

The Effects of L1 Rhetorical Styles on L2 Writing Quality

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This study is a small-scale replication study of Kubota (1998). Kubota discovered that L1 rhetoric was not the main cause of L2 writing problems. The conclusion of Kubota's study was in contrast to that of contrastive rhetoric research that claimed that the use of L1 rhetorical styles in L2 writing negatively affects the quality of L2 writing, in particular, at the organizational level. According to Kubota(1998), the use of Japanese rhetorical styles did not deteriorate the quality of English writing. By investigating Korean ESL learners, this replication study examined whether L1 and L2 writings have the same rhetorical styles and how L1 rhetorical styles affect the L2 writing quality. The study analyzed Korean and English persuasive writings written by 12 Korean ESL learners in terms of organization. The results show that Korean learners of English used different rhetorical styles in their L1 Korean writing and L2 English writing. However, there was a positive relationship between L1 Korean and L2 English organization scores.

[L2 writing/L1 transfer, 작문/모국어 전이]

I. INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the most challenging areas for L2 learners to acquire. There are many factors involved in difficulties in writing. Even though writing problems cannot be attributed to a particular factor, organizational problems among various factors are usually to blame for the major cause for L2 writing difficulty. It is not uncommon that even students who are fluent in a language organize a text that does not match the linguistic and cultural convention of the target language, making the text unclear and inconsistent to readers. According to contrastive rhetoric research, it has been strongly believed that L2 learners organize their L2 writing depending on their culturally preferred writing styles and that these L1 rhetorical styles negatively interfere with L2 writing.

However, there are many reasons making it difficult to hold true to this belief. Nowadays, in many language classrooms, it is observed that English learners are instructed based on an organization of English texts. It is likely that students are well aware of the common English organization patterns; especially, in writing courses for test preparation such as TWE (Test of Written English), the organization is one of the most focused areas of instructions. Therefore, the transfer of L1 rhetorical styles does not always occur in L2 writings.

In this light, it is noteworthy that Kubota (1998) found that Japanese students didn't write in English the same way they did in Japanese and that no particular rhetorical styles affected L2 writing organization scores. In order to confirm the result, this study examined Korean ESL (English as a Second Language) learners.

II. L1-L2 TRANSFER IN WRITING

In dealing with the issue of L1-L2 transfer in writing, Kubota (1998) disproved the argument of contrastive rhetoric research. Contrastive rhetoric studies originated from Kaplan (1966) who analyzed the organization of paragraphs in expository English essays written by 600 ESL students. In his study, different types of paragraph formation were identified according to ethnic groups: Arabic, Oriental, French and Russian groups. Kaplan (1966) argued that

language reflects thought patterns as a part of effective communication and that each culture has particular forms of thought. In addition, the analysis showed that the types of paragraph formation were also different from that of English native speakers. The culture-specific rhetoric resulted in deviations from the expected rhetorical conventions in English.

The Kaplan's early work sparked many similar studies which contribute to the area of L2 writing instructions. As Leki (1991) mentions, the results of contrastive rhetoric studies can be used to make learners aware that preferred writing styles in L1 might be different from the styles that L2 readers expect. In addition, language teachers are able to assess students' strengths and weaknesses in L2 writing styles according to the students' cultural backgrounds, since cultural conventions have a role in the learning of a second language.

However, contrastive rhetoric research has been criticized mainly because of its ethnocentric viewpoints and methodological problems. While English is considered as the norm, culture-specific rhetorical styles are misunderstood as deviations. In particular, some studies pointed out drawbacks of the research method in Kaplan's study. Kaplan's work is limited since it looked at only completed L2 texts of students and lacked explanatory power to describe the complex writing process (Leki, 1991; Liebman, 1992). In addition, the categorization of language groups in the Kaplan study was problematic. Oriental group in Kaplan's study included Chinese, Thai, and Korea speakers, even though there might be linguistic and cultural differences in these related languages (Hinds, 1983).

