and rhetorical variations found in texts written in different languages. Cross-cultural differences among languages can also bring about different writing patterns across different writing genres. Put differently, there are various ways in which “writers from different backgrounds organize and present written material that reflect the preferences of each particular culture” (Reid, 1993, p. 270). More specifically, the differences in the linguistic features among languages can be attributed to the cross-cultural differences among users of these languages and, hence, language is a mirror of culture.
Yet, if language is used as a means to report news and information such as in some factual newspaper writings, the cultural element that influences the use of language might be absent. These texts are, as Giora (1993) states, “texts whose main function is to convey information in the most economical way” (p. 591). In these factual texts, writers only report factual events as they happen without any superfluous allusion to personal and cultural aspects. Simply put, culturally neutral factual text types including informative newspaper reports do not usually allow for a cultural influence on one’s writing. With that said, the writing genre and the text type should not only be analyzed to find out rhetorical patterns across different cultures but should also be considered as a factor that may influence cultural preferences in writing styles. Within this context, this paper questions the evidential effect of culture, as proposed by contrastive rhetoric, across all text types. In other words, this paper aims to test the notion of contrastive rhetoric which highlights a connection between culture and writing conventions across languages within the context of a factual text type, the least expected to reflect a cultural influence. The paper hypothesizes that the effect of culture can be minimized or even neutralized as long as factual texts which impersonally report news and information are concerned. To test its hypothesis, this paper analyzes linguistic features which reflect cultural preferences in English and Arabic writing styles. To that end, the paper attempts to answer these research questions: (1)- how common is the use of long sentences, coordinating and subordinating conjunctions and lexical repetition in Arabic and English newspaper texts?; (2)- do both Arabic and English texts display writer-responsibility tendency, since they are newspaper factual texts, or does the Arabic text retain its reader-responsibility tendency?; and (3)- is there a connection between factual types of texts and the absence of the cultural elements in the text, or not?

Literature Review

Since its appearance in 1966, contrastive rhetoric has inspired research which views writing as a cultural behaviour. The generic premise of contrastive rhetoric establishes a connection between culture and writing conventions across languages. In his seminal paper, “Cultural Thought Patterns in Intercultural Education”, Kaplan (1966) has informed research in L2 writing. Kaplan has focused on how L2 English learners’ writings deviate from the conventions of paragraph writing in English. He found that L2 learners produce written texts which are culturally influenced by their L1 due to low proficiency levels which induce them to resort to L1 resources. He concludes that L2 learners use different styles to develop their paragraphs as a result of the differences in their cultural backgrounds. Two decades later, contrastive rhetoric studies (e.g., Connor, 1987; Enkvist, 1990; Johnson, 1992) have widen the scope of contrastive rhetoric and develop a text-based analytical approach which “describe[s] the conventions of writing . . . and provide analytical techniques with which to compare writing in the students’ first and second languages” (Connor, 2004, p. 6). Most of these studies have particularly focused on the cohesion and coherence of written texts (Ibid, p. 6).

A new analytical approach which moves the analytical focus from the text into the writer of the text has been proposed by Hinds (1987). Hinds differentiates between writer-responsibility (e.g., English) as opposed to reader-responsibility (e.g., Japanese) texts according to “the amount of effort expended by writers to make texts cohere through transitions and other uses of metatext” (Connor, 2004, p. 7). Hinds claims that in Japanese language, it is the responsibility of the reader to figure out the meaning of the text while in English, the writer is more responsible to give a clear and explicit text to his/her readers. In 1997, Matsuda has paved the way for a “dynamic” model which allows for wider comparisons and emphasizes the interaction between writers’ and
readers’ cultural backgrounds, on the one hand, and text discourse conventions, on the other hand (Ibid, p. 7). In its broader scope, too, contrastive rhetoric adopts new directions in analyzing texts of different types across languages and cultures with regard to their social functions and contexts (e.g., Mauranen, 2001; Connor, Halleck & Mbaye, 2002). In the past twenty years, contrastive rhetoric has also developed to include the study of specific genres of writing such as academic, journalistic and business writing (e.g., Bhatia, 1993; Fakhri, 2009). Within this trend of genre analysis, Yakhontova (2006) draws attention to the inadequacy in explaining rhetorical variations across languages solely on the basis of the contrastive rhetoric dominating perspective of the eminent cultural influences. By comparing the linguistic and rhetorical features of applied mathematics’ academic abstracts written in English, Ukrainian and Russian, Yakhontova points out that, sometimes, the “disciplinary practices” may impose similar linguistic features even across different cultures. In similar vein, Molino (2010) indicates that the “disciplinary culture” can determine the choice of some rhetorical aspects among different languages along with the writers’ culture. Molino found that the use of certain rhetorical devices such as first-person pronoun and the passive voice in academic research papers written in English and Italian is affected by the text function and context. Yakhontova and Molino’s studies accentuate that there are factors such as the field of writing and the type of text which should be taken into account in contrastive rhetorical analysis. This can best be applied to factual text types such as in the field of news reporting where the convention of neutral writing is possibly enough to reduce the cultural influence. In contrary to this view, however, Scollon & Scollon (1997) found that there are rhetorical differences in newspaper reporting that can be attributed to cultural influences. They examined news reporting in Hong Kong newspapers written in Chinese and English. Although the papers were reporting the same news stories, they showed differences in a number of rhetorical aspects including text organization and in-text citation.

