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Hamline University

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Exploring the Effect Of Cultural And Linguistic Features on The Academic Writing of
College-Level English Learners

by

Abdullahi Soyán

A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL)

Hamline University

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Capstone Project Facilitator: Betsy Parrish

Content Reviewer: Dr. Sarah Schmidt de Carranza

Peer Reviewer: Yasmine Meziou

DEDICATION

To my wife, children, and mother for their relentless support and prayers during my studies.

EPIGRAPH

“Who teacheth by the pen, Teacheth man that which he knew not.”

Quran 96: 4-5, Translation by M. M. Pickthall

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

When I took the Minnesota Basics Standard Writing Test, I got a final score of about 2.5. A passing score of 3.0 was needed for high school students to graduate. The irony was, before I moved to Minnesota from Kenya as a refugee, I had considered myself a writer. I had written stories and essays in Somali and was confident that I could generate ideas and use them in my writing product. Yet, I earned a failing score on my writing test. At the time of taking the test, I had been in the U.S. for about five months. I was surprised. Was it because of my English language skills? Or was it due to my writing skills? Or both? I was informed that rarely did a newcomer pass the writing test in the first round. Nevertheless, I was not expecting a score that was below 3.0 out of 5.0. At the time, I knew only what an essay paper should have: A beginning, a middle, and an end.

I knew the beginning had an introduction with a main/controlling idea (I was introduced to the term “thesis” later as a learner); the middle was where a writer explained the main/controlling idea; and the end had a conclusion where one needed to remind the readers about the main idea of the topic. I remember my ESL classroom writing instructor teaching us how to write about a topic using three reasons that needed to be explored in the body. In my writing test, I thought I followed all of his directions to the letter. Yet, a score below 3.0 was beyond my expectation. I was not alone. Some of my English Learner (EL) classmates had received a failing score more than once even when they thought they were following the writing instructions from our English

language teacher. I vividly remember a female classmate who had a leadership role in the student body and had strong verbal skills, but when she did not pass the writing portion after several attempts, she quit school altogether in her senior year.

In Chapter One, I will introduce the reason behind my research idea and share my experiences as the basis for my research topic. Alongside stating my rationale, I will list some guiding questions as a roadmap for my inquiry throughout the capstone project.

Professional Experience

It was not until I went to the University of Minnesota (U of M) that I secured a student job as a writing consultant at the writing center after my freshman year. In that role, I observed the type of writing errors students were making. Some were major such as errors at the global/macro level including organization or structure while others were local/micro ones such as mechanics or spelling errors. Many, but not all, of the ELs' knowledge about the writing process was generally limited to the basic knowledge that an essay has an introduction, body, and conclusion. By paying attention to the EL writings, I could see parallels between the common errors in their writing and my own when I was in high school. Because I could relate to their struggles, it was easier for me to connect with them and help them take one or two writing tips from our twenty-minute sessions. While studying English Literature, I continued working at the University's writing center for three years. Being a bilingual writing consultant, I felt empowered to be able to help ELs in their academic endeavors. The more I worked with ELs, the more I gained new insights about their writing struggles. Often, I had repeat student clients signing up for my tutoring sessions—and this gave me the impression that I was able to connect with

them and understand their struggles, dilemmas, and self-doubts. Most of my student clients were Hmong, Somali, Oromo, and Hispanic.

My first time teaching essay writing started after graduating from the U of M. I co-rented a small classroom in Minneapolis where I ran a writing tutorial program. With nonnative students in mind, I had designed a course for two groups: college and high school students. For the college students, I taught a 12-week course, whereas the high school course was only eight weeks long. Twice a week, the high school students would attend my class for three hours while the college students attended once a week for the same hours.

I taught a practical step-by-step writing guide that was the culmination of my years as a student writing consultant at the U of M and with support from textbooks such as *Evergreen: A Guide to Writing with Readings* by Susan Fawcett, *The Norton Sampler: Short Essays for Composition* by Thomas Cooley, *Exploring Writing: Paragraphs and Essays* by John Langan, and the like. I knew I had to evaluate the writing skill of my ELs. To assess their prior knowledge, I would give them an entry test at the beginning of the writing program. When the course was over, I would give them the same writing test as an exit test. Besides holding myself accountable, this exit test would help my students see how much progress and growth they had made during the time they had been in my writing program.

During these classes, I met students who had difficulty conceptualizing the elements of essay writing. The frequent question—and their main concern—revolved around things like mechanics: “Is my grammar good?” and “How is my use of

punctuation marks?” rather than asking more global questions such as: “How is the flow of my paper? Is it coherent? Is it cohesive? Is my thesis statement/main idea clearly stated?”. In other words, they were navigating a writing system that was not familiar to them.

Because they were less familiar with the North American writing convention, my ELs frequently informed me that they had received feedback from their college writing instructors with a note on the margin that said: “Work on your organization” or “Paper needs improvement at the sentence level” or “Lacks coherence” or “Inadequate supporting details” etcetera. To the instructor at these institutions, these errors that needed to be corrected were clear; to my ELs, they were not. This is because the students were not yet fully grounded in the type of Anglophone discourse that informed and shaped academic writing in U.S. colleges and universities. The ELs found it difficult to readily internalize writing elements such as “organization”, “diction”, “sentence structure”, and so forth. As a result, a disconnection between learner and instructor had emerged. In other words, there was a gap.

Major reasons for this gap included pedagogical differences between the home country of ELs and that of the United States (US). Emaliana (2017) gives some insight into the education of a country which has seen a “teacher-centered” approach where learners would “passively receive” it (p. 60). In such classrooms, teachers played the role of absolute authority on the subject and they, the students, did not have some agency in their education and mainly received the content.

This learning style is teacher-centered. According to Lunenberg and Korthagen (as cited in Neumann, 2013), “teacher centered [learning contexts] ... present information that students are supposed to take in” (p. 162). As an approach, it is sometimes referred to as the “sage on stage” (King, 1993, p. 30) because “while teachers are active, students are passive” (Serin, 2018, p. 164). In such scenarios, the learning process is one-directional and almost gives the teacher ownership of the process rather than being a “guide on the side”, a phrase coined by education professor Alison King (Morrison, 2014, p. 13).

Because of the teacher-centered instruction in their respective countries of origin, the ELs had little or no opportunity to discuss, analyze, review, or ask questions about the content and share knowledge in small groups. When they attended classes in the U.S., they realized they needed to adjust to the frequent discussions among the students where content is dissected, analyzed, and critiqued. The student-centered approach in the U.S. classrooms, however, “focused on helping students to develop understanding, to build their own conceptions and knowledge” (Neumann, 2013, p. 162). Yet, adjusting to such a shift was a huge leap for many ELs, particularly when the subject involves writing, which, according to Hyland (2019), “remains among the most important skills that second language students need to develop” (xiii). This means even after moving from “teacher-centered” to “student-centered” classrooms, ELs had already missed a lot of input and did not get enough exposure to notice high frequency concepts since they were late comers. According to Schmidt’s noticing theory (as cited by Myong Hee Ko. 2012), “attention is crucial in the language learning process. Learners need to notice a form in the input in order to be able to process the input further” (pp. 57-58). This means that

without being conscious of key academic writing concepts and their functions, the input does not convert to intake, hence impeding progress in their writing production.