More importantly, L1 rhetorical style was not the sole explanation for students' writing difficulties. According to Mohan and Lo (1985), learners' previous experience in writing instruction with the emphasis on sentence-level accuracy (e.g. grammatical correctness) might be a variable in student difficulties. In particular, Kubota (1998) provided results that contradicted the main arguments of contrastive rhetoric. According to contrastive rhetoric, students write in L2 based on L1 rhetorical patterns and these culturally specific L1 writing patterns interfere with L2 writing abilities. However, in Kubota's study, students didn't write in English the same way as in Japanese. The use of similar or dissimilar patterns in Japanese and English writing didn't affect the

quality of English writing. In addition, Kubota found a positive correlation between Japanese and English organization scores, suggesting that many L2 writing problems might result from the lack in organizing a coherent text in L1 rather than the influence of L1 rhetorical styles.

Kubota (1998) investigated whether English writing quality deteriorated due to the use of the Japanese specific patterns, or the same patterns in Japanese and English. In Kubota's study, 22 students wrote on an expository topic and 24 wrote on a persuasive topic. Two raters evaluated Japanese and English writing, respectively, in terms of organization and each writing was given a organization score. Also, they decided rhetorical styles based on the location of main ideas, and macro-level features. In terms of rhetorical styles, students were divided into two groups, a "similar" group and a "dissimilar" group. If the two essays were the same with respect to two dimensions, they were identified as "similar" and if they were different on both dimensions or one dimension, they were identified as "dissimilar."

The main finding of Kubota's study was that L1 rhetorical styles did not affect L2 writing scores. There was a close relationship between Japanese and English organization scores. Those who received a good score in Japanese writing received a good score in English writing. Similarities in L1 and L2 rhetorical patterns did not cause negative transfer and the use of dissimilar rhetorical patterns generally resulted in the similar organization scores. Therefore, L1 organization skills influenced L2 writing rather than L1 rhetorical patterns. The good Japanese writers were the good English writers regardless of the use of L1/L2 similar patterns or dissimilar patterns. Further, there were cases where ESL organization scores were better than the Japanese organization scores. It was found that the students with good English skills consciously or unconsciously used dissimilar structures based on perception about culturally-preferred rhetorical patterns. The study showed that the transfer of L1 writing style was not the only reason for L2 writing problems.

This study replicated Kubota's study in order to see if the results of Kubota's study on Japanese learners would be applicable to Korean learners. Even though it is said that Japanese rhetoric bears a close resemblance to Korean rhetoric, there has been little research focused only on Korean writings. Kaplan (1972) argues that paragraphs in Korean include seemingly unnecessary

wanderings about the topic. Eggington (1987) argues that the indirectness is due to the effects of a traditional rhetorical pattern, *Ki-Sung-Chon-Kyul*, which is originated from the Chinese *Qi-Cheng-Jun-He* styles. These styles include four units consisting of an introduction, a development of a topic, a turning to a somewhat unrelated topic, and a conclusion. The third part typically contributes to nonlinear structural development and leads to a lack of unity and coherence for western readers. According to Hinds (1990), the traditional Korean and Japanese patterns have “delayed introduction of purpose,” and fail to connect the main topic. The purpose of this replication study is to examine Korean which is closely related to Japanese in terms of rhetorical styles.

Like Kubota’s study, the main purpose of the study is to investigate whether similar rhetorical styles occur in L1 and L2 writing and how the similar and dissimilar rhetorical structures between L1 and L2 affect L2 organization scores. In dealing with the role of L1 transfer in L2 writing, in particular, in organization of L2 writing, the research questions for this study are the following:

- 1) Are there any similarities in rhetorical styles between Korean and English writings written by Korean learners of English?
- 2) How does the use of similar or dissimilar rhetorical styles affect the quality of English writing?

