

Discourse and Intercultural Academic Rhetoric

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This paper is critically concerned with the recent attempts in contrastive rhetoric (CR) to interpret the linguistic and rhetorical differences found in the academic discourses produced by Anglophone and non-Anglophone academic and research writers. Framing this critique within a discourse view of language, culture and communication, this paper points to the need to go beyond such a priori, static, and too often vague concepts as language and culture as explanatory variables in intercultural (academic) rhetoric. Moreover, using data that examined the use of English in lingua franca contexts, the paper urges researchers in CR to consider the differences and misunderstandings arising from a history of socialization of academics to different discourse communities, varying assumptions of what constitutes appropriate academic genres, as well as the identities and meanings that are co-constructed in concrete and situated rhetorical action. It is believed that such a perspective on intercultural academic communication will not only help move the CR agenda forward, but will also lead to a better understanding of communicative and intercultural competence, and dialogue with the cultural academic “other”.

Keywords: Contrastive Rhetoric; Discourse Analysis; Academic Writing/Genres; Intercultural Communication; Situated Rhetorical Action

Introduction

This paper is critically concerned with the recent attempts in applied linguistic scholarship, particularly in the subfield known as Contrastive Rhetoric (hereafter CR), to interpret the linguistic and rhetorical differences found in the academic discourses produced by Anglophone and non-Anglophone academics. The Anglophone grip on international communication and information access seems to be quite in place, as has been amply attested by many studies (Wood, 2001). As such, a large number of academics and researchers from non-Anglophone speaking backgrounds are urged to publish their best in English. For many academics, however, this is no easy enterprise. Indeed, ethnographic research has established that getting an entry into the global academic and research markets entails socialization and enculturation into another textual universe and another public face (Duszak, 1997; Connor, Halleck, & Mbaye, 2002). It is becoming increasingly clear that this textual universe is heavily populated by an English, typically Anglo-American, mode of rhetorical exposition. Non-Anglophones are expected to conform to this mode if they are to make it into the publication market.

According to Swales (1996: p. 25), CR has emerged “out of those cross-linguistic and cross-cultural perspectives, as one of the *best* ways we have of understanding why texts are as they are. In effect, we are once again trying to understand *the distant other* in order to better understand ourselves” (original emphasis). Therefore, CR is relevant to the increasing interest that is being given to the themes of “communicative and intercultural competence” (Kramsch, 2005: p. 545) and cross-cultural dialogues (Savignon & Sysoyev, 2002; Ware & Kramsch, 2005) as

it attempts not only to describe the cultural meanings emanating from the texts produced by writers from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, but it also purports to *explain* the reasons which may inhibit the acquisition of such competence and the facilitation of those exchanges.

The current focus on explaining differences in CR can be justified by a call initially pronounced by Scollon (1997; Mauraanen, 2001) and later expressed by Swales (2004) that the next research agenda for CR research does not lie in proving that there are differences in research rhetorics, but in articulating a theoretical framework in order to *explain* the origins of such differences. This paper can be seen as a contribution to such enterprise.

First, this paper reviews the theoretical assumptions on which the CR approach is based. Second, it addresses the theoretical and methodological criticisms which have been leveled against this approach. The theoretical criticism comes from: a) the recent attempts to rethink the linguistic relativity hypothesis within more discourse perspectives (Gumperz & Levinson, 1996; Kramsch, 2004); b) current conceptualizations of culture (Sarangi, 1994; Holliday, 1999; Scollon & Scollon, 2001; Atkinson, 2004; Kramsch, 2004); c) the *pluricentricity* of English in lingua franca contexts (e.g., Swales, 1996; Kachru, 1997; Seidlhofer, 2001; Canagarajah, 2002), and d) the increasing recognition of the intertextual, interdiscursive and dialogical nature of academic communication (Bakhtin, 1986; Bhatia, 1997; Scollon, 1997; Askehave & Swales, 2001). The methodological criticism concerns the need voiced by many CR researchers to establish appropriate *tertia comparationis* across genres and cultures (Moreno, 1998; Swales, 2004; Connor &

Moreno, 2005). The last part of the paper introduces the theoretical framework and a case study in order to help illustrate this framework.

