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(Re)turning to contrastive rhetoric's basic communication principles: A Common Ground theory perspective



JONATHAN DAVID BROWN

Hosei University, JAPAN

brownj@hosei.ac.jp

Abstract

Contrastive rhetoric (CR) has made great contributions to our understanding of L2 writing. Nevertheless, CR has endured countless criticisms over the years, resulting in “reimagined” forms attempting to address many of these criticisms. In doing so, these forms have shaped CR into a collection of complex ideologies that have unnecessarily complicated CR and impeded its efficacy in both research and the classroom. Therefore, to make it more practicable, it must be decluttered and brought back to its fundamentals. To accomplish this, I look at CR within the theoretical framework of Clark’s (1996) Common Ground (CG) theory, which affixes it to something much more universal and heterogeneous—communication. Essentially, what I postulate here is that when CR is considered in tandem with CG theory, it is shifted from an ideological theory that fails to take into consideration socially and politically constructed notions of L2 writing to an approach concerned with basic communication principles. When this shift occurs, many of its criticisms can then be assuaged and CR can once again become more practical for researchers and an effective tool for teachers to help their students achieve their writing goals.

Keywords: contrastive rhetoric; common ground theory; L2 writing

Introduction

Since its inception over half a century ago, contrastive rhetoric (CR) and its founder, Robert Kaplan (1966), have endured countless criticisms. Yet even its numerous opponents cannot ignore the fact that CR has provided a great deal of insight into L2 writing and has contributed immensely to L2 writing pedagogy, as evidenced by a more discipline-oriented approach that is common in most textbooks and

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classrooms today (Silva, 1990). Accordingly, CR cannot be readily abandoned as there is no denying its importance to the field. This balancing act of acknowledging CR's contributions while at the same time finding fault with its ideological and theoretical wrongdoings has resulted in the creation of its reimagined forms, the most notable being Liebman's (1992) "new contrastive rhetoric" (NCR), Connor's (1996) "intercultural rhetoric" (IR) and, perhaps the most critical (and aptly named) of the three, Kubota and Lehner's (2004) "critical contrastive rhetoric" (CCR).

Though undoubtedly much of the criticism put forth by such scholars is not without merit, their attempts to reimagine CR have more times than not been superfluous. It is due to these attempts that CR is now entrenched in convoluted concepts and ideas that Kaplan never claimed and the theory itself never attested to. In other words, these reimagined forms have turned CR into something it was never intended to be. CR proponents have made similar arguments in the past, suggesting that many of its criticisms stem from critics' lack of understanding and pointing to the fact that the theory is rooted in pedagogy rather than ideology (see Connor, 2002; Li, 2014; Péry-Woodley, 1990). Thus, the purpose of this paper is not to dwell on such issues. Rather, what I hope to do here is unravel the entanglement of ideas created by the various reimagined forms of CR by steering clear of semantic argumentation, like that of Connor (1996) who claimed "intercultural rhetoric is the more appropriate name for this field of study" (p. 1), and instead bring the discussion back to the basics.

Therefore, rather than reimagining or renaming CR, I propose that CR be considered as something much more rudimentary in an effort to avoid the theoretical and ideological pitfalls of which traditional CR has been accused. To accomplish this, I look at CR within the theoretical framework of Clark's (1996) Common Ground (CG) theory, a well-established and widely accepted theory in the field of communication. This assists in the dismantling of the criticisms that have apotheosized CR to a collection of complex ideologies by affixing it to something much more universal and heterogeneous—communication. Considering CR in tandem with Clark's (1996) CG theory further demonstrates that viewing CR as an approach concerned with communication as opposed to a theory associated with the more precarious and intricate workings of notions such as culture is not only a more cogent approach but also truer to the original concept and purpose behind it. Furthermore, adopting such a view effectively consolidates many of the concerns put forth by CR's criticisms and is therefore more pragmatic than attempting to juggle the various alternative forms of CR found throughout the literature. Untangling CR from its criticisms in this manner can then help scholars more effectively approach contrastive works and make use of the many possible benefits CR has to offer the field.

