Contrastive Rhetorical Analysis of Argumentation Techniques in the Argumentative Essays of English and Persian Writers

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Abstract

The present study intended to compare and contrast the techniques used by English and Persian writers to develop argumentative essays. To this end, 20 argumentative essays (10 in English and 10 in Persian) were selected from among the available online argumentative essays with the same length and topic. These essays were analyzed with focus on the frequency of the four argumentation techniques of refutation, rhetorical questions, statistics, and appeal to authority. The results of the study revealed that while the writers in both languages made use of all these four techniques, they significantly differed regarding the frequency of refutation and rhetorical questions. While English argumentative writerspreferred direct, explicit techniques, Persian writerswere mainly in favor of indirect techniques. The findings also suggested that in EFL contexts, cultural differences and their influence on rhetoric and formal writing can make it difficult for Persian learners of English to write logical argumentative essays in the new medium.

Keywords: argumentative essay, collectivist, individualistic culture, refutation, rhetoric.

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Introduction

Rhetoric can be defined as the "choice of linguistic and structural aspects of a discourse chosen to produce an effect on an audience" (Purves 1988, p. 9, cited in Noor 2001). Contrastive rhetoric was originally proposed by Kaplan (1966), who used contrastive analysis to study the rhetorical differences between international ESL students' writing in English and writings of English native speakers. Since then, there have been a great number of research reports, and doctoral dissertations on the issue of contrastive rhetoric. As a result, contrastive rhetoric has made a significant position for itself as a viable object of linguistic inquiry and secured its place in the field of applied linguistics (Wong, 1997).

As stated by Saez (2001), the key question for Contrastive Rhetoric is whether there exist differences between texts written by speakers of different languages and members of different cultures and whether these differences lead to the poor performance of EFL learners in writing. Depending on their fields of study, second-language writers may be required to write for different purposes. Argumentative writing, i.e., writing in order to argue for a specific subject or issue, is one type of such requirements that EFL students may be asked to perform.

Zhu (2001) refers to the prevalence of argumentative writing in the academic curriculum, and to the challenges and difficulties associated with its development. He states that a common component of English as second language (ESL) writing classes consists of helping second-language learners develop argumentative writing skills. As claimed by Nam (2006), writing an argumentative essay in English can be a difficult assignment for the students of English as a Second Language (ESL); thus, it is very important to provide them with instruction on the structure of English argumentative essays. Kaplan (1966) justifies such difficulty, explaining that since logic and rhetorical structure are by no means a universal phenomenon but are culturally defined, a perfectly logical argument in one culture might be viewed as sophistical or illogical in another.

The findings of intercultural communication and contrastive rhetorical studies have provided evidence for the existence of different argument patterns across cultures. For example, in terms of argument orientation and argument structures, Americans are observed to prefer a practical and scientific orientation, absolutism, and factual concrete evidence whereas Japanese are found to prefer a more humanistic aesthetic orientation and situationalism with lesser degree of warrants and backing and with more subjective evidence (Okabe, 1983).

With respect to thinking patterns, logic, and organizational structure use in argumentation, Americans are known to prefer "hard-mind logic" with analytic thinking patterns and rational appeals while Japanese tend to use soft, "heart-like logic" employing affective appeals and presenting things in a holistic manner (Kamimura & Oi, 1998; Okabe, 1983, p.32). While elaborative language use

with frequent metaphors, idioms, clichés, set phrases, or proverbs is found in Arabic (Ostler, 1987), Turkish (Enginarlar, 1990) and Chinese texts (Matalene, 1985); Finnish communication is reported to be an example for succinct style in which only what is exactly necessary is said (Lewis, 2005).

Zhu (2001) refers to a number of rhetorical researches comparing argumentative essays written by native and nonnative English speakers. These researches have revealed rhetorical and textual differences and similarities (Bouchard, 1996; Choi, 1986, 1988a, 1988b; Ferris, 1994; Hinkel, 1999; Kim, 1996; Lux, 1991). For example, Ferris (1994) and Hinkel (1999) found that native English speakers and ESL students differed in the use of counter-arguments. Lux (1991) found that English-speaking college students in comparison with native Spanish-speaking students mainly preferred an elaborate style in writing on an argumentative task. To some extent, these differences explain the difficulties L2 writers experience when they deal with the rhetorical aspects of English argumentative writing.

