

The Rhetoric of Newspaper Editorials

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Abstract: *As a kind of discourse genre, newspaper editorials are of special importance in EFL studies and contrastive rhetoric. Editorials especially editorials of criticism are written to deliberately influence the social cognition of their readers by making use of different persuasion and argumentation strategies and devices. The use of these devices is believed to be language and culture-oriented. Therefore, this study aimed at comparing the rhetorical devices employed in the editorials of the American newspaper, The New York Times, and the Australian newspaper, The Australian, by using Richardson (2007) framework of rhetorical devices focusing on Hyperbole, Metaphor and Metonymy. The main purpose was to see to what extent language affects written conventions. The results showed that, editorials of the two newspapers employed the same rhetorical device categories. However, minor differences were observed in the frequency of the categories across editorials. The findings showed that Metonymy was the most frequently used device in both editorials. In contrast, Metaphor was the least used device in the selected newspapers. Therefore, the minor differences seen in editorials can suggest the importance of language over national styles of writing with regard to moods and conventions of persuasion when it comes to editorials.*

Keywords: *Contrastive Rhetorical Analysis, Newspaper Discourse, Newspaper Editorial, Language, Rhetorical Devices,*

1. INTRODUCTION

Contrastive Rhetoric (CR) is a branch of applied linguistics which argues the existence of strong ties between language and culture. According to contrastive rhetoric, different speech communities differ in their ways of organizing ideas in their writing which in turn reflects their specific cultural thought patterns. Conceived in this way, language plays a vital role in shaping the conventions of writing.

Being argumentative and persuasive in nature, Editorials reflect the writing preferences of their background cultural context and language. In other words, they are regarded as rich sources of writing conventions. To put another way, it is assumed that the way the editorials try to persuade their readers and the strategies they employ to do so differ among languages and cultures. Based on the above mentioned arguments, the present study tries to find out to what extent language affects a particular piece of writing by answering the following questions:

Research question1: Which rhetorical Devices are used in the editorials of *The New York Times* and *The Australian*?

Research question 2: Are there any differences between the editorials of *The New York Times* and *The Australian* in terms of using Rhetorical Devices?

2. REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

2.1. Culture

Culture is one of the most complex concepts in language. Because of its being so broad, there is no single definition of culture that is accepted by all. Culture is a central but at the same time an under-examined concept in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages). In comparison to other fields such as anthropology and cultural studies, there has been little serious discussion and critique of the concept in TESOL. Except for language, learning, and teaching,

there is perhaps no more important concept in the field of TESOL than culture. English as Second Language (ESL) teachers face it in everything they do, whether implicitly or explicitly.

According to Oswalt (1986, p. 25), “culture is the learned and shared behavior patterns characteristic of a group of people. Your culture is learned from relatives and the other members of your community as well as from various material forms such as books and television programs. You are not born with culture but with the ability to acquire it by such means as observation, imitation and trial and error”.

Along the same line, Kramsch (2001, p.6) argues that “People who identify themselves as members of a social group (family, neighborhood, professional or ethnic affiliation, and nation) acquire common ways of viewing the world through their interactions with other members of the same group. These views are reinforced through institutions like the family, the school, the workplace, the church, the government, and other sites of socialization through their lives. Common attitudes, beliefs and values are reflected in the way members of the group use language—for example, what they choose to say or not to say and how they say it”.

Culture is strongly bound up with language in a way that cultural factors influence perception, language, learning, and communication. To put another way, our cultural values are reflected in language, and culture offers certain ways of organizing our perceptions in writing. In so saying, whatever is considered as logical, engaging and well-organized piece of writing in one particular language might differ greatly from that in another language. Therefore, there are preferences across languages and cultures. It is these preferences that are mainly dealt with in Contrastive Rhetoric.

2.2. Contrastive Rhetoric

Contrastive rhetoric (CR) started 30 years ago in applied linguistics by Robert Kaplan, pays special attention to the role of transfer from native language to the target language. The main focus of contrastive rhetoric has been on L2 writing, especially examining the discourse patterns in L1 and comparing it with that of the second language, preferably English. It is assumed that different cultures organize their discourse in a different way and by using diverse strategies. This means that, L1 writing strategies are transferable to L2 writing and students tend to employ the strategies learned in their L1 contexts to their L2 writing. Because of the differences in the conventions of the two languages, an incoherent and ineffective text is likely to result.

