IN THE NAME OF GOD

دانشگاه تربیت مدرس

Tarbiat Modarres University
Faculty of Humanities
English Department

Rhetorical Strategies in Iranian EFL Students' Persuasive Writing

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts in
Teaching English as a Foreign language

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February, 1999

۲۹۲۱۱

Tarbiat Modarres University
Faculty of Humanities
English Department

We Here Recommend That This Thesis

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Entitled

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Be Accepted as a Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Teaching English as Foreign Language.
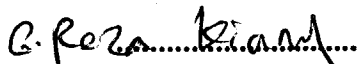Committee on Final Examination

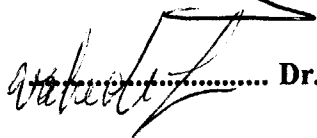Dr. Parviz Maftoon   Supervisor
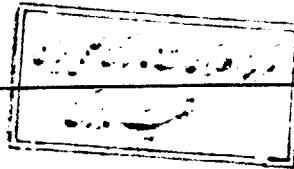
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February, 1999

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آیین‌نامهٔ چاپ پایان‌نامه (رساله)های دانشجویان دانشگاه تربیت مدرّس

نظر به‌اینکه چاپ و انتشار پایان‌نامه (رساله)های تحصیلی دانشجویان دانشگاه تربیت مدرّس مبیّن بخشی از فعالیتهای علمی ـ پژوهشی دانشگاه‌است بنابراین به منظور آگاهی و رعایت حقوق دانشگاه، دانش‌آموختگان این دانشگاه نسبت به رعایت موارد ذیل متعهد می‌شوند:

مادهٔ ۱   درصورت اقدام به چاپ پایان‌نامه(رساله)ی خود، مراتب را قبلاً به‌طور کتبی به مرکز نشردانشگاه اطّلاع دهد.

مادهٔ ۲   در صفحهٔ سوم کتاب (پس از برگ شناسنامه)،عبارت ذیل راچاپ کند:

«کتاب حاضر ، حاصلِ پایان‌نامهٔ کارشناسی ارشد نگارنده در رشتهٔ *آموزش زبان انگلیسی* است که در سال ۱۳۷۷ در دانشکدهٔ *علوم انسانی* دانشگاه تربیت مدرّس به راهنمایی جناب آقای دکتر *پرویز مفتون* و مشاورهٔ جناب آقای دکتر *محمد مهدی واحدی* از آن دفاع شده‌است.»

مادهٔ ۳   به منظور جبران بخشی از هزینه‌های نشریات دانشگاه تعداد یک درصد شمارگان کتاب(در هر نوبت چاپ) را به مرکز نشر دانشگاه اهداکند؛ دانشگاه می‌تواند مازاد نیاز خود را به‌نفع مرکز نشر در معرض فروش قراردهد.

مادهٔ ۴   در صورت عدم رعایت مادهٔ۳، ۵۰٪ بهای شمارگان چاپ‌شده را به عنوان خسارت به‌دانشگاه تربیت مدرّس، تأدیه کند.

مادهٔ ۵   دانشجو تعهد و قبول می‌کنددر صورت خودداری از پرداخت بهای خسارت، دانشگاه‌می‌تواندخسارت مذکور را از طریق قضایی مطالبه و وصول کند؛ به علاوه به دانشگاه حق‌می‌دهد به منظور استیفای حقوق خود، از طریق دادگاه، معادل وجه مذکور در مادهٔ۴ را ازمحلّ توقیف کتابهای عرضه‌شدهٔ نگارنده برای فروش، تأمین نماید.

مادهٔ ۶   اینجانب **محمد صفائی** دانشجوی رشته آموزش زبان انگلیسی مقطع کارشناسی ارشد تعهد فوق و ضمانت اجرایی آن را قبول کرده، به آن ملتزم می‌شوم.

