

# Chapter 1

## An Introduction

In 1997, the late Nils Erik Enkvist, a world-renown scholar of text and style, in an article titled “Why We Need Contrastive Rhetoric” wrote:

One of the hot subjects in today’s linguistics is the field variously known as contrastive (or cross-cultural or intercultural) rhetoric (or, with varying emphases, text linguistics, discourse linguistics, discourse analysis, or pragmalinguistics) . . . simply defined as the study of patterns of text and discourse in different languages that vary in structural and in cultural background. (p. 188)

*Contrastive rhetoric, cross-cultural rhetoric, and intercultural rhetoric* were terms Enkvist suggested as interchangeable. However, this book discusses changes in the concepts of culture, text analysis, and interaction between cultures in the past decade that point to the term *intercultural rhetoric* as the most appropriate name for this area of study. *Intercultural* provides an appropriate connotation of collaborative interaction between and among cultures and individuals, on one hand, and within cultures on the other. (The American Heritage Dictionary, 2000, defines the prefix *inter-* as “1. Between; among; international. 2. In the midst of; within: intertropical. 3. Mutual; mutually: interrelate. 4. Reciprocal; reciprocally: intermingle”; p. 707.) Instead, the prefix *contra-* in contrastive rhetoric suggests acting against or in opposition to something,

with no middle ground. (The American Heritage Dictionary defines *contra-* as “1. Against; opposite; contrasting; contra-position”; p. 302.)

Intercultural rhetoric is defined as the study of written discourse between and among individuals with different cultural backgrounds. By *discourse*, I mean language use beyond the sentence as well as social and ideological assumptions that are associated with communication, consistent with definitions of discourse analysis by Shiffrin, Tannen, and Hamilton (2001).

The discussions of contextualized text analysis as well as new definitions of culture lay the basis for a new theory of *intercultural rhetoric*, the term at the crux of this book. This definition follows a line of thinking put forth in an earlier paper (Connor, 2008), in which three relevant components are overlaid using a postmodern map of (1) texts in contexts, (2) culture as a complex interaction of small and large cultures, and (3) texts in intercultural interactions. Intercultural rhetoric assumes that (1) the study of writing is not limited to texts but needs to consider the surrounding social contexts and practices; (2) national cultures interact with disciplinary and other cultures in complex ways; and (3) intercultural discourse encounters—spoken and written—entail interaction among interlocutors and require negotiation and accommodation.

The new term *intercultural rhetoric* is an umbrella term that includes cross-cultural studies (comparison of the same concept in culture one and two) and studies of interactions in which writers with a variety of linguistic, cultural, and social backgrounds negotiate through speaking and writing.

## Background

The study of cross-cultural writing has had a significant impact on the teaching of writing in both ESL and EFL classes. Kaplan’s (1966) provocative observations about ESL students’ paragraph writing pioneered attention to cultural differences in the writing of ESL students. This focus on writing was especially welcomed in the area of ESL instruction, as an

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emphasis on oral language skills had previously dominated ESL contexts in the United States. Countless books, articles, and academic theses have focused on cross-cultural aspects of writing and how writing is best taught. These studies inform us about cultural and social practices and preferences shaping writing and communication. These insights are important for teachers to know to better understand their students.

My own journey into contrastive rhetoric began as a 23-year-old master's level student of English language and literature at the University of Helsinki, Finland, when I received an opportunity to study for a year at the University of Florida. As I described in my literacy autobiography (Connor, 1999a), a necessary part of my education at the University of Florida was socialization into the writing/rhetorical/scholarly conventions of the U.S. academic milieu.

This experience as an international student affected my research topics. Later on, in doctoral studies in English linguistics and education at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, in the late 1970s, I was drawn to writing term papers with a cross-cultural focus. For my doctoral dissertation, I used Robert Lado's (1957) *Linguistics across Cultures* to provide a design for a psycholinguistic reading study of ESL learners. My dissertation was a contrastive reading study of Spanish and Vietnamese school children learning to read in ESL. According to the contrastive analysis hypothesis, Vietnamese readers would have more difficulty in reading ESL than Spanish readers, whose language structures more closely resembled that of English. The results of my study did not, however, support this hypothesis. Instead, factors such as parents' level of education, the family's socioeconomic status, and other sociological and education factors were better predictors of ESL reading performance as measured by standardized test scores.

This finding was the first signal to me that first language and cultural backgrounds by themselves are not the causes of transfer but have to be examined in the context of other educational and social factors. I continued research on L2 reading while teaching at Georgetown University in the early 1980s when I became interested in the effect of cross-cultural

schemas on reading comprehension. After hearing Kaplan speak at a TESOL conference and after reading his 1966 article, my research interests switched to writing, especially textual analysis of written products (Connor, 1984).