Liu (2005) has maintained that although American and achinese groups agree on the purpose, tripartite structure and the use of formal logic, they differ in the discussion of some fundamentals for argumentative writing, specifically while the Chinese group demonstrates the use of epistemological and dialectical logic and highlights the need to use analogies, the American group considers anticipating the opposition a must.

In the past few decades, a great number of rhetorical studies have also investigated the textual and organizational similarities and differences in English and Persian argumentative texts (Ahmad Khan Beigi & Ahmadi, 2011; Nowrouzi khiabani & Pourghassemian, 2009; Zare-ee & Farvardin, 2009; Baleghizadeh & Pashaii, 2010). For example, Ahmad Khan Beigi and Ahmadi (2011) have found that while the dominant rhetorical features of English argumentative essays are deductivity, linearity, straightforward nature, and explicitness, the dominant rhetorical features of Persian argumentative essays are deductivity, circularity, metaphorical nature, explicitness and the Start-Sustain-Turn-Sum structure. Zare-ee and Farvardin (2009) and Baleghizadeh and Pashaii (2010), have found that Iranian students in comparison with English students tend to use more T-units, discourse blocs, and coordinating clauses in their argumentative writing. It is argued that this is due to different thought patterns between the two languages claimed by Kaplan's (1966) contrastive rhetoric.

As the review of literature reveals a great number of the studies concerned with argumentative writing in English and Persian have mainly focused on the structural and rhetorical differences between these two languages. However, the aim of the present study is to compare the type and frequency of argumentative techniques in these two languages. The intended techniques to be studied are *refutation, rhetorical questions, statistics, and appeal to authority*.

Refutation means to anticipate and overcome objections that the opposition might raise. Rhetorical questions are kind of questions asked only for effect,

not for information. A rhetorical question is constructed so that only one answer is obvious. Statistics involves presenting reliable numerical information in order to support a claim. Appeal to authority, however, means to quote the experts and professionals of the field that can support one's claim (POWA, http://www.powa.org).

There exist several writing instruction websites in English, provided by professional writers that explain in detail the various types of optional and obligatory techniques for developing a reasonable, logical argumentation. However, not only there is not such a web site in Persian to provide information or instruct argumentative writing and its techniques, but also no study has investigated whether, these same techniques with the same frequency are used in Persian or not. The uses of these techniques have been rhetorically investigated in English and languages such as Chinese, Korean, Japanese, and Indonesian and significant differences have been reported (Hinkel, 2002).

The aim of the present study is to contrastively investigate the use of these four argumentation techniques by advanced native writers in English and Persian. In other words, determining the possible similarities and differences between the type and frequency of argumentation techniques in these two languages and the cultural beliefs backing them is the main aim of the present study.

Research Questions

The present study mainly aims to answer the two following questions:

1. The frequency of which techniques are significantly different in English and Persian?

2. Which technique type has the highest frequency in English and Persian?

Methodology

As stated before, the aim of the present study is to identify, compare and contrast the type and frequency of argumentative techniques used by professional native writers in English and Persian in order to develop a logical argumentation.

Among possible ways commonly used by scholars in contrastive rhetoric is to select a number of original texts written by advanced native speakers of different languages and then compare and contrast them with each other. In the case of the present study, the author adopted this method to investigate the similarities and differences between argumentation techniques and their frequency of use in the argumentative essays of English and Persian advanced native writers.

To achieve this end, 20 argumentative essays (10 written by English native speakers and 10 by Persian native speakers) were chosen from among the available online argumentative essays. The selected articles covered topics that were highly controversial, such as: abortion, the effect of TV violence, censorship, death penalty, and so on. The selected essays in the two languages had almost the same length and were written about the same or similar topics so that length and topic may not interfere with the results of the study. In other words, length and topic were controlled so that they may not turn to the intervening variables. For example, if the authors selected a 2500 word English argumentative essay on "The bad effects of violet TV programs on children", they then looked for an argumentative essay written about the same topic and with almost the same length in Persian.

The selected techniques and evidences to be investigated were:counter-argument (refutation), rhetorical questions, statistics, and appeal to authority. These four techniques and evidences were selected from among those techniques which were repeatedly suggested by the majority of English websites instructing argumentative writing, such as OWL and POWA. All these English writing instructional websites emphasized the use of refutation as a must for developing a logical argumentation essay and introduced the other three techniques as good ones for supporting the claims and strengthening the argument. As there were no such professional writing instruction websites in Persian, the author selected these criterion techniques from English instructional websites. The authors selected these techniques with the purpose of evaluating their existence and frequency of use in the authentic argumentative essays by native advanced English and Persian writers.