Overview of Contrastive Rhetoric

CR was first posited by Kaplan (1966) in his seminal work *Cultural Thought Patterns in Intercultural Education* in which he analyzed more than 600 essays and concluded that L1 English speakers write in a linear pattern (represented by a straight line) and support their theses with specific details. He contrasted this description of English rhetoric with that of rhetorical patterns found in four other cultural thought patterns, namely, Semitic, Oriental, Romance, and Russian. According to Kaplan, learners from each of these cultural groups produced patterns unique to their cultural and linguistic backgrounds. For example, he claimed that learners of Semitic background (e.g., Arabic) utilize a series of complex and diverse parallel structures, both positive and negative, in their paragraph development. "Oriental" learners (Kaplan's generalized term for Chinese and Korean learners) displayed a somewhat illogical structure, circling around the topic without ever directly addressing it. Romance learners often drifted away from the main ideas of their writing and provided seemingly irrelevant descriptions.

Based on these findings, Kaplan postulated that culture plays a significant role in how discourse is constructed, and attributed apparent divergences between L2 English speakers' writing (particularly speakers

of languages with rhetorical traditions other than Anglo-American) and native English speakers' writing to cultural differences.

Kaplan's (1966) study in CR was one of the first to explore the issue of L1 cultural identity on writing and how it may interfere with and influence L2 English writing. In his study, Kaplan described how L1 English speakers often find L2 English writing illogical, ambiguous, and sometimes incomprehensible, and pointed to the transfer of the learner's L1 thought patterns as the culprit.

Criticisms of Kaplan's Contrastive Rhetoric

Over half a century since its inception, CR has been widely discussed in both scholarly literature and general teaching resources and textbooks. And as would be expected of such a highly influential theory, CR comes with its fair share of criticisms. To go through each one, however, would be an enormous if not impossible task, especially within the confines of this study. The criticisms discussed here should therefore not be regarded as an exhaustive list but rather some of the more common ones in the literature that are shared among critics.

The "Reductionism" Criticism

Numerous empirical studies have questioned the "conventional wisdom" of Kaplan's CR (see Kubota, 1998a, 1998b, 2014; Kubota & Lehner, 2004; Liebman, 1992; Shi & Kubota, 2007). One of the most common points of criticism, often cited as a major limitation of CR, is how narrowly defined Kaplan's view of rhetoric was, even by traditional Aristotelian standards. Kaplan based his "rhetoric" entirely on discourse organization, specifically, the linear organizational pattern of English compared to the indirect or digressive elements of other languages, which his critics often consider to be a rather static and one-dimensional description. Further, he paid no attention to the fact that conventions and expectations, even within the same cultural context, often differ across discourse communities and genres (Connor *et al.*, 1995; Swales, 1990). Because of this, critics claim that Kaplan's CR ignored some of the most essential components of rhetoric, resulting in what has been described as a "reductionist" view of rhetoric (Connor, 1996; Liebman, 1992).

The "Paradoxical" Criticism

A pillar of Kaplan's CR is the belief that one's thought patterns influence the way in which his/her discourse is organized. Many critics of CR see this as an extension of linguistic determinism, the belief that language dictates thought—a theory that for the most part has long been dismissed by scholars (see, for example, Clark, 1996; Connor, 1996; Pinker, 1994). Whether or not CR is indeed based on linguistic determinism is still debated, but a position on which critics seem to form consensus is that Kaplan's CR overemphasized cognitive factors "at the expense of sociocultural factors" (Connor, 1996, 1997; Kubota, 1997; Matsuda, 2001). And this is where the paradox begins.