Contrastive Rhetoric: Origins and Theoretical Assumptions

CR is a field of inquiry which investigates the way written discourse is structured and used across languages and cultures within such diverse settings as education, academia and the professions (Kaplan, 1966; Taylor & Chen, 1991; Connor, 1996a; Enkvist, 1997). Originally proposed by Kaplan (1966) as a pedagogical solution to the rhetorical and organizational problems faced by non-native speaking students writing in English, CR has become an established field of inquiry in applied linguistics and written discourse analysis (Flowerdew, 2001; Kaplan, 2001; Kaplan & Grabe, 2002). Numerous articles on the subject have appeared in such journals as *Text*, *Written Communication*, *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, *Journal of English for Specific Purposes*, a special issue in *Multilingua* (Connor, 1996b) and recently another special issue in *Journal of English for Academic Purposes* (Connor, 2004a). Book-length treatment of the subject includes Connor's (1996a) *Contrastive rhetoric: Cross-cultural aspects of second Language writing* and the volume edited by Anna Duszak (1997) entitled *Culture and styles of academic discourse*.

Partially derived from the weak version of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of linguistic relativity, CR "assumes that languages differ not only in phonological, morphological, and grammatical features, but in the kinds of genres available to their speakers for the organization of discourse and in the rhetorical (and syntactic) features that co-occur with those genres" (Kaplan, 2001: p. viii). Thus, CR views language and writing as cultural phenomena which are significantly shaped by the culture in which the writer first learns how to write. Moreover, to the extent that writing is cultural, different cultures have developed different "situationally, generically, or stylistically compositional forms" (Scollon, 1997: p. 353) to respond to different contexts of writing, and that these forms vary from one language to another and from one culture to another. Furthermore, the stylistic compositional forms acquired in the writer's native language and culture often transfer to writing in the second or foreign language. In CR, it is important to note that interference is often manifested at the level of the writer's choice of content as well as his/her arrangement of that content to form particular genres of text.

In an influential essay entitled "*Cultural thought patterns in intercultural education*" published in the *Language Learning Journal*, Kaplan (1966) claimed that speakers of different languages write according to different rhetorical logics, and that these logics often transfer to writing in a second or foreign language:

It is apparent but not obvious that, at least to a very large extent, the organization of a paragraph, written in any language by any individual who is not a native speaker of that language, will carry the dominant imprint of that individual's culturally-coded orientation to the phenomenological world in which he lives and which is bound to interpret largely through the avenues available to him in his native language (Kaplan, 1972: p. 1).

Kaplan's original study included a comparison of 600 para-

graphs in English written by students from five major language families: English, Semitic, Oriental, Romance, and Russian. On the basis of an analysis of these paragraphs, Kaplan was able to identify five types of rhetorical tendencies within these groups. He claimed that the expository paragraphs written by Anglo-American students approached a topic in a "linear" and "direct" fashion, whereas paragraphs written by students belonging to the Semitic language group (e.g., Arabic and Hebrew) used a complex series of parallel coordinate constructions. Paragraphs by students with an Oriental language background (e.g., Japanese, Korean, and Chinese) approached a topic indirectly, and came to the main point at the end. Paragraphs written by the Romance language group (e.g., French, Spanish) included material which was only tangentially related to the main topic and allowed for more "freedom to digress or to introduce extraneous material" than in English (Kaplan, 1966: p. 12).

Following Kaplan's pioneering study, wide-scale investigations comparing writing in several languages with English have been carried out. These studies have generally corroborated Kaplan's findings and presented the traditional CR assumptions as universally valid (see, for example, Clyne, 1987 with respect to German and English and Duszak, 1994 with reference to Polish and English). Although these findings have instilled a healthy dose of relativism into the field of foreign/second language teaching and writing, they have led to various stereotypes and prejudices. Kramersch (2004) elaborates on this idea in the following terms:

It is easy to see why so many ESL (English as a second language) teachers of writing extrapolated from the nature of the students' native language to the logic of their paragraphs, and, from there to the innate logic of their minds and the intrinsic nature of their characters. Even though this was of course not what Kaplan had intended, many believed that Americans were direct and straightforward, Chinese devious and roundabout, and the French illogical and untrustworthy, and that those qualities were the direct result of the language they spoke (Kramersch, 2004: p. 254).