Then, the authors analyzed the essays in detail to find out whether Persian and English writers used these four types of techniques to develop their argumentation or not. Moreover, the total number of times a technique was used in all 10 essays in each language was calculated. The obtained results in the two languages were then compared and contrasted to each other. The results were indicative of the existence of both similarities and differences between these two languages regarding the type and frequency of techniques and evidences. The topic of argumentative essays evaluated and the number of times each technique used in each one has been presented in the appendix.

Data Analysis

In the present study, Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances and Post Hoc Scheffe test were performed to examine if there exists any significant difference between the frequency of technique types in English and Persian argumentative essays. As the first step, however, relevant descriptive statistics are presented:

Table 1 . *Between-Subjects Factors*

		Value Label	N
type	1.00	R	20
	2.00	RQ	20
	3.00	S	20
	4.00	ATA	20
group	1.00	Persian	40
	2.00	English	40

Table 2 . *Descriptive Statistics, Dependent Variable: techniques*

type	group	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
1.00	Persian	.4000	.69921	10
	English	2.0000	1.05409	10
	Total	1.2000	1.19649	20
2.00	Persian	1.4000	1.34990	10
	English	.3000	.48305	10
	Total	.8500	1.13671	20
3.00	Persian	.8000	1.03280	10
	English	.6000	.84327	10
	Total	.7000	.92338	20
4.00	Persian	2.8000	1.31656	10
	English	3.0000	1.56347	10
	Total	2.9000	1.41049	20
Total	Persian	1.3500	1.42415	40
	English	1.4750	1.50192	40
	Total	1.4125	1.45562	80

As the descriptive data in Table 2 show, the mean difference of the first technique type (refutation) in English and Persian is significant. As the presented data reveal, English argumentative essays with the mean score of 2.0000 in comparison with Persian argumentative essays with the mean score of .4000 have devoted to themselves a higher frequency of refutation technique. Regarding the second technique (rhetorical questions), again the mean difference between English and Persian is significant. According to the obtained means, Persian argumentative essays with the mean score of 1.4000 as compared with English argumentative essays with the mean score of .3000 represent a higher frequency of use of the rhetorical questions.

Comparing the mean scores of English and Persian argumentative essays with respect to the third technique (statistics), it is revealed that the mean difference is not significant. In other words, this technique both in English and Persian argumentative essays has been used with more or less the same frequency. The forth technique (appeal to authority) has also devoted to itself almost the same frequency in both English and Persian argumentative essays, as it is evident from the low mean difference of this technique type in English and Persian.

Table 3 . *Test of between subjects effects, Dependent variable: techniques*

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	80.887[a]	7	11.555	9.618	.000	.483
Intercept	159.612	1	159.612	132.857	.000	.649
Type	61.638	3	20.546	17.102	.000	.416
Group	.313	1	.313	.260	.612	.004
type * group	18.937	3	6.312	5.254	.002	.180
Error	86.500	72	1.201			
Total	327.000	80				
Corrected Total	167.387	79				

a. R Squared = .483 (Adjusted R Squared = .433)

In this part of the study, Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances[a] was used to test whether the frequency difference across the four technique types and between the two groups is significant and which technique type has the highest frequency in each group. As the data in the above table show, frequency difference across technique types in each group is quite significant (df =3, F= 17.102, P=.05). Moreover, there exist a significant technique frequency difference between the two English and Persian groups (df =1, F= .260, P=.05). These between group differences were elaborated based on the statistical data above. However, in order to determinewhich technique type has the highest frequency in each group, the Post Hoc Scheffe test was performed.

Table 4 . *Scheffe Dependent Variable: techniques Multiple Comparisons*

(I) type	(J) type	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1.00	2.00	.3500	.34661	.797	-.6423	1.3423
	3.00	.5000	.34661	.559	-.4923	1.4923
	4.00	-1.7000[*]	.34661	.000	-2.6923	-.7077
2.00	1.00	-.3500	.34661	.797	-1.3423	.6423
	3.00	.1500	.34661	.979	-.8423	1.1423
	4.00	-2.0500[*]	.34661	.000	-3.0423	-1.0577
3.00	1.00	-.5000	.34661	.559	-1.4923	.4923
	2.00	-.1500	.34661	.979	-1.1423	.8423
	4.00	-2.2000[*]	.34661	.000	-3.1923	-1.2077
4.00	1.00	1.7000[*]	.34661	.000	.7077	2.6923
	2.00	2.0500[*]	.34661	.000	1.0577	3.0423
	3.00	2.2000[*]	.34661	.000	1.2077	3.1923

Based on observed means. *. The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.
The error term is Mean Square (Error) = 1.201.