Besides pedagogy, another reason for the disconnection between nonnative learners and U.S. instructors is that some students had their education disrupted, according to Vinogradov & Bigelow (2010). While many K-12 English language teachers are familiar with the acronym SLIFE (Students with Limited Interrupted Formal Education), a parallel one exists for adults: LESLLA (Literacy Education and Second Language Learning for Adults), according to the education website leslla.org. Vinogradov & Bigelow (2010) state that “immigrants with limited literacy have had limited access to education...Many are refugees who have fled situations of extreme violence or have experienced long term stays in refugee camps,” (p. 1). The countries of origin of these LESLLA students vary. In Minnesota, the majority of these students come from countries such as Ethiopia, Laos, Mexico, Myanmar, and Somalia (Vinogradov & Bigelow, 2010). Because there was disruption at the literacy level, a gap has emerged. Such an academic gap continues to exist and affects their writing performance in US colleges and universities.

In an attempt to draw educators’ attention to how long ELs require to use English both as a social function and academic tool, Jim Cummins (Cummins, 2003) introduced two acronyms, BICS and CALP, as a general framework for educators working with ELs. In his discussion of BICS, or Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills, Cummins noted ELs achieve conversational skills of a new language in about two years after interaction with the natives. In contrast, he argued that it takes about five to seven years to achieve

advanced academic language, which he refers to as “Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency” (p.1) or CALP for short.

Even when a certain level of academic language proficiency is achieved, one can argue that ELs still need ample practice and explicit instruction on academic writing for noticing to happen. Though instructors might assume that their ELs know abstract terms such as “organization”, “diction”, or “thesis statement”, I observed students in my writing sessions getting their “Aha!” moment for the first time after a sustained explicit input from me until they could internalize the concept.

The nature of academic writing is that its convention is not universal. It varies across countries and continents. In some countries like China, the “eight-legged essay” was used for centuries according to Kaplan (1972) and was claimed to influence Chinese writing (Kubota, 2010, p. 266). According to Xinghua (2012), the writing process of this essay followed eight parts that included an “opening the topic”, “receiving the topic”, “beginning discussion”, “initial leg”, “transition leg”, “middle leg”, “latter leg”, and a “conclusion”, (pp. 1-2). In contrast, the use of “the three part-patterns of ‘Introduction-Body-Conclusion’ of English essays” are common in the United States (Bennui, 2016, p.81). In other words, various academic writing conventions exist across cultures. As a result, when a nonnative writer is placed in a U.S. classroom to write in English, he or she faces challenges in the process of adjusting to the writing convention dominant in U.S. colleges and universities.

To explain these conventions, Kimberly De Vries offers a description of English academic writing:

The expected thought sequence is linear in its development the paragraph begins with a topic statement and then proceeds to develop that statement by example and illustrations. The central idea is related to all other ideas in the whole essay. (Li & Liu, 2019, p.86)

This means that nonnative writers not only need to be strong in academic language, but also need to be familiar with the conventions of academic writing “based on Aristotelian classical rhetoric,” (Li & Liu, 2019, p. 84). Therefore, to close the gap, my research intends to explore contrastive rhetoric as an approach to understand linguistic and cultural features that affect the discourses in first language (L1) and second language (L2).

Questions I will investigate include: What factors contribute to the struggle of nonnative writers with academic writing in English? How can writing center tutors meet the academic writing support needed by nonnative writers? What are practical strategies that can help U.S. writing center tutors meet these needs to close the achievement gap? As part of my capstone project, I plan to develop a professional development (PD) for writing tutors (and, by extension, content teachers new to working with ELs).

Summary

In Chapter One, I introduced the rationale for my research idea and shared personal and professional experiences as the reason for the relevance of my research topic. I also listed guiding questions that will be a roadmap for my research throughout the capstone project. In Chapter Two, I will present a literature review about my research topic. Sub-topics I’m considering include contrastive rhetoric, adult learning theory, education outside the U.S., and practical strategies to help ELs with academic writing.

Sources will come from Google Scholar and Hamline's Bush Library online resources.

Chapter Three will use both contrastive rhetoric and the adult learning theory as a framework for my project. The intended audience is writing center tutors, and I will develop a PD informed by these frameworks. Chapter Four will revisit and reflect on the previous chapters as well as make recommendations for future research to help ELs achieve proficiency in academic writing.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

My capstone project explores the cultural and linguistic features that contribute to the struggles of ELs with academic writing. This chapter provides an analysis and intertextual discussion of different perspectives while presenting both the practical and theoretical complexities of adult learning. These perspectives are grounded in what is usually referred to as contrastive rhetoric and the current theories of adult learning. This chapter also provides a cursory look at education outside the United States to help understand the background of ELs studying in U.S. colleges and universities. Another section of this chapter addresses the type of academic writing support that adult ELs need to succeed in colleges and universities. A summary concludes the chapter with a review of the literature available for adult learning theories and contrastive rhetoric. Chapter Two finally ends with an overview of what Chapter Three entails.

Historical Overview of Contrastive Rhetoric

With large numbers of international students coming to the United States for higher education, many colleges and universities sought to understand how to better serve the academic needs of their students (Kubota, 2010). In the 1960s, Robert Kaplan (as cited in Panetta, 2000) observed that nonnative speakers produced writings that at times were inaccessible to the average American educator. Kaplan (Panetta, 2000) coined the term contrastive rhetoric as he attempted to understand the underlying factors that contributed to such different writing approaches. He noted that such differences were beyond the narrow focus on grammar and technical errors at the sentence level (Kubota,

2010). Instead, Kaplan argued, such salient errors were due to thought patterns in the rhetoric and discourse of nonnative speakers' own languages. Following his seminal paper, many researchers wrote about the subject either as proponents or opposers (Kubota 2010). One aspect, however, was not disputed: Contrastive rhetoric emerged in response to a pedagogical need to help and support the academic writing of nonnative speakers.

Ulla Connor (1996) notes that some studies point out that writing is embedded in culture and the schools reinforce the cultural orientation through pedagogy. Connor (1996) defines culture as a "set of rules and patterns shared by a given community" (p. 101). This suggests that cultural differences mean differences in the types of writing conventions available for learners. Connor (1996) references one study that suggests culture shock in an academic setting happens when a learner's literacy background differs from the literacy of the learner's school. She gives the example that involves stylistic choices such as the preference for a unique voice with little emotion by the American teachers while their non-American counterparts allowed writing style that uses imitation and emotion.

Key information about the influence of culture on writing comes from a study by the International Study of Written Composition (Connor, 1996) which analyzed how composition writing was taught in 14 countries in the 1980s. This was an attempt to have a cross-cultural comparison of the types of writing produced in those countries. The findings showed there existed differences in the writing style, content, and pragmatics. Purves and Hawisher (as cited in Connor, 1996) noted that writing organization was not given much emphasis in Chile, whereas Sweden and New Zealand put more emphasis on

the writing process more than any other aspect. They concluded that what constitutes acceptable writing is determined by one's culture.

What Really is Contrastive Rhetoric?

According to Kubota (2010), contrastive rhetoric emerged as a response to the arrival of international students in the United States. In the early days of contrastive rhetoric, it went along with, and was influenced by, other approaches to learning. These approaches include contrastive analysis and error analysis, both of which were in turn influenced by behaviorism. Kubota (2010) noted a distinction between contrastive rhetoric and these two approaches, that is, while contrastive analysis and error analysis focused on the "sentence- or clause-level features of spoken language", contrastive rhetoric focused on "discourse structures beyond the sentence level in written communication" (p. 273). She also observed that another area of interest for contrastive rhetoric was differences among world cultures.

Kaplan's notion of the effect of culture on discourse (Kubota, 2010) had a precedent. His observation that culture influences written language resembled that of Benjamin Whorf. In the 1930s, Whorf (as cited in Kubota, 2010) wrote that "different language systems shape different thought patterns" (p. 273). Though scholars debate how much this influenced Kaplan, he himself is reported to have referenced the phrase "neo-Whorfian" as the basis for contrastive rhetoric (Kubota, 2010, p. 273).