Although Kaplan (1987) and his followers did later denounce these extrapolations, he continued to link cultural differences to the structure of language itself arguing that rhetorical and stylistic differences are culturally conditioned and vary widely from one language to another, and that the stylistic and organizational forms which have been acquired in the writer's native language and culture often transfer to the writing in a second or foreign language.

Having introduced the assumptions on which the CR approach is based, I shall now move to address the major critical stands which have been raised against this approach.

Contrastive Rhetoric and the Linguistic Relativity Hypothesis

CR has been criticized for adopting a strong form of linguistic relativity which has been challenged by more recent studies of language, thought and culture (Gumperz & Levinson, 1996; Kramersch, 2004). According to Kramersch (2004: p. 254), many CR studies still maintain Kaplan's (1966, 1972) original position that "the acquisition of a second language really requires the simultaneous acquisition of a whole new universe and whole new way of looking at it" (Kaplan, 1972: p. 100). For

example, following Whorf (1956), Kaplan (1972) claims that cultural differences are inextricably linked to the structure of the language itself: “rhetorical and stylistic preferences are culturally conditioned and vary widely from language to language” (p. 103). But as Kramsch (2004: p. 254) maintains, the preferred styles and assumptions about genres of writing are transmitted through, and influenced by, schooling and the educational systems of a particular culture. In turn, these styles and assumptions are not static, but they are themselves permeable and open to other cultural and subcultural influences (Daoud, 1991; Davis & Bistodeau, 1993; Moreno, 1998).

Although the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis has been challenged especially in its strong form (i.e. language determines the mode of thinking), the weak version of the hypothesis (i.e. language influences thought) has been reexamined from a wider communication and discourse perspectives. For example, Stubbs (1997) claimed that Whorf asked the right question, but he “ormulated it wrongly” (p. 365). He suggested that rather than talking about the influence of language on thought, it would be more rewarding to talk about the influence of the *use* of certain language patterns on the receivers’ *judgments*.

Following Halliday (1978), Stubbs argued that different communities have developed their own semiotic conventions in order to express their preferred ways of representing reality. For Stubbs, the focus of CR studies should be not on language structure per se, but on “language use in discourse; not on grammar, but on systematic selections from the grammar” (p. 365). He proposed that instead of focusing on the grammatical potential of a particular language, discourse analysts should investigate the “effects of systematic selections (by language users) from this potential in actual language use in important social contexts” (p. 364). Stubbs’s (1997) proposal is a useful corrective for CR studies to focus on the *social action* that particular discourse forms serve in particular contexts and the *effect* which such forms may have on their respective audiences.

In their book *Rethinking Linguistic Relativity*, Gumperz and Levinson (1996) maintained that meaning went beyond lexical and grammatical patterning to comprise culture-specific activities and interpretive practices, and “these are located in the social networks one is socialized in” (p. 11). For the issue of linguistic relativity, the recognition of the culturally diverse ways of assigning meaning to certain speech events *in use* has meant a shift:

From an “inner circle” of links between grammar, categories, and culture as internalized by the individual, [to] an “outer-circle” of communication and its relation, on the one hand, to interaction in social settings and on the other hand to individual patterns of cognition which are partly contextually attuned, and even perhaps acquired primarily through patterns of communication, in turn enabling it (Gumperz & Levinson, 1996: p. 10).

For academic discourses, if the systematic selections of the grammar made by discourse communities determine meaning and interpretation made by disciplinary discourses, it follows that CR studies should focus on the characteristics of those communities, their preferred ways of writing and interpretation, and the functions that these cultural groups assign to systematic selections from the grammar.