As a major pioneer of contrastive rhetoric approach, Kaplan (1966) analyzed texts written by non-native writers in English to see how these texts were organized by different writers. He believed that if students could see and become conscious of the way they organize their text in their native language and the way typical English texts are organized, then they could better approximate the text characteristics of English and apply it in their L2 writing.

In this sense, each language has rhetorical conventions unique to it. Different cultures have different rhetorical tendencies. According to Kaplan, the linguistic patterns and rhetorical conventions of the first language interfere with that of the second language. In contrastive rhetoric, the interference manifests itself in the writer’s choice of rhetorical strategies and content. Nowadays, the notion of L1 rhetorical transfer has been expanded to include not only linguistic, cognitive, and sociocultural dimensions of language but also discourse structures and stylistic choices based on culturally determined rhetorical preferences and conventions. Moreover, it has been suggested that L1 rhetorical transfer is not the only factor of interference. L2 developmental issues and L1 writing ability would also affect L2 writing performance of ESL students.

Considering Kaplan’s finding, it seems logical to accept that different cultures would orient their discourse in different ways, as described above. Even different discourse communities within a single language have different writing conventions and norms.

2.3. Contrastive Rhetoric: New Directions

Contrastive rhetoric initially aimed at identifying ESL students’ problems in their compositions by referring to the rhetorical strategies of the first language (Connor, 1998). Contrastive rhetoric then expanded its domain to include further areas of inquiry. It shifted focus from writing products of schools, colleges, and professional workplaces to other modes of writing such as

research reports, abstracts, journal articles, grant proposals and business letters (Connor, 1999). In line with these new developments in contrastive rhetoric analysis, studying newspaper editorials, considered as a kind of professional and specific genre, opened a new area of research.

Newspapers are of importance in our daily life in that they provide the basis of most of our social and political knowledge. According to Bell (1991), the newspaper text includes three major categories: service information, opinion and news. The service information category includes lists such as sport results, television programs, share prices and weather forecasts. News or news reports give information about the latest news events and are considered as the predominant text type in newspaper discourse. Opinions are texts presenting the newspaper's own views on an issue.

Editorials are a kind of media discourse, which belong to a large class of opinion discourse. Van Dijk has tried to describe the term opinion as it is used in editorials. For him, opinion is a type of belief that based on social and cultural grounds, has an evaluative dimension. In other words, opinions imply that something is good or bad, right or wrong. So, it can be concluded that as soon as a belief presupposes norms and values, we shall call it an opinion (Van Dijk, 1995).

Editorials are of a persuasive nature aiming to persuade readers to undertake a certain type of action, or to change their attitudes toward the topic being discussed. O'Keefe (2002) asserts that Persuasion involves changing persons' mental states usually as precursors to behavioral change. It is an intentional effort at influencing another's mental state through communication in a circumstance in which the persuadee has some measure of freedom.

Use of the mass media as a teaching instrument in the classroom has increased considerably at all grade levels in the past few years. Newspapers are the most widely used source of media. Newspapers are also a great source for ESP teachers. An important part of newspaper is its editorial. An editorial is considered a kind of newspaper genre that gives the opinion of the editor on news topics. They can be used as teaching materials to develop students' language skills.

2.4. Studies on Contrastive Rhetoric Analysis

Ashipu (2013) rhetorically analyzed editorials of the News watch and the Tell Magazines through the application of various stylistic models. The paper dealt with figures of speech as aspects of stylistic components of rhetorical study. The findings of the study revealed the use of rhetorical figures such as simile, personification, hyperbole, rhetorical questions, cliché and idioms. He concluded that in Nigeria like other African societies, figurative expressions are essential components for embellishing a thought.

In another study, Afzal and Harun (2013) made a comparative analysis of editorial contents taken from The News International (NI) and the Arab News (AN). The main focus of the research was the rhetorical strategies and persuasive type of language employed by editors in their texts. The findings of this cross-cultural analysis revealed that the two newspapers are identical in their use of rhetorical strategies. However, some devices were more preferred over others by editors of different backgrounds. As an example, the editor of NI used hyperbole, simile and metonym more than the AN editor.

Similarly, Babaee (2010) implemented a comparative study of twenty English and twenty Persian newspaper editorials from *The New York Times* and Tehran Times. He analyzed the editorials in both newspapers regarding the employment of rhetorical structures and devices. The analysis revealed that editorial writers employed certain rhetorical structures such as Personification, Metaphor, Metonymy and Irony in an effort to persuade the readers. Although the editorial writers in the two newspapers used the above-mentioned structures and devices in their editorials of criticism, they were not consistent in the frequency of using these devices.

