

Original Paper

## Contrastive Rhetoric Studies between Japanese and English Writing

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### Abstract

In this paper, I will explore the differences in organization and paragraph movement between Japanese and English writing, and how cultural and linguistic features of the Japanese language influence English writing by Japanese. By making these differences and features clear, it will be helpful for English writing teachers in Japan to teach not only writing but also the other three skills (reading, speaking, listening) to Japanese students. And I will give some pedagogical suggestions based on these differences and features.

### 1. Introduction

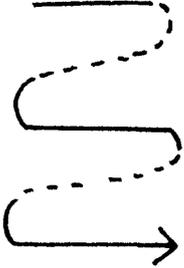
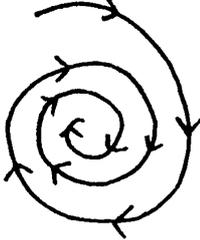
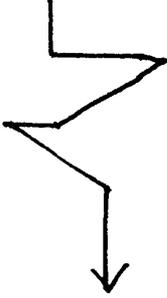
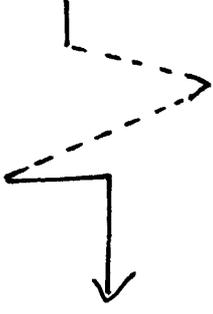
Contrastive rhetoric studies were started 28 years ago by Robert B. Kaplan. Until then, linguists and anthropologists, such as Boas (1911), Sapir (1949), Whorf (1956), and Lado (1957), had studied foreign languages across cultures, but they had not contrasted the rhetoric of English native speakers and non-native speakers of English. Kaplan, however, attempted to analyze how native thinking and discourse structures manifest themselves in the writing of ESL students. This was a new field of inquiry, although it was exploratory and intuitive rather than scientific (Leki, 1991).

According to Kaplan (1966, 1967), the influence of the native discourse forms is powerful

enough to manifest itself in the product written in the target language. He argues that his ESL students revealed evidence of culturally-influenced styles of thought development that emerge in their writing in ways that can be structurally and stylistically described (Purves, 1988). Kaplan claimed that native language patterns of rhetorical organization might be negatively transferred to English language compositions (Hinds, 1982). And Kaplan graphically identified the movement of the various paragraphs in five manners (Table 1):

These diagrams have influenced ESL writing teachers and researchers. At the same time, they have become a controversial topic among them and have stimulated further research in contrastive rhetoric.

Table 1 Kaplan's Diagrams of the Paragraph Movement

English	Semitic	Oriental	Romance	Russian
				

## 2. Japanese and English Rhetoric

### 2.1. Organization

Contrastive rhetoric studies of Japanese writings were started in the 1980s by John Hinds. He examined Japanese expressive prose which was written in Japanese by Japanese for Japanese readers. He explained that the Japanese organizational framework consists of Ki (起) - Sho (承) - Ten (転) - Ketsu (結). These terms relate to the English words introduction, development, change, and conclusion.

He analyzed that the third point, Ten (転), was very different from English organization. Ten (転) was the point where the development was complete and the composition turned to a sub-theme that was connected, but only indirectly, to the main one. When looking at these examples of expressive prose, Hinds found, like Kaplan, that the Japanese rhetorical pattern is not linear. The Ten (転) section breaks the straight line but does not cause a circular or a spiral pattern, which is different from Kaplan's view of it. The shape that best describes the Japanese rhetorical pattern is the line with shark's teeth (  ). At the Ten (転) section, Japanese people enjoy somewhat a guessing game: how will this sub-theme in the Ten (転) section be connected with the

main theme at the Ketsu (結) section, conclusion.