Culture in CR: Conceptual Problems

It has become clear in recent years that CR seems to embrace

a linguistic and cultural determinism that considers second/foreign writers as prisoners/hostages of their own language and culture (Canagarajah, 2002). Many applied linguists have questioned such a view for seeming to give little or no space to human agency to transcend linguistic boundaries and cultural biases. According to Canagarajah (2002), “essentialist” definitions of culture—typical of CR studies—such as Connor’s (1996a: p. 101, but see Connor, 2004b) who defined culture as “a set of patterns and rules shared by a particular community”—tend to ignore the hybrid and heterogeneous nature of academic and educational cultures. For example, defining Oriental writing in terms of being reader-based and Anglo-American rhetoric as being writer-based (Hinds, 1987) ignores the diversity of styles within the two cultures and the changes undergone by them. In effect, it has been argued that “in this age of globalization, when (different scholars) shuttle between communities and enjoy multiple memberships, it is hard to pin down any person or community as characterized by an immutable set of values” (Canagarajah, 2002: p. 35).

In an attempt to overcome essentialist and reified definitions of culture, typical of CR studies, Atkinson (2004) argues that the concept of culture in current CR studies is ill-defined and confusing. Atkinson’s (2004) contribution to the field of CR is theoretical and conceptual. He maintains that so far CR has relied on an “underdeveloped,” “received,” “monolithic” and “deterministic” view of culture in order to explain differences in written texts. Building on mainstream thinking on cultural and postmodern studies, Atkinson proposes a view of culture as fluid, dynamic, and unpredictable. Following Adrian Holliday’s (1999) discussion of big vs. small cultures, Atkinson deconstructs the concept of culture into various subcultures to encompass “small cultures” (e.g. professional-academic culture, classroom culture, student culture, etc.). These small cultures would interact in highly complex ways with national, ethnic and international cultures. The case remains to be made, however, of how these small cultures may interact, intermingle and shape the finished written product in various genres. In other words, the conundrum of untangling the nature of this interaction in these written products remains to be solved.

“Inner-Circle” Varieties of English as a Point of Departure

It has been found that what is named as “inner-circle” varieties of English (British, American, Australian and Canadian varieties) do not constitute a single rhetorical tradition (Y. Kachru, 1995). Swales and Johns (reported in Swales, 1996) observe from their long-standing co-editing experience of the *English for Specific Purposes Journal: An international journal* that the existence of a single rhetorical tradition in what is called “the UK-US heartland” is highly questionable. According to them:

A British paper will begin with some interesting ideas, to be followed by some vague methodology and rather scrappy results. Its final section will just be a summary since the big ideas are all up-front anyway. On the other hand, a “typical American paper” will start off with an exhaustive review of the literature, followed by immensely painstaking methods and results sections. Only in the discussion, with the author’s credibility now established, will it come to full intellectual life. Textual dances of rather different kinds are being performed here. The

British dance steps are quick-quick-quick-repeat; the American, slow-slow-slow-quick” (Swales, 1996: p. 26).

As Swales was quick to point out, although these were simply crude caricatures, the lesson to be derived is that CR studies should avoid considering the Anglo-American rhetoric as “a *point of departure*” or constituting one single rhetorical tradition (p. 27, original emphasis).

Generic Intertextuality and Interdiscursivity

Moreover, and drawing on the concept of “intertextuality,” particularly as conceptualized by Bakhtin (1981, 1986), Swales (2001) has argued that one genre does not constitute a culture, but rather a complex system of genre sets. He maintains that “the idea of independent genres, such as the free-standing research article (RA), is an over-simplification, perhaps a necessary one in the early stages of analysis, but difficult to sustain in the longer term” (Swales, 2001: p. 49). Although empirical attempts demonstrating the operation of other genre sets in individual genres are lagging far behind theoretical formulations, CR studies has yet to grapple with the problem of intertextuality and interdiscursivity across genres.

Drawing on a rhetorical and linguistic analysis of introductions to academic books, Bhatia (1997) concluded that in the present-day competitive research environment, genres can no longer be seen to “maintain static values” (p. 181). Although the standard rhetorical moves in these introductions figured prominently (i.e. establishing the field and establishing a niche in that field), Bhatia found that the promotional input was far more pervasive and dominant than has hitherto been attested. This promotional intent has resulted in an extensive use of adjectives and adverbs. These strategies have brought these academic introductions closer to the genre of advertising:

As I see it, there is a clear indication of the fact that publishers use a socially recognized communicative purpose (i.e. introducing the academic work) and genres which are considered appropriate for the fulfillment of this purpose, to communicate private intentions (i.e. to promote the book), which conventionally were not considered part of the book introduction. This phenomenon of mixing “private intentions” with “socially recognized communicative purposes” is not a characteristic of academic introductions alone; it is widely used in other professional genres too, resulting in a mixing of genres (Bhatia, 1997: p. 187).