Many of Kaplan's critics have taken issue with his oversimplification of writing in general and what it has resulted in: product-centered teaching in the L2 writing classroom (see, for example, Liebman, 1992; Matsuda, 1997). It is now understood that writing is multifaceted and involves several cognitive factors, but Kaplan's CR, as critics claim, completely ignored the thought processes of the writers that led them to produce their texts (Liebman, 1992) as Kaplan's focus was on the completed text, not the composing process. Additionally, while Kaplan paid no attention to cultural contexts in which the texts in his study were produced (other than broadly labeling them), the nexus of his thesis was that texts writers produce reflect their culture—a clear contradiction to the methodology that he actually employed (Connor, 1996; 1997; Kubota & Lehner, 2004; Liebman, 1992).

The “Linguistic Imperialism” Criticism

Another major point of contention with CR in the literature is based in ideological and theoretical notions, much like those made by Edward Said (1978) in his now classic work *Orientalism* (Atkinson, 2012; Li, 2014; Walker, 2010). Said observed scholars of his time promoting the spread of Oriental societies throughout the Anglo-Saxon sphere and the establishment of Oriental Studies departments in “every major European university” (Said, 1978, p. 211)—all supposed evidence of the Westerners’ profound knowledge and grasp of everything “Oriental.” Said pointed out the blatant ethnocentric bias and the essentialization of the exotic Other that was principle to these activities, forcing those scholars to reexamine the stereotypes and ethnocentric biases they projected in attempts to describe and teach Asian cultures. Likewise, CR has been widely criticized for its stereotyping, Othering, and linguistic imperialism (see Kubota, 1997, 1999, 2001, 2003, 2014; Pennycook, 1998).

Kubota and Lehner (2004) claim that CR is a byproduct of “the neocolonial expansion of American economic and political power that attracted a great number of international and immigrant English learners” (p. 18). Pennycook (1998) takes it one step further, suggesting that Kaplan’s view presents L2 English learners as primitive beings in need of enlightenment. According to Pennycook (1998), CR “reproduces . . . the Other as deviant and . . . as locked in ancient and unchanging modes of thought and action” (p. 189). This Orientalist-type essentialism of the non-Western Other, as Pennycook points out, is often seen as a major shortcoming of CR that ultimately leads to not only a complete disregard for but even possibly a condescension to L2 learners and their unique cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Finally, it is important to recognize that much of these “linguistic imperialism” criticisms can be traced back to CR’s traditional approach that was only concerned with other languages (often lumping distinctly different language groups, such as Chinese and Korean, together) compared to English. Critics have been quick to point fingers at this approach, aversely claiming that in doing so CR positioned English as the pinnacle of writing to which all other languages ought to be compared. Positions of power can be further delineated in the classroom where CR presents the English language as superior to other languages and thereby insinuates that L2 English learners are second-rate to native English speakers, as Kowal (1998) explains: “Kaplan puts the ‘native reader’—and the English teacher, by proxy—in the position of authority, and of power” (p. 136).

Contrastive Rhetoric Reimagined

Most scholars would agree, whether they are proponents of Kaplan and his ideas or not, that CR has garnered great interest in the field of L2 writing. And from that interest, L2 writing has seen an abundance of investigation into the complexities of rhetoric and the composing process, sociocultural factors and genre, and power and politics in the language learning classroom (see, for example, Bazerman, 1988; Hyland, 2004; Moreno, 1997; Pennycook, 2016; Reid, 1988; Swales, 1990). These studies, and many others like them, have indicated that writing is much more complex than CR initially gave it credit for. And while it involves a multiplicity of rhetorical forms and dynamic styles, it still functions within purposeful rhetorical conventions, education policies, and politics, all of which are being influenced by an ever-globalizing society (Kubota, 2014).

Based on what has since been learned about L2 writing, many CR critics have recognized a need to generate revised, reformed, and reimagined theories of CR that reflect and demonstrate our current ideological and theoretical knowledge of L2 writing, or, as Connor (2002) puts it, a “need to articulate a current framework for contrastive rhetoric” (p. 494). Among these “current frameworks” are most notably Liebman’s (1992) “new contrastive rhetoric” (NCR), Connor’s (1996, 2008, 2011, 2018) “intercultural rhetoric” (IR), and Kubota and Lehner’s (2004) “critical contrastive rhetoric” (CCR).