Dedication

To my Previous Teachers

Acknowledgements

The present study is the result of hard work and co-operation of a number of educators and students whom I should acknowledge. My first acknowledgement should go to Dr. Parviz Maftoon who tought me effective writing and who helped me in writing the present thesis. Second, I owe thanks to Dr. Mohammad Mehdi Vahedi, Dr. Mirhassani, and particularly, Dr. Kiani who gave me helpful comments and guidelines. Furthermore, I confess that without the help of a number of university teachers and students it was impossible for me to administer the tests and thus collect the required data. Therefore, I acknowledge the following university teachers , Dr. Farahani, Mr. Farzaneh-nejad, Mr. Borzabady Farahani, Mrs. Beyad, and Mrs. Jallali, who helped me to administer the tests and also the MA students, Mr. Rasaei at the University of Tehran, Mr. Poorshab at Allameh Tabatabaei University, and Mr. Millani at the University for Teacher Education, who helped me in data collection. I owe my deep thanks to the MA students, Mr. Tahmasebi at Tarbiat Modarres University, and Mr. Millani at the University for Teacher Education who patiently helped me in rating the essays of the students. And finally, I greatly acknowledge those students at the University of Tehran, Tarbiat Modarres University, Allameh Tabatabaei University, and the University for Teacher Education without whose patience and effort the accomplisement of this project was impossible.

I, alone, am responsible for any probable flaws in this research.

Abstract

Persuasive writing has been recognized as an important and difficult mode of written discourse. However, among different genres of prose, which have been studied in contrastive rhetoric, little attention has been paid to persuasive writing which is particularly difficult for non-native speakers. Furthermore, essays are traditionally evaluated through holistic scoring which is not detailed enough to investigate or evaluate all features of a complex mode of written discourse such as persuasive writing. This study tried to evaluate and discover different features of the Iranian EFL students' persuasive writing with regard to one of the models which had been prepared by both rhetoricians and linguists for the investigation of persuasive writing. In the present study the persuasive essays of 48 Iranian university students, majoring in English, were analyzed with regard to nine independent variables, namely syntactic features, including factor 1 (Intractive versus Edited Text) and factor 2 (Abstract versus Situated Style), parallel progression, sequential progression, extended parallel progression, superstructure, reasoning, persuasive appeals, and persuasive adaptiveness. The dependent variable of this study was the holistic scores of the students. In addition, such independent variables as age and sex were included in the study in order to find out the possible relationships between these personal factors and the other variables. The results showed that such independent variables as reasoning, measured by Toulmin scale, and factor 1 of syntactic features, and also persuasive adaptiveness have significant correlations with the holistic score. However, a stepwise multiple regression analysis revealed that out of these independent variables, only Toulmin score can predict the dependent variable. Moreover, no significant relationship was found between sex and age and the dependent variable.

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Chapter I

Introduction

A. Background

Among different traditionally recognized genres of prose and comparing with expository writing which has been the focus of attention for a long time in contrastive rhetoric, little attention has been paid to the study of persuasive written discourse (Connor & Lauer, 1988, p. 138; Ferris, 1994, p. 45). Two reasons have been mentioned by Connor (1990) to account for the scholars' neglect of students' persuasive writing:

> (1) the confusion about the nature of the genre that led persuasion to be replaced by argumentation in the writing curriculum in the 18th, 19th, and early 20th centuries and (2) the inherent difficulty of operationalizing and quantifying the new theoretical concepts of persuasion developed by linguists, rhetoritions, and philosophers (p. 69).

For instance, Connor and Lauer mentioned such scholars as Campbell (1776), Bain (1866), and Moffet (1968) who distinguished persuasion from argumentation in that

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argumentation appeals to the mind and persuasion to the emotions of the audience; therefore, having ignored persuasion, they classified different genres of prose into descriptive, narrative, expository, and argumentative. Due to the influence of such scholars, the teaching of argumentation was focused on teaching logic and specially on inductive and deductive reasoning; such factors of persuasion as ethos, pathos, and credibility and affective appeals were ignored (Connor & Lauer, 1988, p. 139).