III. RESEARCH METHOD

1. Participants

This study examined 12 Korean students who studied at Michigan State University. They volunteered for this study. Five of them were students in English as Academic Purpose (EAP) or Intensive English Program classes at the English Language Center at MSU. Six of them were graduate students and one was an undergraduate student. Five of them were female and seven of them were male. Their ages ranged from 22 to 30. Three of them had been in America for more than 3 months. The others had been in America for less than

8 years. The profile of the students is shown in Table 1

TABLE 1
Profile of the Students

Student ID	Age	Program	The Length of Stay in America
A1	23	EAP	7 months
A2	22	EAP	7 months
A3	30	Graduate	4 years
A4	28	Graduate	4 years
A5	27	IEP	6 months
A6	33	Graduate	3 years
A7	28	IEP	8 months
A8	27	Undergraduate	1 and a half years
A9	27	Graduate	8 months
A10	30	Graduate	1 and a half years
A11	21	ELC	3 months
A12	29	Graduate	2 years

2. Writing Tasks

Kubota proposed that learners should be examined as individuals. His study employed within-subject analyses where L1 and L2 writings of the same students were compared. This method is believed to be superior to other methods. Contrastive rhetoric studies usually examined ESL texts only, making the L1 writing ability difficult to be considered as an influencing factor for writing developments. The contrastive rhetoric study also compared L1 writing written by one group to L2 writing written by another group. This method is problematic because the two selected groups might not represent the target population groups. For example, Japanese writings written by people with strong English education backgrounds might not reflect Japanese-specific rhetorical patterns.

Therefore, using within-subject analyses, in this study, two different 35-minute essay assignments were given to the same students. In this study, to avoid L1 transfer from the first essay to the second, two different prompts with similar content were chosen. Half of the students wrote first in Korean, and

half of them wrote first in English. For the Korean writing, students were asked to write their own opinions on whether violence on TV should be restricted. For the English writing, students were asked to write their own opinions on early education (under the age of 5). The prompts for each writing assignment are as follows.

English Writing Task: Some people think that children should begin their formal education at a very early age (under the age of 5) and should spend most of their time on school studies. Please take a position for OR against early education. Write an essay for 35 minutes.

Korean Writing Task: There is a growing concern about violence on TV. In your opinion, should violence on TV restricted? Please take a position for OR against the restriction. Write an essay for 35 minutes.

3. Data Analysis

The ESL writings and Korean writings were evaluated in terms of organization. The scoring rubric developed by Kubota was used, ranging from 5 (excellent) to 1 (poor) (see Appendix 1). The raters were asked not to consider vocabulary and language use which were likely to affect the quality of L2 writings.

There were four evaluators. Two native English speakers who were teaching English at the English Language Center scored the ESL writings. Two Korean speakers who were graduate students majoring in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) scored the Korean writings. The rubric was first explained to the raters. All the raters agreed on the descriptors. After each essay was scored holistically by the two raters independently, the two raters' scores on each essay were combined to make a total rating which ranged from 10 (excellent) to 2 (poor).

In order to categorize rhetorical styles, text analysis was conducted based on Kubota's criteria which focuses on (1)the location of main idea(s) and (2)the macro-level rhetorical pattern. The location of a main idea was identified as either (1)initial, (2)middle, (3)final, (4)collection, or (5)obscure (see Appendix 2). The study used five main macro-level rhetorical patterns such as Collection

(Col), Comparison (Comp), Explanation (Exp), Specification (Spec), and Induction (Ind). (See Appendix 3).

Before the research was used to analyze the students' writings, in order to establish the reliability of coding, the English native speakers and the Korean native speakers who scored the students' essays coded the English essays and the Korean essays respectively. After the coders read the criteria and coded the essay, raters discussed in order to arrive at an agreement where there was a discrepancy.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 2 shows the scores of organization, the location of the main ideas, and the macro-level patterns of students' Korean and English writings. According to the results of this analysis, students were divided into two groups, a "similar" group and a "dissimilar" group. If the two writings were the same with respect to two dimensions, they were identified as "similar" and if they were different on both dimensions or one dimension, they were identified as "dissimilar." Based on this criteria, only A7 used the same rhetorical style in both Korean and English writings.