The conclusion, Ketsu (結), in the Japanese pattern was also different from an English language conclusion. According to Willis (1969), the editor of "Structure, Style and Usage: The Rhetoric of Composition", an English language conclusion "must be consonant with the tone of the whole passage."<sup>1)</sup> And McCrimmon (1976), who wrote "Writing with a Purpose", stated that "the conclusion emphasizes the main points in summary, it can draw a conclusion based on information presented in the preceding paragraphs, or it can evaluate what has been presented."<sup>2)</sup> On the contrary, a Japanese conclusion, according to Hinds, "need not be decisive. All it needs to do is to indicate a doubt or ask a question. . . . Clearly, a different set of rhetorical principles is operating in the Japanese composition."<sup>3)</sup>

Another way of writing organization, which has been taught by composition educators in Japan, is the three-division pattern (introduction, development, conclusion). It was imported from the west in the latter half of the Meiji period (1897~1911). This pattern is often seen in expository writing such as in newspaper articles and academic writings, while Ki (起) - Sho (承) - Ten (転) - Ketsu (結)

are seen in expressive prose. My informal survey, however, reveals that Japanese students do not acquire the three-division pattern well because they do not have enough opportunity to write or practice expository writing at school. As a result of this situation, immature Japanese students tend to mix up the three-division pattern with Ki (承) - Ten (転) - Ketsu (結) pattern. That is, they often conclude by indicating a suggestion or doubt in the three-division pattern, which is the style of conclusion in Ki (起) - Sho (承) - Ten (転) - Ketsu (結) and is different from the conclusion of the three-division style. In many cases, the conclusion indicating a suggestion or doubt in a three-division pattern seems weird or is evaluated lower by English native speakers.

## 2.2. The Movement of the Paragraph, GS and SG pattern

Hiroe Kobayashi (1984) examined the way in which Japanese students transfer their rhetorical patterns when doing expository and expressive writing in English. The result of her research is that American students writing in English tend to use the GS (General-to-Specific) pattern which is defined as “having a hierarchical structure from a semantic point of view: that is the overall movement of idea is from general to specific, where a major topic is developed around a set of its subtopics.”<sup>4)</sup> Japanese students writing in Japanese tend to the SG (Specific-to-General) rhetorical pattern, the writer’s central idea occurs at the end of the essay.

According to Kobayashi, the writing in GS pattern tends to be performance-oriented; that is, writers seem more conscious of the need to organize their ideas for an audience. On the other hand, the writing in SG pattern tends to be process-oriented because the direction is not restricted by a general statement. She examined why Americans tend to

prefer “General-to-Specific” and why Japanese prefer “Specific-to-General.” She said that, culturally, Japanese society respects harmony among its members, and direct confrontation tends to be avoided. This results in the preference of the “Specific-to-General” pattern, which makes the writing more indirect: “writers work their way slowly toward a final assertion, leaving the reader to figure out what the main idea is.”<sup>5)</sup> In contrast, it is important for Americans to emphasize individual differences and self-assertion. A general-to-specific pattern with a clear, early assertion makes the writing direct and straightforward, which characteristically meets the Americans’ need for self-assertion.

Other researchers such as Kyoko Oi (1984), Machiko Achiba and Yasuaki Kuromiya (1983), JoAnne Liebman-Kleine (1986), William H. Bryant (1984), Alexander Shishin (1985), and Dennis Ryan (1988), respectively did contrastive studies of Japanese/English writing from different angles to find the differences between them. I can not write about their studies severally in this paper because of the limitation of time and number of pages. However, their common result was that cultural preferences for certain rhetorical patterns clearly exist and somewhat influence English writing. In the next section, I will explore some Japanese cultural and linguistic influences on writing English as a second language.

## 3. Cultural Influence

Sapir (1949) said that “language does not exist apart from culture, that is, from the socially inherited assemblage of practices and beliefs that determined the texture of our lives.”<sup>6)</sup> Culture influences various peoples’ ways of thinking and determines the conventions of language usage.

Accordingly, I will discuss the features of Japanese writing from five cultural points of view: 1) the influence of *engo*, 2) the influence of Confucianism, 3) responsibility in understanding writing, 4) the influence of *otogizoshi*, and 5) different conventions of writing classification. Although there are many other factors which cause the differences between tendencies in Japanese and English rhetoric, I would say that these five viewpoints would strongly influence English written by Japanese.