If this is the case; that is, if *genre mixing* has become the hallmark of contemporary academic research writing, then CR studies might find it useful, at least for analytical and pedagogical purposes, to account for how different disciplinary and national cultures use certain linguistic and rhetorical features associated with prior generic forms to modify or enhance the genre under construction.

There also remains the problem of oral influences on literate traditions in some cultures. Scollon (1997) addressed this problem when he criticized CR for its unjustified focus on literate written genres and its neglect of “oral-to-literate influences:”

Within the traditional contrastive rhetorical paradigm, as evidenced by many papers [...] there seems to me to remain an excess of focus on textual comparisons on the one hand, and on world literature cultures, on the other. In this highly intertextualized, interdiscursive world in which

most of us work, I would argue that oral-to-literate influences are as likely to be the major lines of influence as are cross-linguistic but same genre-influences (Scollon, 1997: p. 356).

Scollon gave as an example his own study of Hong Kong Chinese students’ English writing where he found that the major sources influencing this writing were the popular culture media of music, videos, film and fashion. Although Scollon’s study was concerned with the writing of students, rather than expert writers, it is highly recommended that CR analysts should move beyond what Adrian Holliday (1996: p. 234) called “the narrow emic view of verbatim data” if they were to explain variations in written texts.

Establishing Appropriate Tertia Comparationis

Comparing texts across languages and cultures is no easy matter. Methodological problems abound. As Claire Krmasch (2004: pp. 254-255) observes “an essay is not an essay is not an essay when written in different languages for different audiences with different purposes in mind.” Moreover, it has been found that the same names given to genres across national educational systems are not methodologically reliable. For example, Mauranen (1994) has shown that same labels given to genres such as *the Seminar* and *the Essay* have distinctive functions and values in the Finnish and British educational systems:

In the English (Kent) system, each unit known as a “course” is a cluster of very closely interlinked genres. A certain number of these make up a year, and three completed years constitute a degree. The Finnish (Jyvaskela) system consists of smaller course units, each covering one or two discourse types only, but the units combine into larger wholes which constitute stages in the study system, and completing all the stage earns a degree (Mauranen, 1994: p. 6).

In an attempt to address the problem of establishing a common platform for CR studies, Connor and Moreno (2005) proposed a methodology based on the construct of “*tertium comparationis* or common platform of comparison” (p. 154). This construct requires that CR studies should, first, compare texts or textual elements which can be compared. It consists of a three-level procedure: a) identifying texts for corpora; b) selecting textual concepts to be studied in the corpora; and c) identifying linguistic features that are to be used to realize these concepts (p. 154).

Connor’s and Moreno’s (2005) article builds on an earlier study by Moreno (1998) of the expression of premise-conclusion signaling devices in a corpus of RAs written by Spanish and English academic writers. Examples of these devices comprise such signals as connectives (e.g. *therefore*, *as a consequence*), and expressions such as *the results indicate that* (for a full taxonomy, see Moreno, 1998: pp. 561-562). In order to maximize the similarity constraints in her corpus, Moreno (1998) identified five *tertium comparationis*. These are: *text form* = expository writing; *genre* = RA; *subject-matter/topic* = *business and economics*; *level of expertise* = *expert writers*, and *global superstructure*: *introductions-methods-discussion* sections of RAs, and other rhetorical patterns as *Problem-Solution-Evaluation*.