TABLE 2
Analysis of Korean and English Writings

Student ID	Korean			English		
	Scores	Main Idea	Macro Level	Scores	Main Idea	Macro Level
A1	7	Final	Ind	9	Initial	Comp->Exp
A2	8	Final	Ind (col)	5	Initial	Comp-Exp
A3	5	Initial	Exp (col)	5	Initial	Exp (comp)
A4	3	Obscure	Col	4	Obscure	Other
A5	7	Initial	Exp (comp)	7	Initial	Exp (col)
A6	7	Initial	Exp (col)	7	Final	Ind

A7	4	Initial	Exp (col)	5	Initial	Exp(col)
A8	7	Final	Ind	6	Initial	Exp (col)
A9	8	Initial	Spec(col)	7	Initial	Exp (col)
A10	7	Initial	Comp-> Exp	10	Initial	Exp (col)
A11	3	Obscure	Other	2	Initial	Com->Exp
A12	6	Final	Comp->Exp	3	Initial	Other

Scores = Scores of Organization
Main Ideas = The Location of the Main Ideas
Macro = The Macro-level Patterns

The results showed that the L1/L2 common location of the main idea pattern was initial. The L1/L2 common macro-level rhetorical pattern was identified as Exp (col). With respect to the location of the main idea, five out of twelve put the main ideas in the initial position both in Korean and English. With respect to the macro-level rhetorical pattern, only one student (A7) used Exp (col) both in Korean and in English essays. There was only a pair of essays that were the same with respect to the two dimensions (A7). Except A7, the Korean and English essays were different on both dimensions or one dimension.

As for the organization scores, mean scores for Korean and English essays are 6.0 and 5.8 respectively. Appendix 4 and 5 includes students' writings who received the best score in Korean and English, respectively. Table 2 shows that Korean essays received higher scores than the ESL essays. In Korean essays, four students out of twelve received below average scores. In English essays, six students out of twelve received below average scores. Except A10 and A12, the organization scores for Korean and English were close, suggesting that L1 writing ability affects the L2 writing quality.

Effects of using a particular rhetorical structure on the ESL score were identified as follows. First, the use of similar patterns resulted in the same effect which means the similar scores in the two writings. In A7, the use of the L1/L2 common pattern results in below average scores in both Korean and ESL. There are no instances of negative transfer of L1-specific pattern where the use of similar structures resulted in a considerably lower ESL score than a Korean score.

Second, the use of dissimilar patterns also resulted in the same effect. In A3,

A4, A7, and A11, both Korean and ESL organization scores were rated below the mean. In A1, A5, A6, A8, A9, and A10, there was the same positive effect since both Korean and ESL organization scores were rated above the mean.

Third, the use of dissimilar patterns resulted in the negative but not positive effect. There was no positive effect where a Korean score rated below the mean and an ESL organization score rated above the mean. However, in A2 and A12, there was a negative effect where a Korean score rated average or above the mean and an ESL organization score rated below the mean.

The results show that the use of similar/dissimilar rhetorical style did not seem to affect the organization scores for Korean and English. The results confirm Kubota (1989)'s results that L1 organization skills rather than L1 rhetorical styles are possible causes for writing problems. In this study, most of the students used different patterns in Korean and ESL writings. In addition, the rhetorical styles did not interact with the organization scores of Korean and ESL writings. Instead, the L1 and L2 organization scores were closely related, implying that L1 organizational skills were transferred to L2 writing.

V. CONCLUSION

The study shows that the results of Kubota (1998) hold for Korean learners of English. Like Kubota (1998), L1 rhetorical styles did not transfer to English writing negatively. Korean ESL students did not organize their ESL texts in the same way they did their Korean writing and the use of L1 rhetorical structures did not negatively affect the quality of their ESL essays. Instead, there were negative transfer of poor organization skills. Lack in organizing a coherent L1 text resulted in poor organizations in ESL writings. The result implies that L1 rhetorical styles are not only the conclusive component of L2 writing organization. This result also shows that Kubota's method is useful in finding the writing problems of language learners. This study replicates Kubota's research method that analyzed L1 writing and L2 writing written by the same student. If this study had examined only English writings or compared Korean writing and English writing written by different groups, it could have not found the relationship between L1 and L2 writing skills.