### 3.1 Influence of *Engo*

*Engo* are a unique technique in Japanese of expressing more than one meaning with one word. *Engo* are words which can remind the reader of other words or which are associated with other words. For example, a long sleeve is associated with tears. Tears are associated with dew, and dew with pearl or fleeting. Pearl is associated with pure, and fleeting with life or death. The range of *engo* is almost fixed among the Japanese people based on the common knowledge of famous or traditional poems.

*Engo* might influence the English written by Japanese in two ways. One is that this technique, *engo*, causes the English written by the Japanese to skip ideas between sentences. Through the convention of *engo*, Japanese writers expect associated words to provide adequate connection without expressing the connection in English.

Another influence is that the Japanese try to condense the meaning in a short sentence by using *engo*. Condensed meaning in a short sentence is esteemed more than a long sentence expressed specifically. This does not mean Japanese sentences are short. On the contrary, Japanese tend to write very long sentences consisting of many short sentences, which are combined with coordinating conjunctions. But *engo* affects those short sen-

tences.

Most Japanese students learn these techniques at school, and they take root strongly in their minds when they write in Japanese. They do not actually practice making poems using *engo*, but as a culture they learn interpretations including two meanings or associated words in a sentence and they learn how this technique is used in a sentence. And these would influence the English written by Japanese.

### 3.2 Influence of Confucianism

Japanese culture has been greatly influenced by Chinese culture since the early ages, along with religions such as Buddhism and Confucianism. Confucianism has especially influenced the Japanese people's way of thinking. According to Shibatani (1990), the Confucian tradition emphasizes deeds over words. "Eloquence has not been one of the virtues people have been encouraged to cultivate in Japan."<sup>7)</sup> Shibatani also pointed out another cultural preference in writing, influenced by Confucianism: indirect expression. The Japanese use what in America might be called "beating around the bush" to express their thoughts to others. Listeners are expected to catch the speaker's intention from the context or hints. "It is the person's ability to arrive at an intended conclusion rather than the persuader's logical presentation that is evaluated."<sup>8)</sup> These ways of thinking are, of course, reflected in the writing of Japanese students. In fact, the persuasion of others by means of linguistic skills is avoided because it is feared that it might trigger confrontation. This way of thinking has been inscribed in the minds of the Japanese people by the long history of Confucianism.

On the other hand, what is most valued in writing and speaking in Western countries is clarity and precision in the framework of a rigorously logical system. According to Ka-

plan, “the expected sequence of thought in English is essentially a Platonic–Aristotelian sequence, descended from the philosophers of ancient Greece and shaped subsequently by Roman, medieval European, and later Western thinkers.”<sup>9)</sup> To cite Hinds:

with the emphasis on literacy both in classical Greece and in post-reformation England there was a great concern to make sentences say exactly, neither more nor less than what they meant. Poetry and proverbial sayings which mean both more and less than what they say, were rejected as a means of expressing truth both by Plato and 2,000 years later by members of the Royal Society of London. . . .<sup>10)</sup>

This difference between Japanese and Western ways of thinking might be one of the causes which make Japanese writing seem ambiguous to western readers.

### 3.3 Responsibility for Understanding of the Writers' Intention

Hinds pointed out other cultural differences between Japanese and English writing. He said that responsibility for making clear and well-organized statements differs between Japanese and English speakers. He cited the discussion of Chafe, which reiterated that the desire to write and speak clearly in English permeates English-speaking culture:

. . . the speaker is aware of an obligation to communicate what he or she has in mind in a way that reflects the richness of his or her thoughts. . . . the writer [is] . . . concerned with producing something that will be consistent and defensible when read by different people at different times in different places, something that will stand the test of time.<sup>11)</sup>

Hinds concludes that while English writers or speakers are responsible for making the meaning of writing clear, in Japanese the responsibility falls on readers or listeners. In Japanese writing, a writer is not responsible for making clear his intention. Suzuki agrees with Hinds. Suzuki claims that “Japanese authors do not like to give clarifications or full explanations of their views. They like to give dark hints and to leave them behind nuances.”<sup>12)</sup> Moreover, Suzuki (1975) claims that “it is exactly this type of prose which gets the highest praise from readers.”<sup>13)</sup> He states that Japanese readers “anticipate with pleasure the opportunities that such writing offers them to savor this kind of ‘mystification’ of language.”<sup>14)</sup> Yutani (1977) called the Japanese inductive pattern “fish fried in batter,” which means that the essence of the meaning is covered with inductive expression. The reader is responsible for understanding what essence lies within the “batter.”