On the question of what contrastive rhetoric is, Kaplan (2001) himself tackled the same question in his foreword to Panetta's essay collection in the *Contrastive Rhetoric Revisited and Redefined*. He listed five questions that are at the core of contrastive

rhetoric. These questions, he noted, were on the minds of nonnative writers. They revolved around the type of topic to be discussed in the class, source of authority in the context of classroom activities, form of the expected writing, how evidence is defined, and the type of evidence readers prefer. Kaplan put forth these questions because he believed their answers revealed the cultural filters through which they are addressed learners.

Take, for example, the first question regarding what topic might be discussed in class. In composition classes, topics are not necessarily culture-neutral. For Kaplan, the type of topics discussed in class are socially constructed and, therefore, geographically diverse (Kaplan, 2001). He gave examples such as abortion and how this topic is assigned to college students in the United States because of its political nature. On the other hand, he noted that the same topic is regarded as solely a medical topic, and, thus, does not find itself in the public discourse in countries such as Norway, Sweden, and Finland. For countries practicing Roman Catholicism, they might find such a topic repulsive and “taboo” (Kaplan, 2001 p. x). What Kaplan is trying to get across here is that not every culture approaches every topic the same way; and because of that, students from non-US countries might struggle with their writing when asked to discuss a topic that they do not find in their language discourse. This is why Panetta (2001) noted that nonnative writers should not be labeled as lacking intelligence since some of their struggles are simply a function of differences in language discourses.

Critiques of Contrastive Rhetoric

For Kubota (2010), contrastive rhetoric is not a neutral concept. It is an approach that is Eurocentric and breaks languages into a binary: English and non-English, eventually perpetuating the “othering” of non-English cultures (p. 278). Kubota (2010) also drew a distinction between Whorf’s and Kaplan’s ideologies on language and culture. She noted that Whorf held a pluralist view of language and culture as he critiqued Eurocentric approaches to the subject while Kaplan’s approach is characterized by “Anglocentric, assimilationist, and essentialist” views (Kubota, 2010, p. 273). Yet, Kubota concedes that contrast rhetoric has gone through evolution since its conception. Some researchers now use the label “intercultural rhetoric” and consider it to be an heir to contrastive rhetoric with a broader focus on different types of writings in addition to academic writing. She also noted the pedagogical contribution of contrastive rhetoric in composition including its emphasis on “explicit teaching of the conventional rhetorical structures of English” such as organizing paragraphs, using an outline, and modeling for learners (p. 268). Besides academic focus, contrastive rhetoric, Kubota noted, also has a goal of making ESL students culturally competent so that they are equipped with the rhetorical structures of North American writing convention.

While Kubota (2010) is critical of the inherent partiality of contrastive rhetoric and its view of other cultures, Enkvist (1997) equates it with a necessary tool needed for “improving intercultural communication and understanding” (Enkvist, p. 204). Enkvist (1997) explains that contrastive rhetoric has benefits for the classroom community since both instructor and learner are forced to look at language discourse in relation to culture instead of only focusing on “syntactic features on the linguistic surface” (Enkvist, 1997,

p. 190). In light of this view, Enkvist devoted a considerable amount of time trying to explain the practical application of contrastive rhetoric for students in composition classes. He stated that the skill students in composition class need to develop is to write a “clear and straightforward” paper which is “unadorned” and not to “distract and delight the reader” (Enkvist, 1997, p. 191). This reflects Panetta’s (2001) statement that instructors need to explain to nonnative writers that American rhetoric is “specific, clear, and precise” with no room for digression (p. 8). According to Leki (as cited in Panetta, 2001), the pedagogical benefit of contrastive rhetoric is that nonnative writers become competent cross-culturally, and any insecurity or self-doubt is quelled when they understand their “rhetorical tradition” does not fit well with English writing (p. 11).

However, because nonnative writers have their own respective cultures and languages, they unintentionally transfer first language discourse to their paper written in English. Enkvist (1997), like Panetta, cautioned that such oddities in the writings of nonnative writers should not be interpreted as an intelligence issue or an intrinsic inability to reason. He recommended explicit instruction for nonnative writers with emphasis on how “different cultures have developed different patterns of expression” (p. 192). He went on to compare the benefits of contrastive rhetoric with table manners: “Eating one’s peas with a knife...is likely to cause a negative response and even bar a person from a whole range of occupations” (p. 192).

The conclusion drawn from the comparisons between contrastive rhetoric and table manners would reinforce Kubota’s (2010) argument that contrastive rhetoric thrives on the dichotomy of English versus non-English cultures. One major argument Kubota

raised is the assumption inherent in Kaplan's contrastive rhetoric - that is, there is "incompatibility between language A and language B" with an orientation toward what Kubota called a "deficit model" (p. 279) which disregards cultures of nonnative writers as a resource for success. To illustrate, Kubota (2010) shared the example of a study that compared business writing in English and Russian. The study concluded that Russians writing in English for English speaking readers would "cause miscommunication" due to the transfer of first language rhetorical conventions (p. 280). Kubota (2010) questioned the reason behind the attribution of communication failure to the Russian writers and not to their English readers. She concluded that even after decades of evolution, changes in contrastive rhetoric as an approach is purely "cosmetic, rather than paradigm" (p. 280).

Kaplan (2001) is aware of the criticism leveled against contrastive rhetoric. In a brief response, he noted that contrastive rhetoric emerged in response to the need for students to "manage the discourse structure" of Standard American Schooled English or SASE (p. xv). Contrastive rhetoric as a notion, according to Kaplan (2001), was meant to help learners understand rhetorical conventions of SASE so that a certain level of intercultural understanding is achieved when communicating with speakers of Standard American Schooled English. Furthermore, he underscored that contrastive rhetoric was not meant to be subtractive, but, rather, additive.

Adult Learning Theory

While contrastive rhetoric aims to highlight cultural differences for instructional purposes at the academic writing level, adult learning theories offer a framework for such purposes. According to Jarvis in 1987, (as cited in Merriam, 2013), learning takes place

mostly in social context as opposed to in “isolation” (p. 1). To ground the reader, Merriam (2013) provided an extensive backdrop against which adult learning theories or perspectives had emerged. Adult learning theories respond to factors such as globalization, technology, evolving demographics, and a shift from being an information society to a knowledge society. As a result, the type of adult education available for these various situations has evolved, too.

According to Knowles (1980), the purpose of education had shifted from being an attempt to produce “the educated man” to that of a “competent people” (pp.18-9). With that shift came seeing the teacher as a facilitator for adult learners. As a result, instructors now focus more on what Knowles (1980) calls “learning” and less on “teaching” (p.19) in the context of adult education.

Forms of Education

Merriam (2013) noted that adult education program settings are loosely categorized into three types: formal, nonformal, and informal (p. 16). Formal settings are institutionalized such as adult basic education programs, adult high schools, English as a second language programs, or professional training programs as well as higher educational institutions. Through these settings, adult learners can participate in programs such as English as a second language (ESL), adult basic education (ABE), general education development (GED), continuing professional education (CPE), continuing education, and higher education (Merriam, 2013). Nonformal educational settings do not have education as their primary goal and it includes agencies, organizations, and other

entities. Informal refers to learning undertaken voluntarily by an adult without attending either formal or nonformal educational settings.