Using qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis, Mo-

reno (1998) found striking similarities in the use and distribution of the expression of premise-conclusion in the two writing corpora. These similarities were explained by the influence of English-speaking academia on Spanish business education, such as the frequent use of English language business materials in Spanish schools and universities. The only difference, however, emerged at the interpersonal/interactional level of text (Halliday, 1978), especially in the expression of claims and counterclaims. Unlike their American peers, Spanish academics tend to express claims with conviction and confidence. This was shown by the frequent use of hedges in the American texts and the paucity of such devices in the Spanish texts. Although Moreno's contribution (1998) is essentially methodological, her results suggest a great level of increasing homogenization across academic cultures as a result of the growing global influence of the American academic culture. This influence remains to be shown, however, for the case of other distant languages and cultures. Of particular interest here are questions of difference and accommodation in textual form and organization in lingua franca contexts as academic writers should learn how to address larger and highly competitive research communities. There also remains the question of resistance to the dominant culture and the rhetorical strategies that may be employed in order to negotiate and/or oppose the hegemony of such culture (Canagarajah, 2002, 2007).

Intercultural Rhetoric: A Discourse Approach

Building on Srikant Sarangi's (1995) discussion of the concepts of culture and language in intercultural pragmatic research, Connor (2004b) suggests using the term *intercultural rhetoric*, instead of CR, in order to designate the "analysis of an actual encounter between two participants who represent different linguistic and cultural backgrounds" (Sarangi 1995: p. 22). She suggests that this term help both avoid the "static" model associated with traditional CR studies and subsume "the current dynamic models of cross-cultural research" (Connor, 2004b: p. 272).

Aware of the methodological problems inherent in current cultural comparisons of academic practice, Mauranen (2001) introduces the term "glocalization" (Robertson, 1995) in order to counteract such essentialist, simplified and stereotypical constructions of writing traditions and cultures. She argues that "the universal, or the general, and the local are mutually defining, and they receive their meanings and identities from each other. Local identities arise from intercultural encounters, brought about or accelerated by globalization" (Mauranen, 2001: p. 51). Mauranen's (2001) idea, though so often assumed than actually realized, points to the need to depart from abstract comparisons of cultures and individuals and to focus, instead, on the co-constructive and dynamic aspects of communication and discourse in situated action and language use.

A discourse approach to intercultural communication is exactly the one expounded by Scollon and Scollon (2001) in an article entitled "*Discourse and intercultural communication*." In this article, Scollon and Scollon (2001) introduced the concept of *interdiscourse communication* in order to avoid the methodological demurrals associated with traditional intercultural communication cultural studies. Building on Gee's (1999) Foucault's-inspired (1972) notion of Discourse (with a capital d) as constituting "ways of being in the world, or forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social

identities" (p. 17), Scollon and Scollon (2001: p. 543) propose treating culture as "a minor discursive formation at best." That is, culture as constituting "one of a very wide range of discourses at play in any particular instance of discourse" (p. 543).

Scollon and Scollon (2001) take Gee's (1999) concept of Discourses or discourse systems as providing a "conceptual framework" (p. 542) which helps to deconstruct "reified cultural or social identities on the one hand and of apriorist views of the person on the other" (p. 542). This perspective is outlined in the following terms:

We take the position that in any instance of actual communication we are mutually positioned within an indefinite number of Discourses (in the Gee sense) or within what we have called discourse systems. These discourse systems would include those of gender, generation, profession, corporate or institutional placement, regional, ethnic, and other possible identities. As each of these discourse systems is manifested in a complex network of forms of discourse, face relationships, socialization patterns and ideologies, this multiple membership and identity produces simultaneous internal (to the person) and external contradictions (Scollon & Scollon, 2001: p. 544).

Thus, in this perspective, the discourse system of a certain professional culture would comprise such elements as forms and functions of discourse, socialization, enculturation and acculturation patterns, ideologies (beliefs, values and power relations), and face systems (projection of self and ingroup and outgroup membership). In this sense, culture is seen as an emergent and "ongoing process of construction and negotiation" (Kramsch, 2002: p. 281) interacting with, and impinging on, these elements of discourse.

Kramsch (2002: p. 281) singles out three principles on which this perspective on intercultural communication is based:

- 1) "Intercultural communication is *social action*." It is not a "representation of thought or values". It is "an ecological phenomenon, based on a tacit *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1977), that positions the participants and socializes them into members of communities of practice while differentiating them from other non-members;"
- 2) Social action takes shape through communication;
- 3) Communicative practice is "embedded in history i.e. in contradictions and complications. It is characterized by interdiscursivity, intertextuality, and dialogicality" (p. 281).