3. THE STUDY

3.1. Design of the Study

This study attempts to examine the Rhetorical Devices employed by editorial writers in order to persuade their readers. As a quantitative genre-analysis research, the present study aims to take account of the type and frequency of occurrences of the Rhetorical Devices (RD) in the selected editorials.

3.2. Categories of Textual Analysis

Editorial writers can make use of many rhetorical devices to persuade the readers of their text. But according to Richardson (2007), only few devices are useful for the analysis of newspaper discourse. Thus, a textual analysis was carried out based on the framework proposed by Richardson (2007) regarding the rhetorical devices, focusing on Hyperbole, Metaphor and Metonymy.

3.3. Corpora

By adopting a nonrandom convenience sampling, the present study selected 30 editorials as the corpus of the study: 15 editorials culled from the electronic version of the American daily newspaper *New York Times* at <http://www.nytimes.com> and 15 editorials culled from the electronic version of the daily Australian newspaper *The Australian* at <http://www.theaustralian.com.au>. The period of all editorials publication was from January 2013 up to July 2014. This study aimed to explore the special rhetorical devices employed in the editorials. These devices emphasize or draw attention to special aspects of the meaning of a text, and hence often are used as a part of strategies of persuasion.

3.4. Procedures

After identifying the Rhetorical Devices in the editorials, the type and frequency of RDs were counted per one hundred words in the whole text. The frequencies of every single RD category in each individual newspaper were summed up in order to reach the total frequency of RD use in that newspaper, that is, *The New York Times* and *The Australian*. Finally, the entire distribution of both RD categories was compared between the newspapers of *The New York Times* and *The Australian*.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Hyperbole

Hyperbole is defined as a strategy for making excessive exaggeration for producing rhetorical effect. Textual analysis of the selected editorials revealed that the editorial writers tended to employ hyperbole to persuade the readers of their texts. The following excerpts clarify the point:

- He was one of *the most extraordinary* liberation leaders. (Ref. *NYT* 5)
- The country's president, Good luck Jonathan, has been inept at addressing this *monstrous crime*. (Ref. *NYT* 2)
- Allow such inequality to stifle economic growth and opportunity for all but *the very wealthiest* in this society. (Ref. *NYT* 11)
- The situation in what is one of Europe's *most strategically important* nations ...could be ominous. (Ref. *The Australian* 14)
- The global community cannot afford to sit back and watch another blood force...set up training camps and go about exporting its *deadly business*. (Ref. *The Australian* 4)
- General Sisi is set to be swept to power in presidential elections following last week's *overwhelming endorsement* of a new constitution he proposed. (Ref. *The Australian* 8)

The editorial writers of the above-stated examples have deliberately used hyperbole to make the pointed issues appear more important and more frightening. They have tried to influence the reader's opinion by arousing his/her feelings and emotions. For instance, Excerpt no. 2 suggests that crimes committed by Boko Haram are so cruel and inhuman and the situation is so grave that can be referred to as monstrous. Or excerpt no. 6 mentions that the endorsement of a new constitution by General Sisi was overwhelmingly vast.

4.2. Metaphor

Metaphor in the most general sense involves perceiving one thing in terms of another. In other words, it is a comparison between two dissimilar notions where one notion is to be understood in terms of the other notion. Metaphor was one of the identified persuasive devices employed in the

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editorials. Few instances of the identified metaphorical expressions in the selected editorials are represented in the following examples.

- Mr. Maliki has been central to the political disorder that has *poisoned* Iraq. (Ref. *NYT* 4)
- *All eyes* at this week's United Nations General Assembly will be on Iran's new president. (Ref. *NYT* 15)
- The interim deal would provide sanctions relief, including freeing up about \$4.2 billion in oil revenue that is *frozen* in foreign banks. (Ref. *NYT* 3)
- Israel...is *feeling an itch in its trigger finger*. (Ref. *The Australian* 4)
- General Sisi is now trying to stuff the *Islamist genie* back into the bottle. (Ref. *The Australian* 7)
- Voting was strong in the Kandahar region, *a backbone* of the Taliban. (Ref. *The Australian* 9)

Table4.1. Analysis of Metaphors in Editorials

Topic	Vehicle
Political disorder	Poisonous substance
World's attention	All eyes
Unused oil revenue	Frozen
Israel's desire to start a war	Feeling an itch in trigger finger
The Brotherhood	Islamist genie
Kandahar region	Backbone