As the above table reveals, the most significant difference in technique frequency both in English and Persian is between technique number four (appeal to authority) and other three techniques. To put it other way, compared with the other three techniques, this technique is used with the highest frequency both in English and Persian.

Discussion

As far as the type of argumentative techniques are concerned, the results of the present study revealed that both English and Persian argumentative writers make use of all the techniques and evidences which are the focus of this study, naming refutation, rhetorical questions, appeal to authority and statistics.

However, these two languages differ in the way that the frequency of technique adoption is not the same in two languages. The first technique which is refutation is used by English people with a much higher frequency than Persian writers. In fact, English professional writers show much more sense of an adversary. They believe that, in order to win acceptance, the writer of an argumentative must not only explain and support his proposition, but also anticipate and overcome objections that the opposition might raise (POWA, http://www.powa.org). Even in POWA website and other websites teaching argumentative writing, the use of this technique is considered as obligatory and a must.

The frequent use of refutation by English writers could be explained based on a socio-cultural context of individualism that encourages individual self-expression, creativity and critical thinking (Cheng & Chen, 2009). Individualist patterns involve ideas of the self as independent, self-directed, and autonomous and presuppose exactly this kind of person: someone able to make proposals, concessions, and maximize gains in their own self-interest (Lebaron, 2003).

Individualistic cultures are more self-centered and emphasize mostly on their individual goals. English rhetoric and formal writing is also under the influence of individualism, so the use of techniques that lead the person toward proving his own, individualized ideas even by disrupting and rejecting the ideas of others seems quite natural. Refutation is one of those strategies that help the writer to strengthen his own, personal ideas through weakening the others' opinions in that issue. Moreover, as stated in POWA website (http://www.powa.org), that is an English website instructing various kinds of academic writing, "the goal of argument is to gain your reader's assent to your central proposition, despite active opposition" (Guilford, n.d.).

In the case of Asian writers, however, the limited use of this technique could be explained through the goal of rhetoric under the influence of collectivism culture which is to achieve general harmony, to express the views of the group, and to promote social cohesion (Becker, 1986; Hinkel, 2002; Kaplan, 1966; Matalene, 1985). To achieve these purposes, they employ various indirect modes of expression to suggest their claim, and support their

ideas with appeals to history, tradition, and authority rather than their own individual opinions or beliefs. They rely on accepted patterns of expression, and avoid any contentious forms of argument (Hinkel, 2002; Matalene, 1985; Oliver, 1971; Scollon, 1991).

As stated by Atkinson (1997) and Fox (1994), the social values and practices under the influences of collectivism culture emphasize group harmony and conformity, while qualities such as conformity run counter to the spirit of critical thinking that involves individualistic and adversarial practices. Iranis also considered a collectivistic society. Probably that is the reason why Persian writers prefer to avoid refutation and instead use indirect strategies such as appeal to authority or statistics to support their claims. Just like people in other collectivist cultures, Iranian people prefer to support and prove their claims through the use of indirect techniques. They usually prefer not to address opposing views so that it may not hinder social cohesion or general harmony.

Regarding rhetorical questions, Iranian writers used this technique with higher frequency. These kind of questions are asked only for effect, not for information. A rhetorical question is constructed so that only one answer is obvious. Persuasive writers may choose to answer their own question for further emphasis, or may choose to let the question stand by itself. The use of rhetorical questions is a kind of indirect strategy that seems again to characterize the writing of those who are under the influence of collectivist culture.

For those who are under the influence of such culture , rhetorical indirectness has the goal of maintaining harmony and avoiding impoliteness so that their writing appear vague and indirect to create solidarity between the speaker and hearer. Direct argumentation or persuasion is not common in these cultures (Hinkel, 1998, cited in Liu, 2008). According to Hinkel (1998), indirectness strategies and markers have also been identified in written discourse in many languages, including English. However, in Anglo-American academic writing, explicit points and direct support are expected.

This result of the study is in line with the results of study by Hinkel (1997). This study, based on corpus analysis, compared specific indirectness devices employed in native speaker (NS) and non-native speaker (NNS) student essays and focused on NS and NNS uses of twenty-one rhetorical, lexical, referential (deictic), and syntactic indirectness devices. The results of the study indicated that speakers of Chinese, Korean, Japanese, and Indonesian (who have collectivist culture just like Iranians) utilized rhetorical questions and tags and other indirect techniques in greater frequencies than NSs did.