Thus the two cultures differ markedly in assigning responsibility for understanding the writer's intention. This difference would cause confusion for Japanese writers of English.

### 3.4 Influence of *Otogizoshi*

*Otogizoshi* is a kind of book which was written to teach Buddhism to less educated people. The outstanding feature of *otogizoshi* is the concluding moral lesson such as being dutiful to one's parents, showing filial piety to the boss, cherishing the relationship between friends, and keeping harmony with others. In Achiba's and Kuromiya's research (1983), they found that “at the end of the English compositions by Japanese students, ‘should,’ ‘ought to’ and imperatives . . . are often seen.”<sup>15)</sup> As a matter of fact, composition educators in elementary schools in Japan have guided students in their writings to look

back at their lives and modify their rightness according to the traditional moral and/or public order which are based on teachings from *otogizoshi* to some extent. Such instruction at school would subconsciously have an influence on the students' circuits of thought and their writing in English.

### 3.5 Different Conventions of Writing Classification

The classification of writing differs from country to country, according to their conventions. In Japan, writing is divided into two types: practical writing such as a record, a report, and a memo, and creative writing such as a novel, an essay, a diary, a poem, and a story. Japanese writing does not recognize a type called persuasion or argumentation. Japanese people think that they need not persuade or argue with others in writing. In their reports students express their ideas and give reasons for their ideas, but they do not argue against others' ideas.

This division goes back to the time when the Chinese written system was adapted to the Japanese language. The Japanese believe that one learns to write by imitation, as the Japanese learned Chinese by imitating. And they think that practical writing such as documents and reports are easy to imitate and thus not worth learning from a master. They can learn by themselves by imitating the forms. However, most of the classical verse requires a master to learn. Consequently, the Japanese tend to make light of practical writing, and to respect creative writing such as verse, expressive and/or artistic prose, which requires creativity within close restrictions. The guidelines from the Ministry of Education before World War II show this preference for expressive and/or creative writing. That is, children mainly learn narratives, essays, poems, and classical prose such as *Genjimonogatari* in Japanese language

classes at school still today, but they do not learn practical writing. Although recently many educators have recognized the necessity of teaching practical writing, especially academic writing and expository writing, the schools have not adopted this new emphasis yet, because of the lack of time allocated to composition education and the lack of strong motivation from society. This under-emphasis on practical writing could cause problems when Japanese students attempt academic writing and expository writing in English.

In contrast to the above classification of Japanese writing, Kaplan (1988) divided the range of English writing tasks into three basic types: 1) writing without composing, 2) writing through composing for the purpose of reporting, and 3) writing through composing in which the composing process itself functions as a heuristic act. Furthermore, each of these main categories can be divided into two subcategories: one in which the motivation and inspiration for writing derive from within the writers and another in which they derive from outside of the writers.

Writing without composing consists of list making (which is perhaps internally motivated), form filling (which is externally motivated), and taking dictation and doing basic translation (e.g., 禁煙=no smoking).

Writing through composing for the purpose of reporting includes memo and letter writing, various kinds of persuasive writing such as physicians' patient records and reports of medical clinical research, and most of the articles in various learned journals. This category is the second most frequent type. In this category, it is difficult to draw clear lines between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, because the content, at least, is provided by the writer, but at the same time the form may be dictated by the conventions of an academic discipline or by the requirements of a

journal publisher or a data repository.

Writing through composing in which the composing process itself functions as a heuristic act is the rarest of the writing types practiced by people. It includes the creation of novels and short stories, of poems and plays, of theoretical and philosophical treatises by scholars.