In a second step, Scollon and Scollon (2001: pp. 544-545) outlined the methodology which can be followed in the analysis of a typical intercultural communicative exchange. First, a discourse approach would begin by assuming that individuals in communication in professional or institutional settings belong to different cultural groups and that their communication can be treated as a problem in communication. Second, quantitative or qualitative discourse studies can be established to analyze the typical linguistic and rhetorical patterns followed by these groups and the perceptions and values that these groups would assign to these patterns. Third, through a close analysis of this discourse patterns actually produced, the discourse analyst would identify the problems which may have led to a communication breakdown. This breakdowns is to be found not in the assumed entities of linguistic and cultural membership, but in

patterns of language use, in the history of socialization of groups into different discourse communities, and a “misunderstanding of contextualization cues (Gumperz, 2001) in the actual situation of communicating with each other” (p. 545). Overall, the analysis would impose the concept of cultural membership only when this variable is emergent and invoked by the participants themselves.

Having summarized the principles on which this discourse approach to intercultural communication is based and outlined the methodology which it attempts to employ, I shall now move to provide some examples in order to illustrate this framework.

The Case Study

The first example comes from my own doctoral study of a major twentieth century scientific controversy in the early 1980s over AIDS research (Helal, 2009, Helal, forthcoming). The controversy was about claiming priority rights for the discovery of the AIDS virus between French scientists at the Institut Pasteur in Paris and American scientists at the National Institutes of Health in Maryland. The controversy was played out predominantly in leading Anglophone journals based in the UK and USA. In particular, I set out to investigate some of the features of the style used by both research teams and to tentatively suggest some of the reasons for the French research authors’ performance in the debate, which was considered poor from both the American and international perspectives.

On the methodological level, the RAs published by the American and French scientists during one of the major 20th-century scientific disputes provided ideal equivalent contrasting parameters which have been deemed as one, but so far unattained, design features in contrastive discourse analysis studies. Besides their belonging to the same field, the RAs published by the French and American research teams during the so-called “AIDS virus hunt” seemed to satisfy Swales’s (2004 *tertia comparationis* of “status, likely audience reached, and level of rewriting and editorial gatekeeping” (p. 244).

Using a combination of a rhetorical model adopted from Swales (1990) and a concordance software to analyze the RA introductions written by both research team, I found interesting similarities and differences, but since the differences were so striking, let me provide a quick synopsis. It was found that both research teams based their presentation on the introductory schema described in the CARS model. This was shown by the emergence of the three moves in both paper sets. Substantial differences emerged, however, at the level of the development and elaboration of the schema. While the French research authors followed a simple, relaxed and unelaborated pattern, their American counterparts opted for a recycled and elaborated pattern of presentation by consistently reviewing previous literature and deducing research conclusions from it. These results in the American papers being longer than the French ones.

The qualitative analysis of the argumentation patterns followed by each research team indicated that while the French proceeded with an inductive pattern of presentation characterized by the reticence and the reluctance of the French scientists to distinguish their virus from the American one and to implicate it as the causative agent of the disease, the American proceeded with a deductive and bold style. This was shown by the use of such statements as “*We are testing the possibility that ...*” “*That our virus is the cause of AIDS can be suggested by...*” In short, if the American rhetoric was geared to justify-

ing “why we are considering this possibility,” the French rhetoric was directed to “here is what we found and here we attempt to describe how we had found it.” The rhetorical and argumentation patterns followed by each research team were further confirmed by analyzing the use of sentence connectors, personal pronouns, hedges and boosters which emphasized the fact-based orientation of the French prose vs. the argument-based orientation of the American one during the AIDS controversy. However, by the end of the controversy, certain accommodating rhetorical acts on the French part were observed. This made the French papers look much more like the American ones and much more engaged with scientific argumentation than in the onset of the controversy.