Contrastive rhetoric, moreover, showed that there were differences in the writing of different cultures. For example, Connor and Lauer (1988) found systematic differences among the persuasive writings of native students of the USA, Britain, and New Zealand (pp. 150-155). By the same token, Leki (1991) said that if rhetorical strategies were different in different cultures, then L1 strategies might not be appropriate in L2 context, such as an English-medium university (p. 124). In other words, the way international students organize or present their thought may not match the standards of the target language (Purves, 1988, p. 9). The inappropriacy of stragegies may be in terms of proper choice of words, length of sentences, amount of figurative language, degree of using passive voice, and so forth (Leki, 1991, pp. 124-125). In the same way, Hatch (1992) argues that

argumentative prose is treated differently in different cultures. While "in some cultures, it is a weakness not to completely destroy an opponent's arguments, in others, it is acceptable to see some merit in the argument of one's opponents" (pp. 186-187). For instance, Rubin et al. (1990) found that Japanese students avoid explicitly expressing their argumentative position; this avoidance is interpreted by their teachers as equivocation. On the contrary, in American culture, all arguments are to be raised and disposed of by counterarguments. Besides, American culture does not highly regard those arguments which are developed through repetition (cited in Hatch, 1992, p. 187). Therefore, since acceptable sequences of written discourse are culture bound, not only should the EFL writers produce well-formed sentences, but they also should arrange their written discourse according to the rhetorical conventions of English (Maftoon, 1978, p. 1).

B. Purpose

Since competence in persuasive writing is needed in all walks of life (Dodds, 1986, p. 307; Ferris, 1994, p.45; Johns, 1993, pp. 76-78; Sorenson, 1988, p. 381) and since this mode of written discourse is difficult for native and,

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particularly, for non-native speakers (Crowhurst, 1991, p. 315; Ferris, 1994, p. 46; Johns, 1993, p. 76), differemt models for the evaluation and analysis of persuasive writing have been developed by both text linguists and rhetoricians so that the teachers of writing courses can emphasize those areas of difficulty which are more problematic for the student writers. The purpose of the present study was to evaluate and discover different features of the Iranian EFL students' persuasive writings with regard to one of these models.

C. Statement of the Problem

It has been a long tradition that students' writings have been evaluated by holistic scoring which refers to the readers' judgements based on their impression of the whole composition (Jacobs et al., 1981, p. 29). Oller (1975) argued that "there is no escape from subjective judgement in the interpretation of normal expression in a natural language" (p. 392). In spite of the subjectivity of holistic scoring, Jacobs et al. (1981) remarked that holistic evaluation had proved to be highly reliable (p. 29).

Despite its high reliability, holistic scoring suffers from a number of pitfalls, especially in certain modes of written

discourse such as persuasive writing. First, holistic evaluation is too global to indicate specific strengths and weaknesses in students' compositions (Connor & Lauer, 1985, p. 309; Connor-Linton, 1995, pp. 762-763; Hamp-Lyons, 1995, p. 760). Second, holistic scoring is not enough for research or instructional practice to evaluate the general quality of composition (Connor & Lauer, 1985, p. 309; Hamp-Lyons, 1995, pp. 760-761). Moreover, specific information is needed for objective non-evaluative measures of various linguistic and rhetorical charactristics of the compositions which give rise to a certain judgement in holistic evaluation (Connor & Lauer, 1985, p. 309; Connor-Linton, 1995, p. 763; Ferris, 1994, p. 50). Based on these arguments, the present study poses the following research questions to evaluate the persuasive writings of the Iranian EFL students and to discover different rhetorical and linguistic charactristics of their writings:

1- What is the relationship between the students' level of language proficiency and their holistic scores obtained from their writings?

2- What is the relationship between syntactic features and holistic scores of the students obtained from their writings?