Methods
This paper is a corpus-based analysis of an Arabic as well as an English corpus. A textual analysis approach is used to determine the linguistic and rhetorical choices made by English and Arab writers on the basis of cultural preferences in English and Arabic writing styles.

1) The Corpora
The corpora used in this paper consist of an Arabic as well as an English corpus. The Arabic corpus contains three Arabic newspaper texts taken from three Arabic papers: Al-Sharqa Al-Awsat, Okaz and Al-Riyadh. The English corpus consists of two English texts taken from two British papers: The Independent and the Sunday Times. The Arabic texts consist of almost 176 lines collectively, while The English texts consist of 178 lines in total. Whereas the English texts report on the forest fires in California, the Arabic texts are about the forest fires in Al-Bahah, a city in Saudi Arabia.

2) The Analysis
The studied texts were analyzed according to the following measures: (1) the number of long sentences with coordinating conjunctions and those with subordinating conjunctions; (2) the number of lexical repetitions; and (3) the number of the cases in which the texts show instances of writer or reader responsibilities. For the sake of a clear exposition, I provide some brief description of those measures before plunging into the actual analysis and the presentation of the results. Coordinating conjunctions
include ‘and’, ‘but’ and ‘or’ in English and their counterparts, (و) wa, (لكن) lakinn and (أو) aw, in Arabic. Sentences combined using these types of conjunctions are said to be semantically equal (see Quirk et al., 1985) and syntactically independent. Subordinating conjunctions are like ‘although’, ‘after’, and ‘while’ in English and their equivalents, (بالرغم من) birugmi min, (بعد) ba’ada and (بينما) bainama, in Arabic. Sentences combined using a subordinating conjunction are not semantically equal. Syntactically, there would be a main clause, which is syntactically independent, and a subordinate clause, which cannot stand on its own. More will be said about these particularly from a semantic point of view in the discussion section further below. As to lexical repetition, here the main point is that how many times a lexical item that is not a function word, but whose inclusion is very central to the content of the text, actually occurs within the text. Finally, writer and reader responsibilities here refer to the amount of effort needed to comprehend a particular idea. As such, there is an inverse relation between the two. The criterion here would be how explicit or implicit a meaning is made too sound. The clearer the meaning, the more the responsibility on the writer to make it so, and the less responsibility on the reader to simply get it.

2.1. The Arabic Corpus
In almost all the Arabic texts, there are very few short sentences. The texts abound in long sentences that are either connected by coordinating or sometimes subordinating conjunction. According to Perrin and Corder (1975, pp. 42-44), long sentences are of three types: First, compound sentences which contain two or more independent clauses and are linked by coordinating conjunctions such as, and, or, but, nor, yet, etc.; second, complex sentences which consist of one main clause and one or more subordinate clauses which are joined to the main clause by subordinating conjunctions such as since, because, when, after, etc.; and thirdly, compound complex sentences which contain two or more main clauses and one or more subordinate clauses.

In fact, it is difficult to decide where one sentence ends and another begins for mainly two reasons. First, when we pause at a part of a long sentence, we still feel that it is meaningful. It can also stand by itself as a complete sentence. Yet, it is included as a clause within another sentence. Secondly, most of the statements in the texts begin with the coordinate conjunction (و) wa “and” even if they have no relation to the preceding elements. Accordingly, I depend on Palmer’s (2000, p. 12) technique of using a punctuation mark (i.e., the full stop) to identify sentence boundaries. The analysis of the Arabic corpus showed that the Arabic texts contain long sentences which can be divided into shorter sub-sentences which can, in turn, stand as separate sentences. These long sentences are all connected together by the coordinating conjunctions (و) wa “and”, (ف) fa “and”, and (لكن) lakinn “but” to form one long sentence.

2.2. The English Corpus
The English texts are also full of long sentences. However, unlike the Arabic texts, the English texts display a use of some short sentences that do not contain any conjunctions. These are simple sentences which are referred to by Corder (1975), as sentences which contain “one independent clause and no subordinate (dependent) clauses… [they] may contain any number of modifiers, and either the subject or the predicate (or both) may be compound “ (p. 42). In fact, the analysis does not really focus on the instances of the occurrence of short sentences in both corpora. Yet, it is remarkable that the English texts are full of such short sentences whereas there are hardly any of them in the Arabic texts. In addition, the analysis of the long sentences
only considers the number of those sentences with coordinating conjunctions and those with subordinating ones.