Rather than *attributing* these differences, noted especially in French texts to the *quintessentially Gallic* character of the French intellectual style, or to linguistic interference of some kind as many contrastive rhetoricians would have believed (e.g. Galtung, 1988), I attempted to account for their characteristics in terms of the American and French scientists’ perception as to what constitutes appropriate academic conduct during the debate, the way they constructed their readership, and the sociopolitics of knowledge production in French and American cultures. The explanation in terms of the construction of readership was supported by interview data with one of the leaders of the French scientists who indicates “it is not a question of lack of confidence or competence or ‘humility’ in making a case (as many had thought), we expected them (the readers) to put two and two together” (Francoise-Barre Sinoussi, interview data, cited in Reeves, 1998: p. 9-10).

Differences in the sociopolitics of knowledge production were supported by the idea that that during the 1980s the paradigm of the “hard-sell competitive approach” characteristic of the American science seemed not to find its way to French science and so the French scientists were still subscribing to “an enlightenment ethic.” This is, as humble servants in the discipline working in the name of Science, it appeared that the French scientists saw no need to provide an elaborated and lengthy rhetorical defense of the topic. What was important was to get the facts right. This reading was further supported by the French research authors’ association of American rhetoric with politics and salesmanship: “We have learned more of politics than of science during all this. We never thought we would have to be good salesmen in order to be heard” (Montagnier, head of the French research team cited in Shilts, 1987: p. 496). Similar accounts in the scientific literature also attest to the conservative and rigid nature of French scientific institutions (Balzer, 1998: pp. 312-314).

Although the accommodations in French rhetorical style noted in the later papers posed something of a puzzle which could not immediately be solved, two explanatory factors were suggested. The first was attributed to developmental factors, and the second to the sociolinguistic factor. The first factor was that the French scientists who participated in the controversy were learning the style associated with the global scientific culture. The second factor was that sociolinguistic research suggested that the process of speech accommodation operates on the principle that individuals adjust their speech so as to induce others to “evaluate them more favorably by reducing dissimilarities between them” (Giles & Powesland, 1997: p. 233) regardless of all the risks they may undergo.

Building on the Bakhtinian (1986) view of genre as being the property of discourse communities and their accumulated ex-

perience (Bakhtin, 1986), I suggested that the “AIDS War” could be interpreted as a “genre war,” that is, a clash between two generic conventions and ways of constructing and responding to particular events. Moreover, since rhetoric is both a mode of conflict and a means of managing and building communities (Gross & Keith, 1997), it seemed to me that the controversy analyzed in the study was not between an appropriate, inappropriate or a reserved style or an audacious and powerful one, but between two genres and two discourse communities involved in what Kramsch and Thorne (2002: p. 99) called “global communicative practice.”

As this study and other similar ones have indicated (Frederickson & Swales, 1994) meaning and interpretation are essentially determined by discourse community characteristics and the writer’s orientation to, and construction of, that community rather than by such static concepts as language and culture. Clearly, if texts have different organizations, it is because they have different communicative purposes, and their readerships have different orientations and expectations. Such explanation is far from the traditional assumptions of CR. I believe that if the CR agenda is to move forward, it should attempt to set aside such a priori notions as the writer’s language and culture if it were to adequately continue “trying to understand the distant other in order to better understand ourselves” (Swales, 1996: p. 25) and to promote a fair, healthy and non-deficit model of intercultural communication.

Conclusion

The main argument of this paper has been that in a world where the notion of national cultures is being eroded by international academic (and otherwise) transactions and alliances, the time seems apt to depart from such a priori, often static concepts as language, thought and culture. It proposes to focus, instead, on the co-constructive aspects of communications, and the meanings and identities arising in concrete and situated rhetorical action. Clearly, it has become increasingly established that the analysis of decontextualized and synchronic texts from abstract entities across-cultural and linguistic boundaries will lead to certain stereotypes and prejudices which are unwanted both for research and pedagogical practice. The study has advanced a number of examples which could lend further proof to this growing trend in intercultural academic rhetoric. I believe that a discourse approach, in the sense advanced by Scollon and Scollon (2001), and exemplified in this paper can serve as a useful theoretical framework not only for appreciating the differences found in intercultural academic rhetoric, but also for the teaching of academic writing whether in Anglophone or non-Anglophone writing contexts. A discourse approach to intercultural rhetoric does not dispense with the concepts of language, culture and identity. Rather, it forces us to examine these constructs as arising from the discursive management of these constructs in situation rhetorical action.

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