Critical and Corpus-Based Approaches to Intercultural Rhetoric
Diane Belcher and Gayle Nelson, Editors
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Why Intercultural Rhetoric Needs Critical and Corpus-Based Approaches: An Introduction

Diane Belcher and Gayle Nelson

Some who see the title of our book for the first time may well wonder why critical and corpus-based approaches would be combined in one volume. They may also wonder why intercultural rhetoric, the latest incarnation of what was known as contrastive rhetoric (CR), would or should still be of interest, especially given how problematized, if not demonized, the term *culture* has become in recent decades. Can we connect rhetoric, or discourse, with culture without oversimplifying and overgeneralizing the literacy and oracy practices of large numbers of language users? As Will Baker points out in the second chapter of this volume, intercultural rhetoric remains of interest precisely because it has encouraged us to consider and critique (even if the latter was not its initial aim) the difficult-to-characterize relationship between cultural context and language use. It will remain viable and become even more productive as an area of inquiry, especially in an age of increasing global migration and communication, Baker contends, if we continue to subject the concept of culture and its relationship to texts to even more critical analysis. At the same time, texts themselves can now, with the help of computers (see Connor, this volume), receive the kind of attention, both in terms of breadth or sheer numbers of texts and depth of analysis, that no individual contrastive rhetoricians, despite their linguistic expertise and emic/etic cultural perspectives, could give in pre-computer-assisted days. As influential as CR critic and reseacher John Hinds' (1987) reader and writer-responsibility typology has been, it is rather shocking now to realize how few texts his assertions were based on. This is not to say that Hinds' insights, and those of other early contributors to CR, are without value, especially considering the dialogue over discourse and identity they have stimulated (for example, Kubota, 2001; Kubota & Lehner, 2004). With corpus tools and postmodern critical theory,

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however, we now have the research methods and theoretical frameworks to move far beyond cultural binaries (see Canagarajah and Matsuda & Atkinson, this volume) toward much more empirically based and conceptually complex views of discourse and its contexts.

In the first section of our book, Ulla Connor and Will Baker provide compelling rationales for corpus-based and critical perspectives, respectively, on intercultural rhetoric (IR). While corpus linguistics offers a methodological means of reinvigorating IR, critical theory presents a more conceptual means of renewing it, although both have conceptual and methodological implications. In our first chapter, Ulla Connor, a well-established IR researcher and perhaps the best known of its advocates, explains in highly accessible terms what corpus tools can contribute to IR research. These computer-assisted techniques, as anyone already familiar with corpus linguistics knows, enable multiple means of analyzing huge amounts of authentic language use data, making it possible for IR studies to be far more evidence-based than ever before. Connor both provides steps for conducting research using "comparable corpora" and illustrates the process with one of her own impressive studies, an interdisciplinary analysis of health communication texts for patients in Spain and the United States. Connor advises IR researchers, however, not to be content with textual analysis alone, but to keep in mind what qualitative methods such as ethnography can offer in terms of explaining why we find what we find in textual data. Baker sees recent developments in intercultural communication (IC) theory and English as a lingua franca (ELF) research as offering the critical lenses on culture that IR is still greatly in need of. IC theorist Claire Kramsch's (2010) notion of symbolic competence is one develpment that Baker highlights as especially promising for IR. Rather than viewing L1/L2 (first and second languages) and C1/C2 (first and second cultures) as "static definable entities," Baker observes, the meaning-making process of symbolic competence treats languages and cultures as "situated and relationally constructed based on ideologies, attitudes and beliefs . . . influenced by surrounding discourses." Research on ELF suggests, Baker notes, that for ELF users (the vast majority of English language users), not just oral interactions but written discourse too can exploit and negotiate cultural resources and communicative norms "in a highly fluid way." Given the paradigm shift in conceptualizations of culture that IC and ELF developments have contributed to, it would be difficult, Baker persuades us, to consider the relationship of texts and culture without acknowledging the "ideological dimensions of cultural constructions."