This difference in classification would cause a different awareness or consciousness in writing. To the Japanese, narrative or expressive prose is familiar and easy to write in English, while persuasive and argumentative writing do not fit their expectations. As a result, in the writing of persuasion and argumentation Japanese students might have problems which cause ambiguity for English native readers.

#### 4. Linguistic Influence

In addition to cultural features, Japanese linguistic features would influence English written by Japanese. Linguistically Japanese is virtually isolated from other languages. That is because Japan and the Japanese people are physically isolated as an island nation from the European, American, and Asian continents. This physical isolation is accentuated by the linguistic isolation of Japanese. The following chapters intend to identify the factors that appear to affect English writing in terms of Japanese linguistic features.

##### 4.1 Conceptual Words Expressed by *Kango*

*Kango* are visual words based on Chinese characters, while *wago* are the original Japanese words and phonetical words. Many *kango* express abstract or concept words, while *wago* express plain words used in daily life. Therefore, the more *kango* the Japanese use in Japanese writing, the more their writing seems to be written in a lofty style like Latinate words in English. The abstract or

conceptual words of *kango* can condense many meanings expressed by *wago*. Also, *kango* help Japanese people understand the meaning of written language, because *kango* are visual words. That is, even if the readers can not pronounce *kango*, they can mostly understand the meaning of the Chinese characters.

Japanese students try to translate Japanese writing written in *kango* into English, because they want their English writing to be lofty in style like their Japanese writing. But unskillful students sometimes misunderstand the meaning of *kango* and in addition mistranslate from *kango* to English. Furthermore, a most serious problem is that they often use English translations of conceptual words expressed by *kango*. As a result, their English writing can seem to be ambiguous, unclear, and illogical. If they can translate *kango* into *wago* properly and/or use *wago* expressing specific words, then they could write English acceptable to native English speakers.

##### 4.2 Agglutinative language, Japanese

Not only the influence of *kango* but also the tendency of Japanese verbs to contain or imply more than one meaning might cause trouble for Japanese students in transferring the meaning of Japanese into English. The fact that Japanese verbs contain or imply more than one meaning might come from the fact that Japanese is an agglutinative language. Such meanings as passive, honorific, degree of politeness, and style of writing, whether the writing is assertive or ordinary, can be added to the stems of verbs. The verbs of Japanese that condense such meanings and their subtle nuances are difficult to transfer into the same number of English verbs. For example, the sentence "Nipponjin-mo mousukoshi americajin-no konoyouna bubun-otte - mo ii - no - de - wa - nai - daro - ka" includes many nuances such as suggestion,

subjective assumption, negation, throwing a question to readers. It is very difficult to transfer these nuances into one verb in an English sentence. Japanese writers need to devise a way to express complicated Japanese verbs in English by dividing the meanings and/or nuances in one complicated Japanese verb into each nuance and meaning in different verbs or auxiliary verbs in English.

#### 4.3 Absence of Person Pronouns

Originally, Japanese did not have person pronouns. After Western literature was introduced in the Meiji era, translators put personal pronouns into Japanese sentences artificially. For example, Japanese speakers usually do not say “Anata wa gakusei desuka” (lit. “Are you a student?”). Instead, they say “gakusei desuka” (“Are a student?”). This is because using the second person pronoun gives the statement or question a strong tone, which can be insulting. Concerning third person pronouns, “he,” “she,” and “they,” Japanese used demonstrative phrases to indicate the third person such as “that man” and “this woman.”

In narrative writing the Japanese especially try to avoid the use of first person pronouns. The range of readers can be widened and the experience or feeling in writing can be shared by a wider range of readers through avoiding first person pronouns, because the writing is not limited to only “I.” The subject of the sentence is, of course, unclear, but this technique gives a modest tone to Japanese sentences and makes Japanese writing both natural and sophisticated. It would also have the effect of shirking responsibilities for what the writer said in writing.

The following sentences illustrate the absence of personal pronouns and objects in writing; the first sentence is a Japanese sen-

tence romanized. The second sentence is translated into English verbatim, maintaining the order of Japanese morphemes. The third sentence is translated into English according to English word order.