In addition, the study shows the preferred features of Korean and English short persuasive writings. In the present study, in both Korean and English writings, most students preferred to locate a main idea in the initial position and to use Exp (col). However, there were no L1/L2 common patterns where the two writings were the same with respect to the two dimensions. Further, even though Exp(col) is frequent, there were no L1 specific or L2 specific patterns.

Since the present study is a small-scale replication study, there exist many problems. First of all, research method is too limited to generalize the results of the study. It is necessary that future studies include more subjects, and consider variables such as genres and topics of writings. The length of writing might be a very important factor in creating a particular rhetorical style. In addition, in order to explain the effects of transfer of L1 writing organizational skills, it would be useful if the study included the information about previous L1 and L2 writing experience procured by interviews and questionnaires. For example, the low ESL scores of A2 and A12 who receive higher Korean scores might be caused by low L2 proficiency or other factors. Therefore, The sources of English organization problems might be diverse. It is more likely that L2 writing styles do not result only from the various L1 per se, but rather from L2 proficiency, L1 writing ability or previous English instruction. In addition to the rhetorical styles, other components that constitute clear and coherent writing should be focused in writing classrooms.

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APPENDIX 1

Holistic Scoring of Organization (Kubota 1998, p.96)

Score 5 : Excellent

Main idea(s) is stated clearly and effectively.

There is a clear sense of beginning and ending and they work very effectively.

Reader orientation (e.g., announcing the topic) is provided.
Details are organized according to a clearly discernable plan.
There is no digression.
Sentences and paragraphs are logically and effectively linked together.
Paragraphing is logical and effective.

Score 4 : Very good

Main idea(s) is stated, but less effectively than 5.
Beginning and ending are effective.
Some reader orientation is provided.
Details are organized according to a discernable plan.
There is little digression.
Sentences and paragraphs are linked together well.
Paragraphing is good.

Score 3 : Average

Main idea(s) is stated, but not as effectively or logically as 4.
There is a sense of beginning and ending, but they aren't as effective as 4.
Some reader orientation is provided, but not as effectively as 4.
There is an organizational plan, but it does not appear as clearly as 4.
There is a flow, but some digression is seen.
Sentences and paragraphs are linked together, but a little awkwardly.
There are paragraph breaks but they are a little awkward.

Score 2 : Not very good

Main idea(s) is not stated clearly or effectively.
Beginning and ending are awkward and not very effective.
Reader orientation is not provided very much; even if it is, it is not very effective.
Writer's plan is not very clear; the writer rambles on.
Digression is seen often.
The links between sentences and paragraphs are awkward and not very logical.
Paragraph breaks are awkward and not very logical.

Score 1 : Poor

Main idea(s) is not stated.

The writer creates little sense of beginning and ending.

Writer assumes the reader shares his context provides no orientation.

There is no discernable organizational plan; the writer either lists or follows an associative order.

There is frequent digression.

There is no logical link between sentences and paragraphs.

There is no paragraph break, or no logic in the breaks.

APPENDIX 2

Location of Main Idea(s) : Persuasive (Kubota 1998, pp.98–99)

1. Initial

The writer's opinion is stated in the introduction.

2. Middle

The writer's opinion is stated in the middle section.

3. Final

The writer's opinion in the conclusion.

4. Collection

There is no encompassing statement of the writer's opinion but the opinion is expressed in more than one location.

5. Obscure

The writer's opinion on the restriction is not clearly stated.

APPENDIX 3

Macro-Level Patterns: Persuasive (Kubota 1998, p.100)

1. Col

Equally weighted arguments on the topic are juxtaposed.