**Findings**
The analysis of the Arabic and English corpora revealed the following results.

1) **Use of Coordinating and Subordinating Conjunctions**
Table 1: Number of instances of coordination and subordination in Arabic and English corpora

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Number of Coordination</th>
<th>Number of Subordination</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1: The frequency of coordination and subordination use in Arabic and English corpora

2) **Lexical Repetition**
Table 2: Number of lexical repetition in Arabic and English corpora

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Words</th>
<th>Arabic</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>haraeq حرائق / fires</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Baha/ California</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gabat غابات / forests</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>addifa almadani firemen/ fight fires</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2: The frequency lexical repetition in Arabic and English corpora
3) **Writer Responsibility versus Reader Responsibility**

Table 3: Instances of writer-responsibility and reader-responsibility in Arabic and English corpora.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>writer responsibility</th>
<th>reader responsibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Figure 3: The frequency of Writer vs. reader responsibilities in Arabic and English corpora](image)

**Discussion and Conclusion**

1) **Coordinating conjunctions vs. subordinating conjunctions**

The analysis of the Arabic corpus shows an extensive use of long sentences that are coordinately linked especially with the coordinating conjunction “and” wa. This is simply because it is a rule in Arabic to begin a sentence with the coordinate, “and” wa (Haywood & Nahmad, 1965, p. 436). This finding goes in line with studies which attest that Arabic provides Arabs with a large number of devices for coordination. The obvious preference for coordination in the Arabic texts contradicts the paper hypothesis which states that conveying and reporting information in factual texts might not be affected by the writer’s culture. It is noteworthy, however, that the English texts show a great quantity of coordination which is contradictory to the view that English is more in favour for subordination because it is considered “more stylistically elegant than elaborate parallelism” (Kaplan, 1967, p. 12). The less preference for subordination in the English texts might be attributed to the semantic difference between coordination and subordination. While coordination implies the meaning of equality between connected ideas, subordination brings about inequality to the subordinate clause. As the writers of factual texts believe that each piece of information they are reporting is of equal importance to other information, coordination is the best template to reflect such equality. It can be said, then, that the factual text type (i.e., the informative newspaper reporting texts) has prescribed the use of more coordination. Thus, the text type can minimize the effect of cultural preferences in writing. However, this finding cannot be generalized and needs more extensive research in order to be verified. The analysis of aspects other than coordination in this paper shows no robust cultural influence. Similarly, the extensive use of coordination in the English texts has a base in the English culture. According to Kaplan (1967), there is a historically traditional belief that “elaborate parallelism” which depends on the availability of coordinate conjunctions is “a sign of elegance in style and was at the height of literary fashion” (p. 11).
2) Lexical Repetition
The use of lexical repetition in both the Arabic and English corpora reflect a cultural effect on newspaper writing in Arabic and English. The analysis of the Arabic corpus confirms that the use of a lot of repetition as claimed in some research (e.g., Shouby, 1951) is not only a major component of texts written in Arabic but is also one of the main characteristics of Arabic writing. On the other hand, the frequency of repeated words and phrases in the English corpus is not as much as that in Arabic. According to Mohamed and Omar (2000), Arabic cohesion can be described as “repetition oriented” while English cohesion is “change-oriented”. This classification is based on the preferred use of lexical repetition as a cohesive device in Arabic. Unlike Arabic, English favors a number of other devices which can be used to replace lexical items instead of repeating them. These include the use of a pronoun (reference), the use of a substitute word (substitution), zero substitution (ellipsis), or the use of a synonym (Mohamed & Omar, 2000, p. 59).

3) Writer-Responsibility vs. reader-Responsibility
The analysis of the corpora shows that even when the analyzed texts are only factual informative texts which mainly reports news, the writer-responsibility operates more in the English texts. On the other hand, the Arabic texts contain parts that make it clear that the responsibility to understand the text lies with the reader. It seems that the difference in the degree of responsibility assigned to the text writer or reader can be attributed to a difference in cultural typology between English and Arabic. English is “a writer-responsibility language” where the writers feels the responsibility to give as clear but still relevant information as possible in order not to mislead the readers (Hind, 1987, p. 144). English, however, “attach greater responsibility to the writer” (Mohamed & Omer, 2000, p.50). Arabic texts, thus, are “more tolerant of ambiguity impressions of statements, and absence of clearly stated discourse organizers” (Ibid, p. 50). Put differently, in Arabic, it is the reader’s responsibility to uncover the implicit message of the writer and to determine types of relations which exist within the different parts of the text.

In short, the results of this paper provide a strong support for the contrastive rhetoric hypothesis. There is an evidential effect of culture across different writing genres including factual text types.

Pedagogical Implications
The results of this paper underscore the pivotal role which culture plays in determining the linguistic and rhetorical features of written texts across world languages. These results have some pedagogical implications for the current practices of teaching L2 writing. Writing in an L2 should reflect L2 culture in order to be acceptable within the standards of writing in the native language and to meet the expectations of native readers. However, the existence of a contrasting L1 cultural background which may negatively interfere with L2 conventions can keep L2 learners at distance from achieving a native-like performance. In such a case, “cultural differences need to be explicitly taught in order to acculturate EFL writers to the target discourse community” (Connor, 2004, p. 17). Yet, L2 learners need more than simply being aware of the cultural differences between L1 and L2. They need to have contact with the foreign culture outside the classroom. This can be fulfilled through internet websites which offer opportunities for chatting and communicating with native speakers. The incorporation of teaching materials that emphasize the cultural elements in L2 writing norms can also be beneficial.
References

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