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In the first chapter in Part 2, Critical-Analytical Approaches, Xiaoye You addresses the need for a more ideological or "ethical turn" in IR, to bring to the fore such issues as power structure and subjectivities. You's own response to this need is to apply the classical rhetorical concept of *ethos* to the study of IR. Of particular interest to You are emergent virtual communities where English (as a lingua franca) is used as a resource to achieve individual and community goals. By examining the ethos-building practices of an online community of Japanese adults sharing their English reading experiences, You is able to explore how the members negotiate and sometimes "subtly resist" the ethos, or values and interaction conventions, of their virtual community. You concludes by observing that English in our digital era "can hardly function as a discrete code of communication" but is often a mix, or remix as Bloch would say (see Afterword, this volume), of other linguistic and new media codes.

One of Ramon Escamilla's primary goals in the second chapter of Part 2 is to show us how critical discourse analysis (CDA), with its interest in examining how discourse reflects and shapes social reality, supplemented by cognitive linguistics, especially the notion of *radial category*, can address criticisms of the field formerly known as CR and its tendency to treat cultures as monolithic and "isolatable," rather than as evolving discursive constructions. With a corpus of Japanese and Portuguese language articles by journalists in Japan writing about ethnically Japanese Brazilians who back-migrated to Japan, Escamilla employs critical and cognitive analytic methods to explore how public discourse can function to construct minority identity and reinforce social order assumptions. What CDA ultimately brings to IR, Escamilla cogently argues, is a means of "critically examin[ing] the social practices surrounding text through the medium of the text itself."

Guillaume Gentil's chapter actually straddles both the critical and corpus analytical worlds, but his primary interest is cross-linguistic discourse analysis. As a bilingual (French/English) researcher situated in Canada, Gentil is also particularly interested in language ideologies and finds corpus linguistics especially appealing as a means of discovering connections between lexicogrammar and ideological agendas. Still more powerful than corpus tools alone, however, according to Gentil, is a combination of those tools and qualitative data analysis software plus a "mind-mapping" application. The chief findings of Gentil's multipronged computer-enabled analysis of a corpus of French and English language *memoires* (or briefs) on the same topic are **not** macrostructural rhetorical differences in the handling of the same genre, as so often found in early contras-

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tive rhetoric studies, but differences in ideological positioning. These differences suggest, Gentil remarks, "that the Quebec government still has some ideological work to do if it wishes to persuade English speakers that French is their public language too."

While the Escamilla and Gentil studies in Part 2 both used corpora and Gentil's also employed corpus tools, the chapters in Part 3 more exclusively focus on corpus-based approaches. The first of these, by Eric Friginal, makes abundantly clear what corpus-analytical statistical methods can accomplish when examining spoken intercultual interactions. The outsourced call center dialogues Friginal investigates are of particular interest because unlike other crosscultural business English communications, in which the interlocutors have a vested interest in understanding each other, call center interactions are emotionally fraught and marked by power imbalances, with the continued employment of Indian and Filipino call center "agents" contingent on the satisfaction of (in this case) customers in the United States. While acknowledging the value of qualitative analysis, Friginal demonstrates that, with the use of methods such as Biber's (1988) multidimensional analysis, it is possible to look so much more extensively and intensively at interaction data that we can begin to explore possible distinctive features among various communities' communication styles. Friginal, in fact, finds stylistic differences in the apparently more profusely polite Filipino and more efficient Indian agents' discourse, but the extent to which these should be attributed to cultural factors, linguistic proficiency, or perhaps the training provided at specific call centers (themselves culturally situated) remains an open question.

Like Friginal, Amanda Lanier Temples and Gayle Nelson use corpus tools to investigate the possibly distinct communicative styles of social groups, namely, in this chapter, Mexican native speakers of Spanish communicating in English with Canadian and American native speakers of English—all of whom are participating in an online intercultural communication course while living outside their home countries. Temples and Nelson's analysis of keyword use, specifically personal pronouns and modal verbs, does point to rhetorical differences, with the Mexican students privileging interactivity more than the Canadians and Americans appeared to. Perhaps more intriguingly, however, the authors' analysis reveals that the participants forged a shared discourse style in their unique online community unlike that usually found in English language academic writing or conversational interactions. As Temples and Nelson put it, the "students generated . . . a culture of participation, an intercultural rhetoric," which effectively heightened group cohesion. Computers, thus, not only can enhance our investigations of various communities' communication styles, but

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also, as this chapter persuasively illustrates (see also You, this volume), provide opportunities for new communities to be built in which "cultural and linguistic boundaries" can be "crossed and merged."