Merriam (2013) delved into informal learning and noted it is the most “prevalent of the three forms of learning” (p. 17). It cannot be measured because such learning takes place everywhere, both in private and in public. For this reason, Illeris, 2004, (as cited in Merriam, 2013) called it “everyday learning” (p.17). Likewise, informal learning branches into four parts: “incidental learning, self-directed learning, tacit learning” and “integrative learning,” (p.19). A common thread that runs through all of these four parts is the word “learning”. She noted that it has replaced the word “education” (p. 20). The implication here for adult education is that “learning” as a gerund carries the connotation of an ongoing activity, perhaps an engaging one, whereas “education” as a noun does not.

Discussions about best practices in adult learning are not new. When defining learning, societies in the West draw from Plato and Aristotle while it is Confucius for societies in Asia (Merriam, 2013). Yet, learning as a topic remained a philosophical one for centuries until researchers in Europe and North America approached it scientifically according to Merriam. From these scientific observations, researchers deduced that learning should be defined as a change in behavior (Merriam, 2013), which, later, was recognized as being a “process” and an “outcome” (p. 25).

Major Approaches

Though there is no known consensus on which theory can be considered a learning theory, some perspectives present three categories such as “behaviorist”, “cognitivist”, and “integrative” (Merriam, 2013, p. 26). Regardless, Merriam (2013)

listed five major categories of learning theories in chronology: behaviorism, humanism, cognitive, social cognitive theory, and constructivism.

Behaviorism. Though current adult learning instruction is informed by more than one single perspective, behaviorism seems to be still relevant in the form of phrases such as “performance-based” or “learning outcome” and “competency-based curricula” (Merriam, 2013, p. 27). Critics of behaviorism argue that it is “too mechanistic” and “too controlling” (p. 28).

Humanism. Another adult learning theory diametrically opposed to behaviorism, Humanism argues that people have freedom “to make choices and determine their behavior” (Merriam, 2013, p. 29). For Maslow (1970), this is referred to as self-actualization while for Rogers (1983) humanistic perspective means a “fully functioning person” (Merriam, 2013, p. 29). Maslow’s self-actualization is defined as the “desire to become more and more what one is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming” (p.30). This view on learning informed adult education theories in three fronts: andragogy, self-directed learning, and transformative learning.

It is worth noting that Rogers, 1983, (as cited in Merriam, 2013) argued that learning happens because of involvement by the learner at the visceral and cerebral levels. Regardless of the stimuli, Rogers argued there is agency, or a “self-initiated” move by the learner (Merriam, 2013, p. 30). This contrasts well with the behaviorist perspective which proposed that learning happens as a result of the stimuli in the environment. For these competing views, Merriam stated that it is almost hard to find another perspective strictly opposed to behaviorism as humanism.

Cognitivism. Besides behaviorism and humanism, cognitivism is another perspective that informs adult learning. Cognitivists are interested in how information is processed, problems are solved, and memory is used. A similar attention is given to how the brain functions as this is where learning takes place and involves an “internal mental process” (Merriam, 2013, p.39).

Social cognitive. Social cognitive theory is a fourth perspective on adult learning (Merriam, 2013). This is considered a subset to cognitive with a social bent because it focuses on social environment. Social because learners are said to observe behaviors of fellow students for academic success. As a result, this perspective combines elements that are associated with cognitivism as well as behaviorism. Merriam (2013) provides one illustrative example of social cognitive theory: A medical student following the steps taken by a professor in a learning setting.

Constructivism. A fifth learning theory is constructivism (Merriam, 2013). She writes that meaning is created from experience - a core belief that knowledge is constructed as a result of experiences (Merriam, 2013). According to Simons (1993), there are six core characteristics associated with constructive learning. Four of these characteristics are attributed to Shuell, 1988 (as cited in Simons, 1993) who argues that constructivism is active, constructive, cumulative, and goal oriented. He adds two more attributes of constructivism: diagnostic and reflective. In essence, constructivism is synonymous with self-regulated learning. Two conditions need to be met for this to work successfully in an academic setting. According to Simon (1993), students need skills to function effectively in constructive learning environments and teachers need new training

on constructivism before they start implementing it. Merriam (2013) notes that constructivism is partially influenced by Vygotsky's sociocultural theory.

The above learning theories are considered to be traditional and foundational for adult education (Merriam, 2013). These perspectives continue to influence research and researchers. Knowles, for example, is influenced by the humanistic perspective. His discussions of self-directed learning and andragogy draw from humanism which argues that adult learners are motivated from within and a need for growth drives them to learn. Nevertheless, adult education instructors use some aspects of these traditional learning theories based on the context.

Knowles' Andragogy

According to Forrest III and Peterson (2006), Knowles introduced andragogy to the U.S. in the late 1960s and early 1970s. He himself was introduced to andragogy by a Yugoslavian educator in the sixties (Knowles, 1980). However, andragogy as a term itself originated in the 19th century with a German school teacher called Alexander Kapp (Finn, 2011) as he considered that the learning of adults was dissimilar to that of children (Forrest III and Peterson 2006). A literal translation for the term is "leader of adults" (Finn, 2011, p. 36) and has Greek roots. After its first conception in Germany, andragogy had not been used for a while until it reemerged again in the 1920s (Forrest III & Peterson 2006) and continued to be studied.

Andragogy is not a technique to be used for instructional purposes (Forrest III & Peterson, 2006), only a perspective that can guide instructors. Andragogy offered a much needed paradigm shift from pedagogy which in general is subject-centered since learners

in the K-12 education system are not independent of the teacher yet. With the introduction of andragogy, instruction shifted to learner-centered. And with this shift came the major assumptions of Knowles. According to Knowles (1980), these assumptions include self-concepts, role of learners' experience, readiness to learn, and orientation to learning. Furthermore, Forrest III and Peterson (2006) add two more of Knowles' assumptions, namely the need by adults to know and their innate motivation to learn. Because both Knowles and Maslow (Merriam, 2013) drew from humanistic theory, one notices parallels between Knowles' self-concept and Maslow's self-actualization as both denote an intrinsic willingness by the learner to move from one point to another in the learning process.

Forrest III and Peterson (2006) noted that self-directed learning is accepted by teachers who embrace andragogy as guidance. They also added that with andragogical instruction, "students' abilities to direct their own lives and educational endeavors" is encouraged. The assumption inherent in these assertions could have a drastic effect for ELs. The notion of being self-directed assumes one has some degree of independence from the instructor and has reached a level of self-actualization. This might not be the case for adult ESL students who need subject-centered instruction when learning about North American writing conventions. In other words, pedagogy, not andragogy, would serve such novice learners well.

Knowles (1980) himself acknowledged that not all adults will need only andragogy-informed instruction. In fact, he cautioned against looking at pedagogy and andragogy as opposing instructional approaches. Instead, he noted that the two models

should be seen “as two ends of a spectrum” (p. 43). He illustrated this with the example of a child who self-directes (that is, behaves like an experienced adult) when learning about rules of a new game on one hand and the middle-aged man who acts dependent (that is, behaves a like a child in a subject-centered class) when learning about ways to use a computer on the other. From these possible scenarios, Knowles (1980) deduced that using a suitable instructional approach (pedagogy or andragogy) for each scenario is recommended irrespective of the learner’s age. In light of this, ELs working on their writing skills in English might, depending on situational context and their level of academic readiness, benefit from either pedagogy or andragogy for a specific learning goal.