New Contrastive Rhetoric

Liebman (1992) was one of the first to attempt to address many of the perceived shortcomings of Kaplan's CR by rebuffing the prescriptive-determinist approach, not only of Kaplan's CR but also of the numerous other CR studies that had followed Kaplan's initial thesis. To accomplish this, Liebman surveyed a group of Japanese and Arabic students via questionnaire and inquired into their L1 writing educational background and training. The survey found a number of similarities between the two groups, such as an educational background that placed emphasis on grammar and organization. Liebman, however, discovered that these students were not taught the "Oriental" or "Semitic" patterns as Kaplan had identified in his 1966 study but rather were instructed in the "linear" pattern of Western rhetoric. In addition to the linguistic/grammatical and organizational elements of writing, Liebman's study identified both similarities and differences in these two cultural groups' composing processes, experiences in writing, and instructional backgrounds.

Based on her study, Liebman (1992) argued that a focus on the text alone produces "misleading" results as it cannot inform us of how the text was produced or how the writer approached the writing task, vital components of writing that significantly influence the outcome of a text. According to Liebman, a "new" CR that "considers not only contrast in how people organize texts in different languages, but also other contrasts such as their approach to audience, their perception of purposes of writing, the types of writing tasks . . . , [their] composing processes, and the role writing plays in their education" (p. 142) is needed. Taking these points into consideration can then help to address many of the issues that she sees as hindering the effectiveness of Kaplan's CR.

Intercultural Rhetoric

Connor (1996, 2008, 2011, 2018) has proposed an alternative to CR that she terms "intercultural rhetoric" (IR). Though it has been suggested by some scholars that CR and IR are interchangeable terms (see, for example, Enkvist, 1997), Connor makes a clear distinction between the two. According to Connor, IR gives greater consideration to sociocultural factors by viewing conventions of English academic discourse as socially produced in particular communities, aligning with Hyland (2004). Connor contends that rhetoric must be investigated without oversimplified generalizations and static descriptions and, accordingly, argues for the importance of considering language and writing as a social interaction within particular contexts (much like Fairclough, 1992; Hyland, 2004; Moreno, 1997), thereby addressing the "reductionism" of Kaplan's CR.

Connor's IR also attempts to deal with the perceived issue of "linguistic imperialism" found in CR. By recognizing an "accommodation" between the L2 English learner and the L1 English speaker during an interaction rather than an asymmetrical relationship, Connor argues that IR is "not one of assimilation by non-native English speakers" (1996, p. 7). According to Connor, communication across cultures does not demand that one speaker assimilate into the language and expectations of the other, and this interpretation therefore incorporates a more current understanding of L2 writing that distinguishes IR from Kaplan's CR.

Critical Contrastive Rhetoric

While Connor's IR attempts to rectify some of CR's criticisms, including accusations of stereotyping, Othering, and linguistic imperialism, many scholars still saw a need for an alternative conceptual framework that specifically emphasizes the political nature of language learning (see Kubota, 1997, 1999, 2001, 2003, 2014; Pennycook, 1998). Critical contrastive rhetoric (CCR), proposed by Kubota and Lehner (2004), is one such framework. Building upon post-structural, post-colonial, and

post-modern schools of thought, Kubota and Lehner devised a number of principles that see cultural differences as discursively constructed, and in turn see classroom discourse as a means by which power and position can be manipulated, established, and/or broken down. Kubota and Lehner (2004) summarized CCR as follows:

When put into practice, critical contrastive rhetoric affirms multiplicity of languages, rhetorical forms, and students' identities, while problematizing the discursive construction of rhetoric and identities, and thus allowing writing teachers to recognize the complex web of rhetoric, culture, power, and discourse in responding to student writing. (p.7)

Echoing Pennycook (1998), Kubota and Lehner found fault with Kaplan's CR as they felt its "assimilation and adherence to a perceived, monolithic, hegemonic English written rhetoric" (p. 22) acts as a "colonial construction of cultural dichotomies" (p. 7). CCR, on the other hand, reconceptualizes cultural difference in rhetoric and provides for the variety of language and culture as well as for the uniqueness of individual identity (indirectly dealing with aspects of reductionism identified in the original CR by critics).