In the early 1980s, Kaplan and I organized five annual colloquia at the international TESOL Conference, drawing presenters such as John Hinds; several of Kaplan's former students, such as Bill Eggington, Shirley Ostler, and Bill Grabe; speakers from overseas, such as Nils Erik Enkvist, Lars Evensen, and others from the NORDTEXT Group; and Sauli Takala from Alan Purves' International Education Achievement study of writing achievement. Then, in 1987, Kaplan and I co-edited *Writing across Languages: Analysis of L2 Text*, the first-ever edited volume of empirical and text-analytic contrastive rhetoric studies, most of which had been originally presented at the annual contrastive rhetoric colloquia.

Since this period in the 1980s, there have been at least six major influences that have shaped intercultural rhetoric:

1. Links between American composition and European text linguistics. Links between American traditions of rhetoric/composition on the one hand and European traditions of text analysis on the other are integral to the field today. Early contrastive rhetoric used organizational patterns as a method of analysis. Today's analyses are based on more sophisticated textual analyses.
2. Links with Comparative Rhetoric. Comparative rhetoric (Kennedy, 1998) studies rhetorics of languages and cultures (e.g., Chinese, Arabic) in their own right. Histories of rhetorical traditions are explained in detail. Such an approach to rhetoric is manifest in a study by You (2008), whose cogent explanations of Chinese writing traditions are useful reading for an English teacher of Chinese students.
3. Revisions in the definition of *rhetoric*. In contrastive rhetoric, the term *rhetoric* was limited to arrangement or organization, one of the three steps in Aristotle's

- treatise of rhetoric as an act of persuasive skill. The two other aspects were invention or discovery and style (Aristotle, 2005, p. 6). The term *rhetoric* in intercultural rhetoric is more closely related to Aristotle's concept of rhetoric (invention, style, and arrangement) with its three different types of rhetorical proof: logos (the use of reasoning), ethos (the credibility of the speaker/writer), and pathos (the use of emotional appeals). See Connor 1996 for a detailed discussion of the appeals. This notion of rhetoric follows current thinking in the field of rhetoric/composition. George Kennedy (1998) in *Comparative Rhetoric: An Historical and Cross-Cultural Introduction* defines rhetoric as "a form of mental and emotional energy" (p. 3). Emotional reaction (e.g., fear, lust, hunger) as well as thought, of course, produce utterances. According to Kennedy, "rhetoric is a natural phenomenon: the potential for it exists in all life forms that can give signals, it is practiced in limited forms by nonhuman animals" (p. 4). Sullivan and Porter (1997) in *Opening Spaces: Writing Technologies and Critical Research Practices*, believe that rhetoric is "defined by its focus on 'situation' and by its concerns about how rhetorical situation guides production" (p. 25). This broadened definition of rhetoric as effective communication is appropriate for current work in intercultural rhetoric.
4. Innovations in research methods for studying writing. Major innovations in the study of language and writing—such as genre analysis and corpus linguistics—have been brought into intercultural rhetoric. Much-needed connections, however, have been made between intercultural rhetoric and the field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). In combination with the notion of genre, intercultural rhetoric has substantially refocused on writing for specific purposes. My own studies on grant proposals and fundraising letters are examples of this cross-over (Connor, 2000; Connor & Gladkov, 2004).

5. Intercultural communication as speaking and writing. The need to study and understand the two-way flow of influence between speaking and writing in intercultural communication, consistent with the expanded definition of rhetoric discussed earlier, has become clear. Negotiation often takes place in the form of both text and talk. Consider international business negotiations where emails complement phone conversations and face-to-face meetings, followed by hard-copy written memoranda of understanding and official written contracts. The writing classroom also includes a mix of writing, spoken and written peer response comments, teacher-student conferences, and online chat rooms. This text-talk interface calls for different methods of analysis from traditional contrastive rhetoric.
6. Explosion in studies of culture. Since the late 1980s and early 1990s, the influence of cultural studies and concomitant qualitative research methodologies has pervaded the social sciences, and contrastive rhetoric has followed suit by exploring research approaches that go beyond the analysis of texts and included case studies, observations, ethnographies, and even literacy autobiographies (Belcher & Connor, 2001). Other influences and developments affecting the teaching of writing include ever-changing views of culture, intercultural communication, standards of English, and language learning. Each of these will be discussed in subsequent chapters, but the movement has been more than ever toward analyzing language contextually. Culture, in all the complexities of that word, is seen as dynamic and not confined to a hegemonic national discourse. The complexity of large and small cultures necessarily exists in the classroom just as it does in day-to-day life in a range of situations and social groupings (Holliday, 1999).