Viviana Cortes and Jack Hardy remark in their corpus-focused chapter that their work differs from many other IR corpus studies in that they take a bottom-up approach, starting with analysis of lexicogrammar rather than assumptions about macro-structure and functions (or rhetorical moves). While the authors modestly describe their efforts as exploratory, their goals are ambitious: to forge more links between corpus-based text analysis and IR research. What makes Cortes and Hardy's study of lexical bundles (frequently occuring expressions) and semantic prosody (co-occuring word classes of negative/neutral/positive valence) and preference (shared semantic categories of frequent collocates) especially relevant for IR is their use of cross-linguistic register-specific parallel corpora. Few lexical bundle studies have looked at languages other than English and still fewer at two languages. While Cortes and Hardy find interesting similarities and differences in their in Spanish and English language history writing corpora, they note that there is much that remains unexplored about lexical bundles and their contexts across languages. This study instructively points the way forward for such research.

In the final section of this volume, Suresh Canagarajah, Dwight Atkinson, and Paul Kei Matsuda consider what the future could or should hold for studies in intercultural rhetoric. Canagarajah challenges us to re-envision intercultural rhetoric as cosmopolitan practice. Why we should do so, he argues, has much to do with the term *intercultural rhetoric* itself. Both *inter* and *cultural* are too suggestive of static, bounded entities rather than of dynamic, hybrid contact zones where cultures are performed by the practices adopted and adapted. *Cosmopolitan*, unlike *intercultural*, Canagarajah observes, implies multilayered affiliations and negotiated connection despite difference. *Practice*, more so than *rhetoric*, suggests not just linguistic but social negotiation, the co-construction of intelligibility. We see what cosmopolitan practice can look like in Canagarajah's analysis of a lingua franca interaction between a Danish exporter and Egyptian importer, who appear to adopt "cosmopolitan values" to "transcend their cultural and linguisitc differences." Ultimately, what Canagarajah recommends is a mode of interaction, a pedagogy, and a way of conceptualizing intercultural rhetoric that treats norms not as shapers of communication but "affordances for meaning-making."

Dwight Atkinson and Paul Kei Matsuda's dialogue on the current and future state of intercultural rhetoric in many respects continues the discussion of cosmopolitan practice begun by Canagarajah and continues a "conversation"

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begun earlier by Matsuda and Atkinson themselves in 2008. Like Canagarajah, they reflect on what "intercultural rhetoric" means. For Matsuda, IR connotes three different strands of inquiry, only one of which equates with the comparative analysis goals of traditional contrastive rhetoric, while the other two address discourse in interaction and learner trajectories. Atkinson too sees IR as a "wide-ranging interdisciplinary topic area," with the *inter* in *intercultural* referring to "*everything between* whatever worlds, whatever cultures, whatever communities, whatever languages you have good evidence for assuming." IR, in Atkinson's view, is inclusive of "cosmopolitanism," but considers not just negotiation but the stabilities that make negotiation possible. For Atkinson, the *culture* in *intercultural* may most usefully be viewed as the mix of influences that have stabilized enough to affect behavior. Matsuda, however, reminds us of our propensity for privileging stabilty in written language and through our writing pedagogy, institutionalizing dominant discourse practices. For both Matsuda and Atkinson, culture as a concept is of value when it is probed, problematized, and decoupled from overgeneralizations about ethnicities and languages. This is the conversation that intercultural rhetoric and those interested in (or provoked by) it, as Baker observed in the second chapter and Atkinson and Matsuda do in the last, are especially adept at inspiring.

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