The Communication Principles of Contrastive Rhetoric

These reimagined forms of CR make significant effort to address many of the critiques of CR or at the very least give them some thoughtful consideration. Nevertheless, each one remains incomplete. That in and of itself would not be an issue since each framework clearly specifies its parameters and what specific gap of CR it is attempting to fill. But every new "articulation" necessitates the existence of additional articulations. And though these endeavors are well-intentioned, they end up overcomplicating CR rather than enhancing it.

A major fault with these attempts is that they are based on the premise that the original CR cannot account for the complexities of writing and cultural contexts (both large and small), or that CR is plagued with issues of linguistic imperialism, stereotyping, and Othering that lead to unequal positions of power in the language learning classroom. Though Kaplan may not have directly addressed such issues, I believe these premises to be inaccurate, leading to numerous misguided assumptions on which these new conceptual frameworks are established. Thus, what I would like to do from this point onward is to demonstrate that 1) CR does not need to be approached from a highly ideological/theoretical position, because it is in fact framed in very basic communication principles which is made apparent by applying Clark's (1996) Common Ground (CG) theory, and 2) when seen from the CG perspective, many of the criticisms of CR can be assuaged without the need to construct a multitude of "reimagined" forms.

Overview of Common Ground Theory

A concept proposed by Clark (1996), CG theory refers to the shared knowledge, beliefs, and assumptions that are believed to be essential for successful communicative interaction. Clark argues that without mutuality it is not possible for two individuals to understand one another or have a meaningful interaction. This stance is further supported by Duranti (1997) who argues that even "simple" exchanges, such as greetings, are arranged within specific and complex prior contexts and experiences, situational contexts, as well as cultural models and are dependent on the participants' shared knowledge on which each bases his/her assumptions. These assumptions affect the choices the participants make in their interaction with one another as they look toward 1) precedents that help to inform them of appropriate choices in specific contexts and then 2) conventions that the participants have acquired by being a part of and interacting within a discourse community over a period of time. These "coordination devices," as Clark calls them, help each participant involved in a communicative interaction to

coordinate the communication in such a way that he/she has “good reason to believe,” that is, assume, the Other can, with ease, accurately interpret the intended meaning of his/ her utterance.

Since precedent and convention play such important roles in communication, one may conclude that understanding is much easier to achieve when the participants come from similar backgrounds (Gumperz, 1982; Kecskes, 2014; Scollon & Scollon, 2001; Tannen, 2005). In other words, understanding is more likely to be achieved between those who share similar prior experiences and cultural contexts since there is a much greater likelihood that these participants will share a wider range of knowledge that overlaps to create the participants’ common ground. This process or “coordination” cannot be achieved without establishing “commonalities” (Clark, 1996), and these commonalities rely heavily on assumptions based on precedent and conventions. This is where the problem arises for L2 learners and where CR has attempted to assist.

Applying Common Ground Theory to Contrastive Rhetoric

Unlike L1 speakers who have shared prior experiences, that is, “precedent,” in the language to be able to effectively identify and apply conventions to meet the expectations of other L1 speakers, the L2 learner lacks this. Not because he/she is inept or negatively influenced by his/her native language, but simply due to the fact that the “sum of [the L2 learner’s and L1 speaker’s] mutual knowledge, beliefs and suppositions” (Clark, 1996, p. 327) does not add up to a comprehensible whole; in other words, the L1 speaker and L2 learner do not meet to converge and establish a broad enough common ground on which the L2 learner can coordinate an effective communicative outcome with the L1 speaker. And, since the success of a communicative outcome is dependent on the participants’ mutual understanding of the circumstances surrounding the perceived context (Clark, 1996; Stalnaker 2002), there is very little chance the L2 learner and L1 speaker will generate understanding between one another without negotiating a common ground, often referred to as “emergent common ground” (Kecskes, 2014).