4.3. Metonymy

Metonymy as an example of figurative language is defined as a figure of speech in which one word or phrase is substituted for another with which it is closely associated. The most frequently-employed rhetorical device in the editorials was found to be Metonymy. Instance of metonymic concepts appear in the following excerpts:

- There are many things *Moscow* can still do to derail the election. (Ref. *NYT* 14)
- *Iran* has agreed to stop enriching uranium beyond 5 percent. (Ref. *NYT* 3)
- This is not the first time *Boko Haram* has attacked students. (Ref. *NYT* 2)
- This is despite the North Korean precedent, which saw *Pyongyang* agree to stop enriching uranium. (Ref. *The Australian* 3)
- *The Brotherhood* has added fuel to fire by its refusal to compromise. (Ref. *The Australian* 7)
- *Washington* must not be alone in offering assistance to Abuja. (Ref. *The Australian* 2)

The metonymic use of words is presented as below:

- Moscow —→ Institution (Government)
- Iran —→ Institution (Nuclear program)
- Boko Haram —→ Army of militiamen
- Pyongyang —→ Institution (Nuclear program)
- The Brotherhood —→ Army of militiamen
- Washington —→ Institution (Government)

4.4. Entire Distribution of Rhetorical Devices in both Newspapers

Table4.2. Entire Distribution of RDs in both Newspapers

Rhetorical Device (RD)	The New York Times		The Australian	
	Frequency (F)	Percent (%)	Frequency (F)	Percent (%)
Hyperbole	9.30	34.38%	8.10	28.60%
Metaphor	4.97	18.37%	5.25	18.53%
Metonymy	12.78	47.24%	14.97	52.86%
Total	27.05	100%	28.32	100%

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the comparative analysis of the editorials' main text in the two newspapers showed their rhetorical characteristics. In an effort to persuade their readers, editorial writers in both papers relied on Hyperbole, Metaphor and Metonymy in their individual texts. As can be seen from the results, the tendency to frequently use Metonymy goes for both The New York Times and The Australian newspapers. This device enabled the editorial writers to use one identity to represent another. In most cases, the editorial writers used the geographical names such as Washington or Moscow to refer to the government. Additionally, they used the names of the institutions to refer to the people and members of that institution such as *The Brotherhood* or *Boko Haram* representing *the army the militiamen fight for*.

The second most used device in both newspapers happened to be Hyperbole. In order to give an excessive effect to their ideas, writers employed Hyperbole to make a claim that is literally quite impossible and unreal. They deliberately used this strategy to make the issue seem more important and vital to the reader.

In the similar vein, the frequency of Metaphor is almost the same for both newspapers and is the least used persuasive device. To manipulate the readers' understanding of the news events, editorial writers employed metaphor to reflect the opinions of the editorial writers towards the issue being discussed rather than the reality of the news events.

This makes it hard to distinguish whether the differences and similarities are the result of language or the particular genre conventions. Although the language of the two newspapers was English, but because of the existing geographical distance, we speculated that their cultures would differ and this would in turn affect their rhetorical conventions in the editorial genre. The results of the study proved the speculations wrong. From the results gained, the two newspapers were largely identical in the categorical distribution of the rhetorical devices with only minor differences existing between them.

It can be concluded that the editors in both newspapers adopted the similar style and way of approaching the issues by making use of rhetorical devices. Although, the geographical distance might have caused differences in the culture of each individual community, but the categorical distribution of these devices was nearly the same between the two newspapers. Therefore, language might be the main factor leading to the similarities between the newspapers with regard to the number of Rhetorical Devices they each use.

6. CONCLUSION

This study was based on the rhetorical analysis of editorials from The New York Times and The Australian based on Hyperbole and Metaphor and Metonymy. The results achieved from the analysis of the editorials showed that the newspapers, The New York Times and The Australian, were identical and similar in their use of rhetorical device categories. However, it was found that the categorical distribution of rhetorical devices was nearly the same in the two newspapers. In sum, editors tended to formulate opinions and enhance the persuasiveness of the composition via using these devices. This identical way of approaching the issue might be the result of the language the editors speak and its direct influence on the thought pattern and cognition of the community members. It might also be related to the written persuasion conventions of each individual language and culture. Thus, editorial writers might behave in similar ways no matter which society and culture they come from.

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