2. Comp

Two elements are stated in a relationship of compare/contrast, adversative or alternative.

3. Explanation

3.1. Exp

The writer's opinion on the topic is presented and then a supporting reason is stated.

3.2. Exp(Col)

The writer's opinion on the topic is presented and then supporting reasons are enumerated.

3.3. Exp(Comp)

The writer's opinion on the topic is presented and then a supporting reason is presented by comparing or contrasting two elements.

4. Specifications

4.1. Spec

The writer's opinion and a preview statement of a supporting reason or a point of view for the subsequent argument are presented, and then it is explained in more detail.

4.2. Spec(Col)

The writer's opinion and a preview statement of a supporting reason or a point of view for the subsequent argument are presented, and then the reasons or arguments are explained in more detail by enumeration.

4.3. Spec(Comp)

The writer's opinion and a preview statement of a supporting reason or a point of view for the subsequent argument are presented, and then the reasons or arguments are explained in more detail by comparing/contrasting two elements.

5. Comp -> Exp

After an opinion which is against the writer's opinion is stated and it is supported by a reason.

6. Induction

6.1. Ind

The main idea is placed at the end and preceding arguments constitute supporting reason(s) for it.

6.2. Ind(Col)

The writer's opinion is realized in the final section; the preceding arguments constitute premises or reasons which are arranged in a form of enumeration.

6.3. Comp -> Ind

After two elements are stated in a relationship of compare/contrast, adversative or alternative, the writer's opinion is drawn at the end.

7. Other

None of the above.

APPENDIX 4

Translation of Korean Essay

A lot of people spend a considerable amount of time in front of their TV unconsciously when they are at home. They tend to get less and less sensitive to the very contents of the programs in TV while the program producers are more and more eager to devise programs that are provocative and inflammatory. The adults have the capability to filter out and to select programs that are best suitable for themselves but the children are exposed to the sensational programs without protective filtering barriers. The violence on TV may lead to some potential problems and issues.

First, the imitation might turn out to be a problem. The children have a natural tendency to copy after the violence they had seen on TV without any second thought and without any regard to the resulting outcome to which they have not expected to happen. Only a month ago, there was a real case of a six-year old boy killing another six-year old boy in the city of Flint in the course of only pretending to threaten him. One may point out some plausible reasons, but the violence on TV must have played a considerable part of it.

Second, the children may appeal to the violence as not a last resort but as an effective way and means of settling down any disputes that they may face. Actually, most of the violence on TV plays a crucial role in solving a significant number of cases when everything, in certain situations, went against the heroes/heroines. In everyday life, on the other hand, there seems to be a lot of better ways and means to settle down disputes as one could easily imagine.

The violence on TV does have a harmful influence on immature children and that is the very reason why the violence on TV has to be duly controlled and checked.

APPENDIX 5

A Sample of English Essay

It is very controversial issue that whether the formal education for children should be put at the very early age or not. Assuming that the education is not for only knowledge, I agree to the early education.

First, children will have precious opportunity to get peer relations. Getting education has more important meaning than learning knowledge or skill. They can learn how to get along with their friends, how to interact and how to communicate each other. This is peculiar aspect of institutional education comparing with home education.

Second, parents can find their children's interest and ability. As I said, the early age education has to focus on finding the areas in which the children are interested such as music, painting, and sports. By helping them to develop their talents, I am sure that will enrich their lives.

Third, children can be confident in the regular formal education level. Usually they have good feedback from their teacher because the areas are what they are really interested in. From the elementary school, they have to study math even if they don't like it. But early education experience helps them to get used to it and makes them confident that they can do it.

As a conclusion, I agree to the opinion that children should begin their formal education at a very early age but I do not agree that they should spend most of their time on school studies. By providing opportunity to contact different fields they might be interested in they can develop their talents at the early stage. And they can learn what relationship with friends looks like.

예시언어(Examples in): English

적용가능 언어(Applicable Languages): English

적용가능 수준(Applicable Levels): College

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