In general, the majority of adults attend programs for career- or job-related goals (Finn, 2011). A study conducted in 1960 by Cyril Houle (as cited in Finn, 2011) categorized adult learners into three groups: “goal-oriented”, “activity-oriented”, or “learning-oriented” (p. 35). For ELs who are goal-oriented, economic advancement is a priority and the main reason for attendance in the adult education program. Orem, 2000 (as cited in Finn, 2011) writes that the adult ELs consider education as an opportunity for self-improvement. However, these students face obstacles which are, according to Peterson and Roelfs, 1974 (as cited in Finn, 2011) “situational barriers” (p. 35). Such life struggles for adult English language learners translate into concrete hurdles when climbing Maslow’s pyramid to achieve self-actualization. Yet, citing the work of Wlodkowski (2008), Finn (2011) states that adults want to succeed as learners.

Education Outside the U.S.

Adult ELs come to the U.S. colleges and universities with experiences in different academic settings that had different pedagogical orientations. Many countries in the world follow a system where instructions are teacher-centered with students believing that teachers are “experts that take all initiative in classrooms” (Romanowski, 2020, p. 8). According to Huang and Brown (2009), North American higher education institutions can be an impediment to the success of ELs, citing institutionalized factors such as more discussions with limited lectures and collaborative work in groups.

Huang and Brown (2009) note the cultural shock Chinese students face in the opening line of their abstract: “Confucianism meets Constructivism in North American universities and our classrooms are failing to meet the educational expectations of Chinese students,” (p. 643). And such predicament underscores that key assumptions inherent in andragogy (as noted above) contribute to the underperformance of these learners. Woldkowski, 2008 (as cited in Finn, 2011) proposed some criteria that make learning more pleasant and a safe endeavor. By safe, Finn explains that it refers to the absence of embarrassment to the learner. However, when ELs find themselves in situations where the driving assumption leads to their embarrassment, and by extension underperformance, progress becomes slow.

A concrete example is seen in Read’s (1987) observation of how ELs struggle in U.S. classrooms when their instructors “use methods and materials that have been developed with the learning needs of native speakers of English in mind” (p.91). Such scenarios inhibit learner performance since the students are not yet equipped with the

cultural capital to process those materials. This is the reason Kaplan noted that contrastive rhetoric approaches that were meant for both the learner and the facilitator in the composition classes are not widely used. However, it is not only culture; it is also pedagogical. Furthermore, the facilitators of these institutionalized discussions might not take into account Kaplan's (2001) questions that are on the minds of the ELs: "What may be discussed?" (p. ix). The embarrassment could be a function of how the topic under discussion is viewed in the respective cultures of ELs.

According to Okuda and Anderson (2018), Chinese college students in one study stated that their previous education in China was a hindrance to their academic performance in Canada, particularly with academic writing. They suggested that such students would benefit from direct and explicit instruction. This call for explicitness is aligned with Kaplan's contrastive rhetoric views as Kubota (2010) stated that the pedagogical benefits of contrastive rhetoric in academic writing such as the emphasis on explicit instruction on things like organizing paragraphs, using an outline, and modelling for learners.

On the other hand, Boonchum (2020), stated that learning materials that are tailored to the needs of ELs in the form of "interesting and motivating English textbooks, quality videos and recording or computers and internet" have a positive impact on the learners (p. 96). This seems to be reflective of the humanistic approach to learning since words such as "interesting and motivating" have the footprints of an instructional approach that is rooted in the learners' intrinsic motivation for growth. According to Emaliana (2017), in Indonesia, where English is taught as a foreign language, there was

a paradigm shift with a focus on education that is student-centered so that programs reflect the prevailing approaches in adult learning theories.

Emaliana (2017) also compared the two approaches, “teacher-centered” and “student-centered” (p. 60), both grounded in behaviorism and humanism respectively, because Indonesia had seen both instructional approaches. To start with a teacher-centered approach, knowledge is linear. This means that teachers pass information to the students who passively receive it. According to Zohrabi et al, 2012 (as cited by Emaliana, 2017), teachers were more concerned with the performance of their students on state tests instead of focusing on the needs of the students. Phrases such as student performance and student needs carry meanings of different perspectives. The behaviorist perspective is normally associated with performance tests to see if learning objectives are met while the humanistic approach shifts attention to the needs of students and their potential for growth. In other words, Emaliana (2017) suggested that a paradigm shift is necessary so that students’ needs are met in the classrooms.

Experiences of ELs with Academic Writing

Kaplan’s contrastive rhetoric is credited with its focus on big picture issues such as explicit teaching, paragraph organization, and outlining a draft (Kubota, 2010). This was done to equip ELs with the rhetorical structures of North American English. Before contrastive rhetoric, how did instructors manage teaching writing to international standards?

Matsuda’s Work

According to Matsuda (2003), before the emergence of contrastive rhetoric, emphasis was placed on spoken language in second language acquisition starting with the late 19th century to early 20th century. This reflects Kubota's mention of the two approaches that pre-dated contrastive rhetoric, namely contrastive analysis and error analysis both of which focused on the spoken language much like what Matsuda (2003) stated.

At the time, the leading applied linguists believed writing was not a domain to be given much attention as speaking was. This means ELs in U.S. colleges and universities were not receiving tangible academic writing services. However, Matsuda (2003) stated that this attitude changed in the 1940s with the University of Michigan's English Language Institute (ELI). Still, according to Matsuda (2003), ELI did not put significant emphasis on ESL writing at the discourse level, though it gained the attention of other colleges as they modeled their ESL programs after ELI. By the 1990s, English for Academic Purposes (EAP) which prepares ELs in U.S. colleges and universities for the major domains of communication and English for Specific Purposes with discipline-specific emerged (Hinkel, 2002). Even with writing instruction being offered to ELs, Fernandez et al (2017) acknowledged that there was a need to improve it as ELs were not prepared for colleges and universities in the US.

Struggle of ELs with North American Writing Conventions

Fernandez et al (2017) noted that ELs struggled with "creating, arguing for, and supporting a thesis statement; using and crediting sources; abstracting and summarizing supporting information; writing precisely and concisely; using appropriate vocabulary

and sentence structure; and submitting a well-edited piece” (p. 11). Similarly, Vries, 2000 (as cited in Li & Lu, 2019) offers a description of English academic writing: “The expected thought sequence is linear ... paragraph begins with a topic statement and then proceeds to develop that statement The central idea is related to all other ideas in the whole essay,” (Li & Liu, 2019, p. 84). In other words, informing non-native writers that these are characteristics of the type of writing that is expected in U.S. colleges and universities would help them achieve self-actualization as they learn a new writing tradition that is “based on Aristotelian classical rhetoric favors using a deductive approach,” (Li & Liu, 2019, p. 84).

However, achievement of ELs in academic writing is predicated on one key element. According to Ferris and Hedgcock (2005), instructors would benefit from understanding the need for explicit writing instruction and modeling by ELs so that they are supported to develop academic writing skills and can succeed in U.S. colleges and universities. In the absence of such awareness, a lot is at stake.

Process or Product Writing?

Canagarajah and Jerskey (2009) pointed out there is a need to distinguish between the writing process and writing product. With adult learning theories evolving since the introduction of the term andragogy to the US by Knowles, new writing instructions focused on process-based as opposed to being product-based. This means helping nonnative writers master the writing process in the form of planning, revising, and editing is much needed rather than the puritanical focus on grammar, writing conventions, and style.

Even when the focus shifts from product to process, there is a debate about two writing approaches and which one has more immediate relevance for students (Canagarajah and Jerskey, 2009). These two approaches are English for General Purposes (EGP) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP). According to Canagarajah & Jerskey (2009), proponents of EGP believe that EGP prepares learners for mastery of the essential elements of writing such as “paragraph structure, topic and thesis sentences, audience awareness, rhetorical modes” and other skills (p. 8) in English composition classes. This line of reasoning resembles that of Kaplan’s contrastive rhetorics - that is, explicit instruction of the writing elements offer much needed help to ELs in U.S. colleges and universities. ESP proponents on the other hand argue that writing takes place in context, grounded in specific genres and such genres can be taught to ELs through writing across the curriculum practices in the classroom.