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This book will address the importance of considering language and writing as social action within particular contexts as well as the crucial move of understanding intercultural communication as an act of interaction and accommodation between native and non-native speakers—not one of assimilation by non-native English speakers. Along with these new views comes a necessary attention to the spread of English as a lingua franca (ELF) (English used in communication by speakers from different first languages), the subsequent implications of negotiating accepted English language norms, and the resultant diversity found in the language as it is practiced in different settings among people of varying proficiencies who have differing uses for the language. These evolving aspects of written and spoken language and communication certainly have implications for the classroom and the future of the intercultural communication field.

So far, we have considered influences on intercultural rhetoric. But we also need to remember the impact of intercultural rhetoric on other fields of study beyond composition and rhetoric. Intercultural rhetoric has seen its impact grow beyond second language writing. In 1997, Nils Erik Enkvist wrote about the growing importance of contrastive rhetoric for a range of disciplines including departments of business, translation, and interpretation, especially in a country like Finland where the teaching and learning of foreign languages has been a must. As Chapter 6 will show, intercultural rhetoric insights are also being used in the training of medical professionals. Other non-academic arenas of intercultural rhetoric's impact include ESL and intercultural communication training of immigrant workers in the United States.

Finally, despite the focus on accommodation and negotiation in intercultural encounters by all sides—native and non-native speakers alike—I must emphasize the need to teach English learners the tools of appropriate discourse for a variety of situations. It would be remiss for teachers not to expose learners to the use of dominant English language norms, such as writ-

ing an acceptable essay, job application letter, or emailing in a register and style expected of one's interlocutor when the basic norms can be identified.

### **Aims, Purposes, and Outline of This Book**

Given the influences and impacts outlined, this book continues the exploration of ongoing developments and possible future directions of intercultural rhetoric. The book will show how intercultural rhetoric contributes to the study of language and discourse by bringing in interactional studies, fore-fronting the multiplicity of texts, and studying both from a non-essentialist perspective. Intercultural rhetoric takes us away from binary distinctions such as linear and non-linear writing and individualist and collectivist cultures.

This book first discusses contrastive rhetoric today—where we are—and later shows where we could go. Thus, it identifies the gaps and shows how we can move to fill them. With this vision for mapping new directions for intercultural rhetoric, the book has three main goals: (1) to show what is worth keeping of the traditional approach of cross-cultural text analysis; (2) to establish what new approaches are needed to develop a better understanding of culture, what writing means, and how language norms are changing; and (3) to envision what a new theory of intercultural rhetoric would look like once Goals 1 and 2 are realized.

A natural tension exists throughout this work between holding on to the traditional and changing with the times. One should not throw the baby out with the bath water and whole-heartedly embrace new approaches at the expense of losing what is worthwhile. This is a challenge. Accordingly, this book takes a careful look at text analysis, the root of contrastive rhetoric. Text analysis can provide a window into culture if we consider texts as venues for performing cultural, cross-cultural, and intercultural action.



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This book also provides an overview of ways in which a dynamic view of culture can enrich intercultural rhetoric. According to this view, textual and discourse preferences are determined via interactions among national, disciplinary, classroom, and individual, among other cultures.

To set the stage, Chapter 2 reviews the shift from contrastive rhetoric to intercultural rhetoric. Chapter 3 then provides an overview of definitions of culture and their effect on the study of texts and writing. This overview leads to the discussion of intercultural rhetoric and what it entails in terms of the research paradigm of writing across languages and cultures. Chapter 4 deals with changes in text analysis from the linguistic text analysis of written products to considering how texts are produced and comprehended in their situational and cultural contexts and how the change to more contextualized analyses affects research on writing across cultures.

Chapter 5 tests the new theory of intercultural rhetoric for second language writing research and practice. This discussion includes reviews of studies of student and other writing with rich contextual analysis as well as a consideration of the new theory for the teaching of writing and its implications in the classroom, in the writing center, and in ESP and ELF situations, as well as implications for writing assessment.

The book will conclude in Chapter 6 with a case study of intercultural rhetoric as applied to research on health discourse. Health discourse is the subfield of applied linguistics that seeks to provide linguistic solutions to problems in the processing, comprehension, and interpretation of health-related communication such as doctor-patient interaction, patient education programs, and pharmaceutical literature.

### Discussion Questions

1. This chapter sets up the progression from contrastive rhetoric to intercultural rhetoric. In anticipation of Chapter 2, what are the salient differences presented thus far between the two?
2. Consider your own teaching. In your interactions with international students or in your role as a teacher educator, do you construct learning projects more closely aligned with a “teaching English norms” approach or an interactive intercultural approach? Explain using examples from your experience.
3. How has the revision of how we define *rhetoric* advanced studies of communication across and within cultures? Why is such study needed?