This finding of the study is also in accordance with the study which revealed that arguments are more direct in Germany, Italy, Greece, France, (Tannen, 1998), and Northern European countries (Beltran, Salo-Lee & Maestro, 2002) compared to those in the USA, while they are even more indirect in collectivist cultures such as Korean, Japanese, and Chinese that their main goal is good relationships and harmony (Dillard & Marshall, 2003).

As the results of the study reveal, appeal to authority has been used with the same frequency and more than the other three techniques in both languages. This result of the study is not so much in line with previous studies which showed that people in individualistic cultures tend to argue more directly, while appeal to authority is an indirect strategy that has been used with such high frequency in English.

One possible explanation is that the use of this technique is significantly different in English and Persian in the sense that the use of anonymous authorities is more common among Persian argumentative writers. For example, "Experts agree that ..", "scientists say .." or even "they say ..". The problem with this kind of information is that the provided information would not be verifiable, and there would be the very real possibility that the arguer himself doesn't know who the experts are.The English arguers, however, present more exact quotes. Their quotes in majority of cases containcontext, and the arguer can say where they come from. Probably the reason is that Persian writers are much more tolerant of vagueness than English writers who expect everything to be explicit and clear. In other words, although the technique is considered to be indirect, the English writers make it explicit through mentioning the exact sources and through using it in context. To put it other way, the same technique that is used in an indirect, vague mode by Persian writers, is used directly and explicitly by English writers.

Statistics can also be considered as excellent support, provided that it comes from responsible sources, and the sources are cited. Statistics is one of those techniques that is used with almost the same frequency in English and Persian. However, generally, it has not devoted to itself a high frequency of use either in English or Persian. The reason probably is that the argumentative writers believe other techniques and evidences to be more useful in proving their argumentation. Moreover, the arguers may not be sure about the accuracy of statistics and numerical calculations or probably the sources providing the statistics are not available so that they can report them for the purpose of verification.

Conclusion

In sum, English argumentative writers under the influence of socio-cultural context of individualism, prefer to use direct, explicit techniques to overcome objections against their individual, personal beliefs and attitudes. While, on the other hand, Persian writers, respecting the values of a collectivist culture, mainly employ various indirect modes of expression to argue since they prefer to avoid refutation or direct arguments that may threaten social cohesion and harmony. This can provide an explanation for why Iranian EFL learners may experience difficulty when writing an argumentative essay in English and why they may not succeed in writing a logical argumentation in the new medium.

The present study, however, has just investigated four argumentative techniques and there is the possibility that if other techniques are also

evaluated, more comprehensive or even different results may be obtained. One of the implications of the study is that being aware of these different techniques and the socio-cultural beliefs backing them can be helpful for both EFL learners and teachers. Teachers can familiarize the learners with the different argumentative techniques used in the foreign language and consequently guide them how to write logical argumentative essays.

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Appendix

Argumentative essays	Technique types in English			
	refutation	Rhetorical questions	Statistics	Appeal to authority
Essay 1: The effects of violent TV programs on children	4	0	1	2
Essay 2: The good and bad consequences of death penalty	1	1	0	4
Essay 3: The effects of mobiles on students' academic performance	2	0	0	2
Essay 4: constitutional issue of abortion	1	0	2	3
Essay5: Is counseling beneficial	3	0	0	5
Essay 6: Filtering internet	2	1	0	0
Essay 7: Advantages and disadvantages of nuclear power	2	0	0	4
Essay 8: beauty surgery, its advantages or disadvantages	1	0	2	5
Essay 9: TV advertisements	1	1	1	3
Essay 10: War and its consequences	3	0	0	2

Argumentative essays	Technique types in Persian			
	refutation	Rhetorical questions	Statistics	Appeal to authority
Essay 1: The effects of violent TV programs on children	0	0	3	5
Essay 2: The good and bad consequences of death penalty	2	1	0	3
Essay 3: The effects of mobiles on students' academic performance	0	1	1	4
Essay 4: constitutional issue of abortion	1	0	1	2
Essay5: Is counseling beneficial	0	0	2	4
Essay 6: Filtering internet	0	3	0	1
Essay 7: Advantages and disadvantages of nuclear power	0	1	0	3
Essay 8: beauty surgery, its advantages or disadvantages	1	4	1	2
Essay 9: TV advertisements	0	2	0	3
Essay 10: War and its consequences	0	2	0	1