Error correction

Besides the debate about process versus product, other questions emerged, namely the debate on error correction: Does it help? Does it harm? According to Truscott, 1996 (as cited in Ferris and Hedgcock, 2005), research does not support focus on grammatical errors and it is believed to be harmful since it focuses on mechanical errors as opposed to focusing on major things such as ideas of students. According to Scarcella, 1996 (as cited in Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005) a dissenting view holds that ignoring errors in the writing could lead to “fossilization” (p. 266). Therefore, error correction is helpful for ELs writers. These diverging viewpoints are a reminder of the error analysis approach

discussed by Kubota (2010) in relation to the rise of contrastive rhetoric, though Kubota was discussing it in the context of the spoken language, not the written one.

The error correction debate led to another question: What constitutes an error? Ferris and Hedgcock (2005) state that errors are made up of “morphological, syntactic, and lexical deviations from grammatical rules that violate the intuition of [native speakers]” (p.8). As a result, the type of errors produced involve verb tense, construction of passive voice, modals, and subject-verb agreement, (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005). In addition to verbal errors, nouns are a source of error for nonnative writers. These include distinguishing between count and noncount nouns, using the right article or determiner, for example. Ferris and Hedgcock (2005) also noted that the errors of ELs are not homogeneous. Instead, two factors determine the type of errors: first, how their first language is structured, and, second, the duration and effectiveness of their study of English.

Making errors in a different language is inevitable. And this raises the question about the appropriate way to correct such errors. Would it be prescriptive or descriptive? At this point, contrastive rhetoric would recommend direct error correction to avoid fossilization. However, Ferris and Hedgcock (2005) note that feedback that directly addresses the error does not help the learners. Still, Leki, 1991, among others (as cited in Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005) believe that students in the lower levels would benefit from direct error correction. They also add that when dealing with idioms, students in the lower level learn the most from direct error correction according to Ferris and Hedgcock.

As these debates on error correction continue, Canagarajah and Jerskey (2009) present nine areas experiencing some shift in the teaching of nonnative writers (p. 10), partially presented in the table below.

Table 1 - Shift in Teaching Multilingual Writers

| From | To |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Deficiency/errors | Choice/options |
| Focus on rules/conventions | Focus on strategies |
| Focus on text construction | Focus on rhetorical negotiations |
| Writing as constitutive | Writing as performative |
| Compartmentalize literacy traditions | Accommodate literacy traditions |

(adapted from Canagarajah and Jerskey, 2009)

These shifts indicate a move from behaviorism to humanism. However, it is worth noting that Kaplan would counter some of the reasoning in the table above with his call for explicit instruction to help ELs succeed in U.S. colleges and universities.

Summary

The literature review for Chapter Two covers four subtopics in my paper. Because my capstone project is about the cultural and linguistic features that contribute to the struggles of ELs with academic writing, the review explored themes such as contrastive rhetoric which is sometimes referred to as intercultural rhetoric, how it focuses on both culture and language in relation to academic writing, and how it can be seen as purely Eurocentric. Besides contrastive rhetoric, Chapter Two reviewed adult learning theory, its origins, the five major traditional theories, their evolution overtime, and how they

continue to shape adult education instructional strategies. The discussion of adult learning theory is followed by a cursory look at different educational systems and the implication of these differences for international students studying in the United States. The review finally explores issues related to writing instruction in the college and ways to help ELs achieve self-actualization. The result from these areas will accumulate into a professional development grounded in contrastive rhetoric and adult education theory.

In Chapter Three, I will describe my workshop project. I will heavily draw from contrastive rhetoric and adult learning theories with an eye for the kind of assumptions tutors and instructors need to do away with when tutoring/teaching ELs. Chapter Three will give detailed information about the setting of my workshop, the demographics of the participants, and tentative timeline for the project completion.

Chapter Three

Project Overview

I'm exploring the question: What are cultural and linguistic features that contribute to the struggles of ESL students with academic writing? I wanted to find out what the research says about this question and how it addresses it. As part of my capstone project, I wanted to create a professional development that is targeted toward ways to meet the academic needs of ELs.

The professional development (PD) will be for writing tutors (and, by extension, content teachers new to working with ELs). The content of this PD will be a combination of education theories and practical approaches to analyzing writings of ELs. This combination would not only equip the PD participants with a deeper understanding of the issues common to writings by ELs new to North American writing conventions but also give them the affirmation they need to support ELs as they explore a new writing system in US colleges and universities.

For Chapter Three, I will heavily draw from two major frameworks, namely contrastive rhetoric and adult learning theory. I will then discuss the type of setting and target participants, provide a descriptive overview of the professional development where I describe the frameworks and theories that informed the creation of professional development (PD) sessions for writing tutors, and finally conclude with a chapter summary.

Using Contrastive Rhetoric as a PD Framework

Kaplan (1980) had introduced contrastive rhetoric to the U.S. in the 1960s. His primary objective was to address the needs of international students learning academic writing in U.S. educational institutions. What he observed was that the language thought patterns of international students contrasted with that of speakers of English language (Panetta, 2001). Such differences were reflected in the academic writing produced by international students as traces of first language (L1) were detected in their writing product. When that happened, it affected the comprehension of American readers (Kubota, 2010).

Kaplan (Panetta, 2001) noted that writings by international students were inductive in comparison to the deductive nature of English speakers' writing. This led to the need for a shift from error analysis that mainly looked at writing at the sentence level to a focus at the discourse level. Instead of looking at grammatical errors such as subject-verb agreement and count and noncount nouns, contrastive rhetoric looked at how thought is expressed in one's L1 and how L1 affects L2 writing. Panetta (2001) noted that nonnative writers transfer their own language discourse to their English writing. According to Enkvist (1997), errors by nonnative writers do not constitute low intelligence or an inability to reason. To address the presence of L1 elements in L2 writing, Enkvist recommended explicit instruction for nonnative writers that shed light on how different patterns are associated with different cultures (1997). Kaplan (Kubota, 2010) also noted that such explicit instruction should include things like how to organize a paragraph, use an outline, and so forth. Kaplan (2001) noted the importance of such

explicit instruction because a lingering question in the mind of ELs revolves around the form of the writing. This suggests that explicit instruction is the best strategy to address their need to be familiar with L2 writing conventions.

Vries, 2000 (as cited by Li & Lu, 2019) grounds us in the description of English academic writing as being the linear arrangement of thought consisting of paragraphs, where each paragraph is centered around one main topic sentence. All paragraphs are developed throughout to support the central idea of the paper. Yet, because this involves rhetorical conventions, it can be challenging to some ELs. Elachachi (2015) noted that rhetoric is cultural and dictates how the ideas of a writing are developed. She noted that the same goes for syntax.

Elachachi (2015) illustrates the type of rhetorical hurdles Arab ELs face including the use of repetition and style. Abu Rass, 2011(as cited in Elachachi, 2015) explains that repeated content written in longer than usual sentences characterizes rhetoric choices made by Arab students writing in English. She observed that, to Arabic speaking students, the function of repetition is to put emphasis on what is being discussed. In contrast, she explains, such rhetorical choices by Arab students might come across as verbose and redundant to speakers of the English language. Style is another rhetorical hurdle faced by Arab students. Writings by Arabic speaking students show preference for indirect style that uses flowery language, whereas English speakers prefer direct style according to Elachachi (2015).