While it may be possible for a common ground to emerge through conversation, the same cannot be said in the writing context. Accordingly, it is of the utmost importance that L2 learners are provided with the knowledge they need to establish commonalities with speakers of the target language so that coordination in language use can be achieved and common ground established within the text.

Assuaging the Criticisms

Though numerous “reimagined” forms have attempted to address CR criticisms, CR can in fact effectively counter its many criticisms on its own merit without the need for “reimagining” or “articulating” new forms. This becomes evident if we simply take a step back and consider the foundation upon which it was built—not as a “description” of rhetoric or an extension of linguistic determinism, and certainly not on essentialist notions like that of Orientalism. On the contrary, CR is far from ideological, and this becomes apparent when carefully examined in tandem with CG’s description of communication. In doing so, CR can be viewed as a valid theory of communication rather than a hodgepodge of pedagogical, ideological, and theoretical concepts and notions that Kaplan neither claimed nor attested to. Accordingly, errors made by L2 writers should be understood as not simply manifested “deviations from native speaker norms” (Kusuyama, 2006, p. 41) but more importantly as a hindrance to fundamental communication.

From this perspective then, it seems reasonable to assume that CR is neither attempting to describe nor define “rhetoric” in a prescriptive sense. That is, Kaplan’s focus on organization is not meant to suggest that organization is all there is to rhetoric and writing but simply that L2 writers do not share this particular convention with L1 readers and as a result are struggling to find mutuality with them—the mutuality necessary to bring about a successful communicative interaction.

When CG theory is applied to CR it also becomes evident that it is not necessary for CR to account for sociocultural factors and cultural contexts, as this is inherent to the coordination devices of communication. CR sees thought patterns as being shaped within specific contexts, and thus those thought patterns follow the conventions of the contexts that shaped them, i.e., cultural contexts. This is in no way different than the notion that sees sociocultural factors, or even genre for that matter, playing a role in how one writes a text, because the cognitive factors are rooted in mutuality and that mutuality is generated through sociocultural factors. It is not the culture itself but the commonalities between the writer and reader within a particular context that helps to create meaning. Furthermore, the linguistic element plays one of the many roles involved in establishing meaning and is therefore not deterministic. Considering that a coherent text and thereby understanding is established through CG thus turns us away from a culturally or linguistically reliant notion to a less biased and more inclusive viewpoint of how a writer creates meaning in a text and is ultimately the basis upon which CR rests.

The crux of CR is simply about helping L2 learners become more effective writers in the target language by bringing “precedent” to the forefront and identifying the conventions shared amongst L1 speakers. In doing so, CR shows how the choices made and assumptions held by the L2 writer do not always properly align with the expectations and assumptions of L1 speakers. This misalignment then results in a coordination problem, or a perceived illogical text by the L1 speaker, and it is this very concept that Clark (1996) alludes to in his assessment of what constitutes communication: “Communication is built on commonalities of thought between people and taken for granted in the communities in which each language is used” (p. 325).

When looking back at Kaplan and his original notion of CR through the lens of CG theory, it seems he and his theory were and always have been concerned with the “commonalities of thought.” These commonalities, which are often “taken for granted” is what causes the most trouble for L2 writers, as Li (2014), explains: “. . . what [is] hardest for an outsider [are] . . . those hidden, unarticulated values about good writing” (p. 105). It is those “hidden, unarticulated values about good writing” that are the commonalities taken for granted which result in the “outsider,” or in CR’s case, the L2 English writer, being unable to meet the assumptions and expectations of the L1 speaker. Thus, the ultimate goal of CR is to expose the commonalities of thoughts and help identify the differences between the commonalities that the L2 writer brings with him/her when writing, and those commonalities of the L1 speaker which often do not meet to establish a common ground between the two. In fact, this appears to be what Kaplan (1966) was trying to convey in his initial hypothesis, as he himself stated:

This discussion is not intended to offer any criticism of other existing paragraph developments; rather it is intended only to demonstrate that paragraph developments other than those normally regarded as desirable in English do exist . . . the teacher must be himself aware of these differences, and he must make these differences overtly apparent to his students.” (p. 14)

Through a CG lens Kaplan’s intentions of CR become clear then: it is simply about the investigation of commonalities across varying cultural contexts in an effort to help writers find common ground with their readers. In fact, as can be inferred from the quote above, it appears that Kaplan rejected the notion of linguistic imperialism. Further to the point is that since he put forth his initial hypothesis, there has been a great increase in awareness of and interest in rhetorical frameworks outside of Western cultures and languages as evidenced by the impetus of studies conducted on non-English rhetoric that have followed.

For example, one of the better known of these studies comes from Robert T. Oliver (1971). In *Communication and Culture in Ancient India and China*, Oliver explored Chinese and Indian communication

and culture in relation to philosophy and social customs based on the premise that even though “rhetoric may be universal in the sense that philosophy or religion are universals,” (p. 7) rhetoric is unique to the culture in which it arises, just as philosophical systems and religions are. In a similar fashion, Smith (1971) sought to develop an African concept of rhetoric separate and distinct from that of the Western rhetorical tradition by drawing from traditional African philosophy.

There have also been CR studies conducted that gave no consideration to the English language or English rhetoric whatsoever, such as Abbott (1993) who investigated ancient Mayans’ rhetoric in comparison with classical Spanish rhetorical theory. Other studies have looked to non-Western rhetorical patterns in an effort to better understand rhetoric as a whole. Hatim (1990), for example, investigated Arabic rhetoric and its models of argumentation in hopes of bringing insight toward a “theory of text types” (p. 47) that would be useful for and applicable to a non-language and non-culture specific rhetoric.

More recently, writing pedagogy research has sought to utilize non-English rhetorical approaches in the English composition classroom. In his 2011 study, Cole implemented a Native American rhetorical device into the English composition classroom and found that students’ writing and thinking skills improved.

Today, scholars see the study of non-Western rhetorical strategies as a way to “reposition Western rhetoric as an object of analysis and critique itself” (Cole, 2011, p. 122), which would effectively aid researchers in breaking free from the pitfalls of ethnocentricity, and it all started with Kaplan’s CR. This is clearly in accord with Péry-Woodley (1990, p. 143) who claims that, contrary to its many criticisms, CR actually provides the “best antidote” for the ethno/lingocentricism that has poisoned the field.

Conclusion

Owing to CR, it is now understood that writing requires not only awareness of but also recognition that there is a set of rules that govern how ideas are presented, supported, explained, and more, and that this set of rules extends far beyond grammatical structures. It is a social interaction that is far more complex than ever could have been realized without CR shedding light on its intricacies.

Kaplan had it right when he postulated that culture creates differences, though the reasons for these differences extend far beyond a simplistic construct of culture to encompass the act of communication, not only across cultures but within cultures, subcultures, discourse communities, and even between two individuals in a specific context and situation (Kubota, 1997). Criticisms of CR have often been rooted in the assumption that CR does not take these dimensions into consideration. Others have attempted to rectify this, such as Liebman’s NCC, Connor’s IR and Kubota and Lehner’s CCR, but, in the end, these frameworks have only managed to entangle CR in a web of ideological and theoretical notions, which has only managed to make it rather impracticable. By applying CG theory to CR, we have been able to structure CR around basic communication principles. In doing so, it has become clear that a much more pragmatic approach than a reimagined and/or renamed CR is to simply take it for what it is at its root: an approach to help L2 learners reach a common ground with L1 speakers.

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