(NOM=nominal marker, O=object marker, PAST=past)

1) Me-ga deru made mainichi mizu-o yaru.

    sprout-NOM shoot until every day water  
-O give.

    (You/We) water (the seeds) every day  
until (they) sprout.

2) John-ga kita node hon-o yat-ta.

    John-NOM came when book-O give-  
PAST.

    When John came, (I) gave (him) a book.

In sentence (1), the second person pronoun and an object, the seeds, are omitted because the subject is a general person and the object can be inferred from the word “sprout” in the context. In sentence (2), also, the first person pronoun as a subject and an accusative personal pronoun are omitted. The subject and the accusative are clearly understood by readers from the context. If the writer used the first person pronoun and the object in sentences, the sentences would seem unnatural to Japanese readers.

In order to avoid using person pronouns as subjects, the Japanese might prefer to use the passive voice and/or inanimate subjects. Because the passive voice also works to express the meaning indirectly to readers, it suits the Japanese mind. This tendency might be one of the causes why native speakers feel that English written by Japanese is unnatural or awkward. The following illustrates such features:

3) sono hon-wa raigetsu shuppan to yuu  
koukoku-ga dete-iru.

This book-NOM next month publish  
(that) advertisement-NOM announce.

This book is announced to be published  
next month.

In sentence (3), the passive voice is double used, which makes the sentence sound clumsy. It might be better for English native speakers like this: “The publishers announce that the book will come out next month.”

### 5. Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications

Thus, the Japanese have a long history of indirect expression and implied intention because of the teaching of Confucianism and other cultural conventions such as expecting an emphasis on harmony, the readers' responsibility for understanding the writer's intention, ending a written piece with a moral as in *otogizoshi*, and the different writing classification. These traditions and conventions, operating unconsciously, might be called a covert culture. This covert culture could be expected to affect their writing of English.

Linguistic differences including the features of conceptual words expressed by *kango*, agglutinative language, and absence of person pronouns would also affect English written by Japanese. English translations of conceptual words expressed by *kango* may cause English written by Japanese ambiguous, unclear, and illogical. The features of agglutinative language might lead to an oversimplification of the English, or to omission of the original ideas. And the most serious factor latent in the absence of overt pronominal forms is to confuse Japanese students when they try to determine the subject of the sentence or the voice of the sentence.

The Japanese features mentioned above are the tip of an iceberg, because language itself consists of much more complex factors than I have mentioned. Honestly speaking, I

found that it was very difficult to say what Japanese and English rhetoric are and how different or how similar they are. However, I heartily hope that clarifying differences or similarities between them will help Japanese students with writing or expressing their thoughts clearly and without misunderstanding, even if they progress little by little. With this hope, I shall give some pedagogical suggestions while at the same time deciding to continue this study.

1. Introduce English organization: English organization is not fixed, which is the same as Japanese. However, teaching one or two main ways of organizing one's thoughts in English would help students, especially beginners, to organize their writings without hesitation and fear. If it is difficult for them to write in an English organization at the beginning, they can write English into Japanese organization first. Then they can revise their work following the English organization. This way of writing might be more comfortable for them.

2. Teach the difference between Japanese and English rhetoric: Although grammar is important in both Japanese and English, a sentence which is grammatically correct is not necessarily acceptable for native speakers. Therefore, it is important for English learners to know the rhetorical conventions in both languages. An awareness of rhetorical differences would make their English writing more acceptable or natural to English native speakers.

3. Use specific words instead of abstract words: General and abstract words do not convey the idea clearly to readers, although writing with abstract words might appear to be lofty or literary in style. Specific words, which are mostly used in *wago*, make writing vivid and precise. If abstract words are used in writing, recommend that students explain

them using some examples or specific expressions.

4. Try to express the entire idea, not to translate word by word: It is impossible to translate exactly word by word between different languages with different cultures.

The most important matter is to convey the idea or information to readers. If one English sentence is not enough to convey the idea which is expressed in one Japanese sentence, encourage the students to write more than one sentence in English to describe the idea.

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