Using Adult Learning Theory as a PD Framework

The type of adult learning theory available to instructors in adult education varies. Merriem et al (2013) lists five major traditional adult learning theories, namely in chronological order: behaviorism, humanism, cognitive, social cognitive, and constructivism. These theories are considered to be the bedrock for adult education programs. Familiarity with these approaches has relevance for participants in the PD sessions.

Behaviorism is the oldest of them all and holds the view that learning is a response to a stimulus in the environment (Merriam, 2013). In contrast, humanists argue that learning is intrinsic and comes from within since learners have the freedom to choose and self-initiate. This argument is also reflected in Knowles' andragogy and Maslow's self-actualization concepts. For cognitive, the focus is how the brain functions to solve problems and use memory and process information. Social cognitive, a fourth theory, adds a social dimension to the cognitive perspective and argues that learners learn and strive for success through observing how fellow students behave in an academic setting. She puts constructivism as the fifth major adult learning theory that proposes that learners create meaning from experience and, therefore, knowledge is a construction from those experiences.

Setting

My professional development project is meant to take place in the writing centers of U.S. college and university campuses. The writing centers annually serve a large number of students who are both native and nonnative speakers of English. The latter

group consists of international students as well as immigrants and refugees studying at the universities. In the writing center where I worked, tutors helped students for about twenty minutes with any paper about any subject such as English composition, biology research, and world geography. The majority of the learners were undergraduate students, though there were also graduate students visiting the writing center. This is normally characteristic of colleges and universities across the United States with a large number of undergraduates.

Participants

Student writing center tutors are the primary group this professional development targets, though content teachers new to working with ELs would also benefit from this PD. This group of writing tutors normally consists of sophomore through senior college students working part time at the writing center. They can be diverse and are not monolithic. Majority of them have had years of experience in the U.S. education system from elementary to college.

Description of the Professional Development

Goals

Developed for writing center tutors, this PD will combine adult education theories and practical approaches to analyzing writings of ELs. There is an ample opportunity for the participants to reflect on their understanding of culture, adult education instruction, and language features. Through active learning and reflective responses, the tutors will learn about contrastive rhetoric and its contribution to the teaching of academic writing to

ELs, demonstrate an understanding of culture, gain new insights on the influence of culture on discourse, and apply new perspectives and approaches as a writing tutor.

PD Format

During the three sessions of this professional development, I will use a powerpoint presentation to introduce Kaplan's concept of looking at errors beyond their sentence- or word-levels on one hand, and the five major adult learning theories on the other hand. Starting with contrastive rhetoric, I will ground the participants in world cultures and the implication of working with students whose first language informs writing in English as a second or third language. Contrastive rhetoric strongly recommends that ELs should be given explicit instruction.

Activities

During the professional development, the tutors will do different activities such as individual short responses, pair work, and large group discussion throughout the sessions. With the pair work activity, one writing tutor will act like an EL and work with another writing tutor. Focus is on syntax and discourse. The partner will be given a paper with flaws beyond grammatical errors. The other partner will be given ten minutes to work on the paragraph. After the ten minutes tutoring is over, the role changes. A different flawed writing will be distributed for feedback. When the second round of ten minutes is over, the whole participants will reconvene. They will be asked specific questions: Did anyone provide explicit instruction? Why, if provided? Why not, if not provided? Similarly, those who were in the EL role will be asked how they felt about the tutoring session.

After introducing the concept of contrastive rhetoric, I will then pause for some reflection. Those tutors who gave or did not give explicit instruction when correcting the paragraph will be given time to reflect on their choice in light of the information about contrastive rhetoric from the presentation. Those in the EL role will be given a chance to respond to the presentation about Kaplan's concept.

After that, I will divide them into two groups again, the same as before. The mock ELs will take a paragraph with major flaws. And the tutoring group will be given specific tips to use when addressing such errors. The tutoring group will be informed to use constructivism when giving feedback. After ten minutes, roles will change. Those in the mock EL group will be given a new paragraph with errors. Those in the tutoring group will be provided with pedagogy as an approach to use when fixing errors. When the ten minutes is over, the whole class will reconvene.

When the role playing is over, both of the mock EL groups will be asked about their experiences with the type of controlled feedback they received from the tutoring group. Once they share what they experienced and how they felt about it, attention will turn to both of the tutoring groups. They will be invited to share how they felt about giving controlled feedback. After all groups discuss their experiences, I will present the major adult learning theories. The participants will reflect on pedagogy and constructivism as frameworks for working with ELs.

Timeline

For this professional development, I plan to get it started on September 1st, 2021 and complete it by November 1st, 2021. I will revisit and evaluate the PD materials

between November 1st and December 1st and modify it as needed. I expect to present this PD to tutors in February 2022.

Summary

In Chapter Three, I have provided an overview of my research question, the guiding adult learning theories, a brief discussion of contrastive rhetoric and its relevance in the classroom (Panetta, 2001). Contrastive rhetoric is prescriptive by nature and puts emphasis on explicit teaching of the type of writing required in U.S. colleges and universities (Kubota, 2011). In addition to contrastive rhetoric, I have briefly discussed adult learning theories that inform adult learning instructions (Merriam, 2013). I have also provided some information about the type of participants for this project, the setting, and a tentative timeline. The professional development activities will consist of role play and mock tutoring sessions that will expose the participants to different situations that mimic actual tutoring sessions. For Chapter Four, I will discuss the sample paragraphs, the response and feedback from the writing tutors attending the professional development, and any modifications needed.

CHAPTER FOUR

Reflection

Overview

The purpose of my research question was to explore the question: *What factors contribute to the struggle of nonnative writers with academic writing in English?* With that question came related ones: *How can writing center tutors meet the academic writing support needed by nonnative writers? What are practical strategies that can help U.S. writing center tutors meet these needs to close the achievement gap?* In exploring these questions, I turned to Robert Kaplan's contrastive rhetoric as well as Malcom Knowles' andragogy as a framework. In the meantime, I did a cursory look at the history of EL support in the United States relying on work by Matsuda (2003). I then discussed experiences of ELs with academic writing heavily drawing from studies on non-native writers outside the United States.

In Chapter Four, I will reflect on major discoveries during my research, the literature reviews, possible implications and limitations of my project, future research and recommendation, and communicating the results and the benefits of this project. Finally, I will close with a summary of chapter four.

Major discoveries

As I reflect on my research on contrastive rhetoric in relation to the teaching of academic writing to ELs, I feel empowered and more grounded in theory and practice. I am passionate about writing. I mainly produce creative writing, but I also enjoy the

intellectual fulfillment associated with academic writing. As an educator coming from an EL background, I felt I have a duty to advocate for fellow ELs struggling with and frustrated by writing in North American conventions. My research on contrastive rhetoric and andragogy equipped me with the *what, why, and how* about teaching academic writing to nonnative writers.

By *what*, I mean the issues and struggles English learners face in the process of writing in English in U.S. colleges and universities. By *why*, I mean the reasons for such issues and struggles of English learners in composition classes. By *how*, I mean practical- and research-based ways or approaches that can inform the instruction of academic writing with ELs in mind. This should not imply that all nonnative speakers have the same writing needs. Rather, I am mainly focusing on college-level English learners whose language (L1) interferes with their English (L2) writing.

Regarding unexpected discoveries throughout the research, I was in the beginning under the assumption that everyone including researchers and scholars would be on-board with Kaplan's contrastive rhetoric. Instead, there were scholars critical of his paper and concept. Major criticism revolved around Kaplan's word choice and semantics, especially his choice of the word "contrastive" and the connotations associated with it which the critics pointed out -- that his views were "Anglocentric, assimilationist, and essentialist" (Kubota, 2010, p. 273). Another finding is that between process-oriented and product-oriented writings, a preference is usually given for teaching the process writing approach (Hinkel, 2002, pp. 50-51). To me, this has an implication: Teaching academic writing to ELs needs to involve some explicit instruction. As noted earlier, Fernandez et

al (2017) also observed that the real struggle of ELs with writing students revolves around “creating, arguing for, and supporting a thesis statement; ... writing precisely and concisely; using appropriate vocabulary and sentence structure; and submitting a well-edited piece” (p. 11).

Looking Back at my Literature Review

Before I decided on a research topic, I was always curious about best practices in teaching academic writing to ELs. This is because I tutored ELs, and listening to their frustrations with the writing process had me wondering about finding solutions to their predicament. Throughout my TESOL program courses, I was finding scattered and random discussions in the assigned readings on best practices on teaching English language, but not a holistic and concerted study with a comprehensive response to my question regarding teaching academic writing to ELs. In my first linguistics class, I was introduced to Michael Halliday’s Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), which employs a general approach to the teaching of language both as spoken and textual. Yet, it is not particularly designed to address the reasons ELs struggle with academic writing beyond syntax.

However, an exposure to an unassigned reading in a course textbook would become the seed for my research topic. The unassigned chapter was by R. Y. U. K. Kubota, titled, “Cross-cultural perspectives on writing: Contrastive rhetoric.” The phrase “cross-cultural perspective on writing” caught my attention, and I did not really give much thought to the other part: “Contrastive rhetoric.” I shared my interest in this topic with my course instructor during a Google meeting so that I might do more research on

cross-cultural writing. Her question would then give me a much needed clear direction: “Are you familiar with contrastive rhetoric?” -- to which I responded in the negative. In that Google meeting, I was introduced to contrastive rhetoric as pioneered by Kaplan. I did not give it a second thought about my decision to choose this as a research topic with a focus on understanding factors that affect the academic writing of ELs.

Before I delved into the research, I divided my topic into subtopics that would contribute to the overall paper. For the subtopic about contrastive rhetoric, I used research from both Kaplan and his critics. When I say critics, I do not mean that they were looking at his work equally. Some improved the wording of how work by moving from “contrastive rhetoric” to “intercultural rhetoric” while others focused on their perception of his attitude toward other cultures based on Kaplan’s tone and diction. Nevertheless, these papers provided me with a wealth of information that grounded me in contrastive rhetoric and its influence in the teaching of academic writing to ELs in U.S. schools.

The more I read about contrastive rhetoric, the more I could make connections to the bigger writing issues including why I failed my writing test as mentioned in Chapter One. This new understanding of contrastive rhetoric confirmed what I had already believed about learning in a new culture and in a new country. Many of the school-related struggles of ELs are cultural. I did poorly in a homework assignment about Robin Hoods in a high school CIS class. While the instructor wrote me feedback explaining where I needed to improve, for me the critical question was: Who is Robin Hood to begin with? In other words, I was working on an assignment that involved a cultural legend and that the first time I had heard of him coincided with when I was given the assignment.

Back to contrastive rhetoric, I was drawn to its focus on culture and rhetoric in the learning of academic writing. Ulla Connor (1996) considers culture to be a “set of rules and patterns shared by a given community” (p. 101). Furthermore, she suggested that culture shock happens in learning institutions when there’s no shared literacy experiences between new comer students and their school. This resonated with my experience and that of fellow ELs as we navigated (and continue to navigate) our education in a language other than our respective mother tongues. As a result, salient errors in the writings of ELs were contributed by differing cultures and discourses. I was intrigued upon finding out that contrastive rhetoric does not merely focus on grammatical errors, but instead takes a global look at the influence of culture and L1 in writings of ELs.

Besides contrastive rhetoric, Knowles’ andragogy was influential in my capstone project and product. I was particularly drawn by the flexibility of the frameworks he presented. Embedded in the andragogy model is self-directed learning. However, Knowles (1980) later considered that sometimes pedagogy could serve well an adult learner. This is because, according to Knowles (1980), andragogy and pedagogy are “two ends of a spectrum” (p. 43) depending on the needs of the learner regardless of the learner’s age. The implication here is that adult learners can show dependency when the subject (like North American writing conventions) is new to them and a pedagogical model where the instructions are explicit would benefit them.

Possible Implications and Limitations of My Project

Though I believe this research would help tutors in the writing center, I see some logistical hurdles in its implementation. This is because the research suggests the practice

of explicit instruction for ELs. Hinkel (2002, p. 53) notes that even “academically oriented [non-native speakers] need to be made aware of the rhetorical and sentence-level features and constraints prevalent in formal written discourse,” (p. 53). However, writing centers in general have a policy of limiting tutoring sessions to 20 minutes. Their goal is efficiency. Such policy or accepted norm in the writing centers might not allow for an expanded session where comprehensive feedback or explicit instruction would take place. Though 20 minutes may seem like a lot of time, a feedback that is cross-cultural can not be successful in such a short amount of time.

Regarding limitations, I came to the conclusion that there is more to my topic than what I presented in this paper. I did not incorporate research on the experiences of ELs in the writing center or, inversely, a study of the effectiveness of writing centers in serving ELs. Because I had previously worked in a writing center during my undergraduate years, I mostly have drawn from those experiences when writing my paper as well as creating and designing my project, and focused on creating content that I deemed would be beneficial to the tutors, especially the idea of culture as a thing that can influence how a paragraph is organized or how a sentence is structured.

Future Research and Recommendations

I will be updating and polishing this project so that it is meaningful to its intended audience. Future research that I believe will benefit stakeholders is one that involves ways to equip writing center tutors with the necessary cultural and linguistic awareness as they tutor ELs. Because one can argue that even what we currently know about teaching academic writing to ELs is relatively new, it might be helpful to see concerted efforts to

study and critically evaluate the pervasiveness of Knowles' assumptions about adult learning in the writing centers. This is because one can deduce that Knowles did not have ELs in mind when he was discussing his assumptions. Yet, his andragogical model and the self-directed learning seem to be widely accepted and implemented in the writing centers.

Self-directed learning is of course beneficial -- but it is only conditional on the context. If the context involves ELs or a learner without prior knowledge, then self-directed learning might not be much of a help when the learner needs an explicit instruction with a pedagogical model. Therefore, I would recommend a holistic and a critical study of the practices that have been accepted in the writing center and see if they are universally applicable to all students. If they do not, then there is a need for an alternative approach to working with ELs in the writing center.

Communicating the Results and Benefits of this Project

In the near future, I plan to share my findings with the target audience. One place to get this started is a writing center where ELs are seen on a regular basis. I will reach out to the directors or managers of writing centers and discuss why my project would benefit them if the tutors attended a workshop as a professional development (PD). This project combines both theory and practice. The tutors who are mostly undergraduate students are not expected to know much about the different, sometimes opposing, views on teaching academic writing to ELs. However, my PD would ground them in the issues studied in the contrastive rhetoric circles as well as Knowles' andragogical views. Through interactive and active learning, the tutors will have an opportunity to look at

things from cultural and linguistic perspectives which in turn raises their awareness of the needs of ELs.

Summary

In Chapter Four, I reflected on major discoveries during my research in terms of what I have learned from contrastive rhetoric and adult learning theory. Next, I discussed the literature review starting with how I had arrived at the topic and what works played a major role in my research. Then, I presented possible implications and limitations of my project. After that, I talked about future research and recommendations about the teaching of academic writing to ELs. Finally, I suggested ways of communicating the results with my target audience and stated the benefits of my project for the writing center tutors.

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